

NewEvangelists.org

new
evangelists
monthly

August
2015

New Evangelists Monthly #32

August 2015

- [New Evangelists Monthly - August 2015](#)

New Evangelists Monthly - August 2015

- [**Forward**](#)
...about this eBook
- [**Mother Teresa: The Model of Magnanimity**](#)
by Virginia Lieto
- [**Clean and Unclean Meat**](#)
Catholicism and Adventism by Stephen Korsman
- [**The Three Criteria of Moral Acts**](#)
BIG C CATHOLICS by Matthew Coffin
- [**Cancer: Heartfelt Gratitude Among Tears**](#)
Designs by Birgit by Birgit Jones
- [**Spiritual Works of Mercy and the Theology of the Body**](#)
Plot Line and Sinkers by Ellen Gable Hrkach
- [**Stumbling Blocks on the Road to Sanctity**](#)
FranciscanMom by Barbara Szyszkiewicz
- [**18 Years Ago Today We Said "I Do" and 18 Special Marriage Mementos**](#)
A Slice of Smith Life by Tracy Smith
- [**When Tolerance Simply Isn't Enough**](#)
A Faith-Full Life by Adam Crawford
- [**How a Mystic Prepares for Holy Communion**](#)
The Shield of Faith by Frank Rega
- [**The Gentle Mastery of Christ**](#)
These Joyful Mysteries by Kathleen S
- [**Centering Prayer's Errors About God**](#)
Contemplative Homeschool by Connie Rossini
- [**Preparing the Troops**](#)
Declaring the Whole Counsel by Fr. Chori Jonathin Seraiah
- [**Rejection**](#)
The Word for the World by Fr. Vladimir Echallas
- [**On Cultivating Patient Irrelevance: The Benedict Option 2.0**](#)
One Thousand Words a Week by Rick Becker
- [**The privilege of eating; the privilege of flesh**](#)
by Margaret Felice
- [**Are We Joyful, Humble, Fleshly Ciboria?**](#)
Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation by Michael Seagriff
- [**St. Francis, I'm Glad We Had This Talk**](#)
String of Pearls by Laura Pearl

- [**Toxic Soup and spiritual warfare**](#)
JOY Alive in our hearts by Nancy Ward
- [**Beautiful Womanhood**](#)
TASTE and SEE by Kathleen Laplante
- [**Stopped by Trains**](#)
Busy Catholic Moms by Shannon Vandaveer
- [**Why genuflect?**](#)
Convert Journal by George M. Sipe
- [**An Appeal to Young Catholics Leaving Home**](#)
The Contemplative Catholic Convert by Rich Maffeo
- [**Another Death Sentence**](#)
CF Family by Allison Howell
- [**What do you desire? Who do you desire?**](#)
Catholic Deacon by Deacon Scott Dodge
- [**I Fasted For Your Intentions: Here's How It Went**](#)
by Carolyn Astfalk
- [**Thankful Summer**](#)
Lord, Make Me a Saint by Jamie Jo
- [**The Gift of Grandparents**](#)
Your Holy Family by Allen Hebert
- [**For the Supreme Court, It is All About the L-U-V**](#)
Kitchen table chats by Denise Hunnell
- [**True Freedom**](#)
The Veil of Chastity by Cindy Hurla
- [**Cavity**](#)
With Us Still by John Schroeder
- [**Time for a cranial-rectal extraction**](#)
On the Road to Damascus by Robert Collins
- [**Beside Still Waters**](#)
Theologyisaverb by Elizabeth Reardon
- [**How Low Can We Go**](#)
The Wayward Catholic by Paul Roy
- [**Are YOU Aware it's NFP Awareness Week?**](#)
A Shower of Roses by Sara Boyle
- [**Lost**](#)
Blogging For A Better Life by Rose O'Donnell
- [**Nature's Gold**](#)
Grace to Paint by Sister Maresa Lilley
- [**Sadness of Loss**](#)
Quiet Consecration by Leslie Klinger

- [**The "Shameful Silence" -- It Honors Evil**](#)
It Makes Sense to Me by Larry Peterson
- [**The Threat of the Pink Blankie**](#)
Peace Garden Passage by Roxane Salonen
- [**The Me I'm Meant to Be!**](#)
by Tony Agnesi
- [**Assessing our Discipleship**](#)
Bartimaeus' Quiet Place by Bartimaeus Timeo
- [**The Nature of Intimacy**](#)
beautiful thorns by Lisa Ponchak
- [**Question: Why did God Become a Man?**](#)
Quidquid Est, Est! by Matthew Rose
- [**Agape Wins**](#)
by Molly Oshatz
- [**Before the age of Starbucks and Costa Coffee**](#)
by David Torkington
- [**Life Moment is Here**](#)
by John Shimek
- [**Ryan Anderson's 'Truth Overruled' is a Bold New Defense of Marriage**](#)
National Catholic Register by John Shimek
- [**Five Things You Can Do Right Now to End Abortion**](#)
CatholicVote.org by John Shimek
- [**The Benedict Option: It's Attractive, but We Shouldn't Do It!**](#)
In Caritas Christiana by Shannon Ball
- [**Truth Has a Way of Dividing**](#)
Brutally Honest by Rick Rice
- [**Am I Embarrassed To Be Pro-Life?**](#)
The Heart's Overflow by Anna Coyne
- [**Pluto's Unexpected Terrain**](#)
A Catholic Citizen in America by Brian Gill
- [**Inside Someone's Mind is a War You Cannot See**](#)
Tactical Catholic by Andy McNutt
- [**How are you fed?**](#)
Fr. Ben's Biblical Blog by Fr. Ben Hadrich
- [**Resisting the modern palantir**](#)
Mere Observations by Jeff Walker
- [**10 Reasons I Love Being American & Catholic**](#)
The Jesuit Post by Joe Simmons
- [**Dolls from Heaven: Introduce Your Child to Jesus' Little Flower**](#)
Christ's Faithful Witness by Susan Fox

- [**"Gay Parenting:" Children Raised by Unchaste Adults Lead Difficult Lives**](#)
Christ's Faithful Witness by Larry Fox
- [**To Hell With You? Not If We Can Help It!**](#)
Arnobius of Sicca by Dave Wanat
- [**Reconnecting with a Friend is an Unexpected Gift**](#)
Catholic Review by Rita Buettner
- [**The Method of Praying the Rosary of the Mater Dolorosa**](#)
by Tom Perna
- [**We all have a place at the Lord's table**](#)
A Moment From De Sales by Fr. Richard DeLillio
- [**Strawberry Pigtails Forever**](#)
Raising Angels by Amy Parris
- [**The Secret That Sister Assumpta Never Told Me!**](#)
Association of Pauline Cooperators by Sr. Margaret Obrovac
- [**The Tyranny of Radical Secularism**](#)
Justin's Corner by Justin Soutar
- [**Bouyer and Aristotle on the effects of the liturgy on the worshipper**](#)
LMS Chairman by Joseph Shaw
- [**Finding Peace When Making Difficult Decisions**](#)
A Couple of Catholics by Pat and Nicole Padley
- [**Tips for the Trip**](#)
bukas palad by Fr. Adrian Danker
- [**Encouragement**](#)
Bible Meditations by Barbara Hosbach
- [**9 Inspirational Contemporary Christian Songs to Brighten Your Day**](#)
A Catholic Newbie by Lyn Mettler
- [**Restoring the Sacred Silence {in Spite of the Internet}**](#)
Blossoming Joy by Melody Marie
- [**While You Were Freaking Out About the Gay Marriage Decision...**](#)
The True Dignity of Women by Bethanie Ryan
- [**Liguorian Series Posting 0: Introduction**](#)
Servimus unum Deum by Julian Barkin
- [**Justin Welby of Canterbury, Pope Francis, N.T. Wright, Father Stephen Freeman, and Father Robert Barron: Evangelisation**](#)
Monks and Mermaids by Fr. David Bird
- [**Chesterton, Tolkien and Lewis in Elfland by Joseph Pearce**](#)
Monks and Mermaids by Fr. David Bird
- [**The Mercy of God from Taize, Pope Francis & St. Isaac the Syrian**](#)
Monks and Mermaids by Fr. David Bird
- [**Super Saints really work!**](#)

Equipping Catholic Families by Monica McConkey

- **[The Anti-Christ is Here](#)**

Catholic Girl Problems by Tara Baker

- **[The Rights of Evil](#)**

Travels of a New Christian by Reese Cumming

Forward

New Evangelists Monthly is an informal, dynamic, crowd-sourced “meta-magazine” showcasing the best posts faithful Catholic bloggers publish each month. Here you will find many different, but faithfully Catholic viewpoints, insights and perspectives.

Contributing authors submit their very best piece from the prior month between subsequent first and second Saturdays. Readers are welcome to visit anytime, even while contributions are still being accepted for a new issue. Back issues are available in the archive.

eBook editions such as this are available within a few days following submission deadlines (the second Saturday of each month). eBook formats include .mobi for Kindle users, .epub for most other eBook readers and .pdf for everyone else.

For the latest edition of *New Evangelists Monthly*, or for more information about this New Evangelization initiative, visit us at:

NewEvangelists.org

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: Regardless of where you enjoy *New Evangelists Monthly*, either online or in this format, note that copyright is exclusively retained by the respective contributing authors. If you wish to use or redistribute any of their content, please contact them directly for licensing information.

Mother Teresa: The Model of Magnanimity



Mother Teresa is the model for the virtue of magnanimity. Yet, my guess is that most of us know little about this noble virtue. So let's start with a definition:

Magnanimity: *The virtue which prompts one to do morally good acts of exceptional quality. Magnanimous persons are disposed to perform actions of extraordinary generosity, kindness, fortitude and charity; not in order to gain fame, glory or recognition, but simply to do what is right, good, just or needed. Magnanimous actions are usually only possible for those who, as a matter of habit and custom, practice the other virtues with great regularity and ease. Magnanimity supports and enhances Fortitude, and it is one of the highest forms of charitable self-sacrifice.*¹

The best, contemporary example of magnanimous behavior would be Blessed Mother Teresa. She lived and breathed the virtue of magnanimity by practicing all of the other virtues. She shunned fame, and lived amongst the poorest of the poor. She gave of herself solely for the benefit of alleviating poverty and suffering.

There is only one Blessed Mother Teresa. However, we are all called to embrace the virtue of magnanimity by being the best that we can be (in both simple and notable ways). We all have it in our power to be magnanimous. We need not be wealthy or famous to make a positive impact in the lives of others. We simply need to practice one of the greatest commandments, “*to love thy neighbor as thy self*” (Mark 12:31). We are called to give of ourselves in a self-sacrificial way to the needs of others, primarily for the benefit of others. We can do this by following the example of Blessed Mother Teresa. If we do so, we will be in good company, as she modeled her life after Jesus, “*the Way and Truth and Life*” (John 14:6).

In our next reflection, we will look at another saint's life, and how he embraced magnanimity. Don't miss

it!

Footnote:

¹ *Catholic Encyclopedia, Revised Edition*, Huntington: *Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division*, Print, 1998, p. 643

This contribution is available at <http://virginialieto.com/mother-teresa-the-model-of-magnanimity/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Clean and Unclean Meat [at Catholicism and Adventism]

The Bible says that certain animals are not clean, and may not be eaten. Many Christians innocently avoid food containing meat from these animals. Some denominations, like Adventism, make it part of their doctrine that these are unclean and should not be eaten.

What is the context in the Bible, and does it apply to Christians?



Sow with piglet

Sacrifices to God consisted of ritually clean animals, such as cattle. Yet these sacrifices were only a foreshadowing of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. They could not take away sin. Christians no longer offer animal sacrifices to God. Therefore the sacrificial aspect of clean and unclean animals is not longer relevant.

Hebrews 10:1-4 (KJV) – For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. **For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.**

There's another aspect to the distinction between clean and unclean animals – it's symbolic of the distinction between Jew and Gentile.

Leviticus 20:23-26 (KJV) – And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them. But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people. **Ye shall therefore put difference** between clean beasts and unclean, and between unclean fowls and clean: and ye shall not make your souls abominable by beast, or by fowl, or by any manner of living thing that creepeth on the ground, which I have separated from you as unclean. And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.

God separated Israel from other people ... **therefore** they were to differentiate between clean and unclean animals. Israel was God's chosen people – that's why they sacrificed clean animals to him.

But now? We no longer sacrifice animals, and Israel's time as God's chosen people is over. The Gospel has gone out to the entire world, and the distinction between Israel and Gentiles has ended.

Romans 10:12 (KJV) – For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

Galatians 3:28 (KJV) – There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:11 (KJV) – Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.



English breakfast

God no longer distinguishes between Israel and the rest of the world. His kingdom is open to all.

So should we continue to perpetuate a distinction created for a purpose God has abolished?

Christians today who think it's biblical to differentiate between clean and unclean animals are, at least unknowingly, denying God's revelation that God's kingdom is open to all. They're continuing to create a distinction between Jew and Gentile that the Bible says no longer exists.

This wasn't obvious to all from the start – the Apostles needed to bring together everything Jesus had taught into one whole teaching. Jesus himself said that the Holy Spirit would continue leading them to a fuller truth (John 16:13). So when Peter didn't fully understand that Jew and Gentile were no longer to be separate, God gave him a vision.

Acts 10:9-16 (KJV) – On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: Wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, **What God hath cleansed**, that call not thou common. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.



Hickory smoked barbecue bacon

The vision was in the context of clean and unclean animals. We saw above that the distinction between clean and unclean animals was given by God as a symbol of the distinction between Israel and the Gentiles. God is showing Peter that the Gentiles are no longer unclean by using a vision of unclean animals. And the voice says “*What God hath cleansed*” ...

Why on earth would he do and say that if the animals were to continue being considered unclean?

[In the next post](#), we’ll look at what Jesus and Paul said about what we eat.

In the mean time, take this quiz – [Bible Quiz: Are unclean meats still unclean for Christians?](#)

This contribution is available at <http://blog.theotokos.co.za/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Three Criteria of Moral Acts [at BIG C CATHOLICS]



Human beings are moral actors because, as persons, we have the capacity to make choices. A person has an intellect with which to know and a will with which to choose. As a result, a person is always a "someone," never a "something." Animals are incapable of sin. Their intellects are governed by instinct and they do not have free will. Only persons can freely choose and

act out their choices

We must weigh three criteria when judging a moral act good or bad:

1. The act itself
2. The person's subjective motive
3. The circumstances under which the act occurs

Every moral act consists of three criteria: the objective act (what we do), the subjective intention (why we act), and the situation or circumstances in which we act (where, when, how, etc.).

For an act to be morally good, what we do (the act itself), must be objectively good. Some acts are always wrong because they are intrinsically evil (i.e. the killing of innocents, torture, and rape).

The goal or intention is the subjective criterion of the moral act. For an action to be morally good, one's intention must be good. If our motivation is to do something for a bad intention— even something that is good, our action is immoral. The end does not justify the means.

Finally, the conditions under which an act occurs is a factor in considering whether an action is moral. For a husband to make love to his wife at a time when it is medically dangerous to do so — and thus threaten her life — would be an example of a morally illicit act. Sexual congress between husband and wife, while normally a good thing, is rendered morally bad by virtue of the circumstances.

In weighing the three criteria, the act, the intention, and the situation must all be good in order for the act to be moral. Two out of three isn't good enough. You can't do the right thing for the wrong reasons. You can't do the wrong thing for the right reasons.

Various throughout history have existed alternate moral systems. Popular at the time of Christ, Legalism was a strict adherence to rules. You were good if you obeyed them. You were bad if you didn't.

More common in our time, subjectivism is the notion that as long as you are sincere, as long as you are loving, than your actions are noble. The only thing that matters is feelings.

Most common, Relativism is the idea that there are no moral absolutes. Everything is relative. Consequently, no idea is superior to any other. Morality is simply a matter of weighing factors.

The Christian vision of human morality is diametrically opposed to the legalism of the Pharisees, the subjectivism of hippies and the relativism of secular humanists. Jesus speaks of good and evil, vice and virtue, compassion and conversion. He tells us in no uncertain terms that we will be judged according to our actions. We must love selflessly and live honorably, "even unto death". Love enables courage and self-donation without asking the cost. In the process, faith replaces fallacy, sinners become saints, and what's fallen is redeemed.

Values clarification — that is to say, deciding who to throw overboard in a hypothetical survival situation where you are stranded at sea in a boat with dwindling resources — is a poor substitute for knowing the mind of Christ and living his call to love.

This contribution is available at <http://www.bigccatholics.com/2015/07/the-three-criteria-of-moral-acts.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Cancer: Heartfelt Gratitude Among Tears [at Designs by Birgit]

Has it really been 21 years (May 4) since our dear, faithful mother died of BRAC1 breast cancer at age 58? It seems so long ago, yet so recent too. When someone has such an impact on the lives of those around her, the hole left by her loss is enormous and forever present.

The world goes on, however, and so did we. The years passed and our children grew into adults. Then their marriages were celebrated and soon gifted with children - 9 of them so far (with 5 little saints in Heaven). We've been immeasurably blessed!

Yet cancer struck again! First I was diagnosed at age 48 - the same demon BRAC1. Though there were trials, times of fear, a temporary sense of hopelessness, and a resurgence of trust in Almighty God - I've survived for almost 10 years now.

Six years ago, against the normally accepted odds, our daughter was also diagnosed - at age 28! That she was also 20 weeks pregnant was an unfathomable horror. When local doctors told her that she had only two choices - 1. Wait to give birth and then undergo treatment or 2. Terminate the pregnancy (abort) and undergo treatment - she balked at either choice. Instead, our scientifically trained daughter began her own research.

What she found was both amazingly encouraging and appallingly horrible.

The encouraging aspect was finding that doctors had been treating cancers in pregnant women for over 20 years - with great success and zero harm to their babies.

The appalling part was that so few doctors across the country seem to share this information or even appear to know about it. How many woman have killed their unborn children through abortion in order to survive? How many other women have forgone treatment for themselves because they sincerely thought it was their only option for saving their child?

As our daughter, and her daughter, celebrate their 6 year cancer-versary today, I'd like to share this information with the public. Consider it my public service announcement for the day. If this information reaches even one woman who is tragically faced with what she thinks is a choice between her own life or the life of her baby, these few words will have been blessed! In your charity, you might even consider sharing this information with others. The Holy Spirit has lead our daughter to share her story publicly and it has touched those who needed it.

In the mean time, I praise and thank Almighty God, the Great Physician, for allowing us the priviledge of these past 6 years. The vast numbers of people across the country and even the world, who prayed for both mother and child, cannot be ignored. If ever we have seen the power of prayer, it was during those months of cancer treatment. We even witnessed a

[miracle](#)

at one point.

Erika and Rachel, you are truly loved and are our miracle in this world. That you are such faithful souls and give so selflessly to others is a blessing to all who know you and even to some of those who don't!

+ + +

Links to past posts about Erika and her Miracle Journey (please consider sharing):

[Bald Pregnant and Living Evangelizing for Life - Chemo While Pregnant Erika's Miracle Journey](#)

- Erika's blog

[Erika's Miracle Journey Continues](#)

- Facebook fan page

[Cancer While Pregnant](#)

- Facebook fan page



This contribution is available at <http://designsbybirgit.blogspot.com/2015/07/cancer-heartfelt-gratitude-among-tears.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Spiritual Works of Mercy and the Theology of the Body [at Plot Line and Sinker]



Photo Copyright James Hrkach

To further celebrate NFP Awareness Week, I'm reposting this article from last year on practicing the spiritual works of mercy with a

theology of the body

focus:

According to the Catholic encyclopedia, **mercy** is *“a virtue influencing one’s will to have compassion for, and, if possible, to alleviate another’s misfortune.”* The spiritual works of mercy are one way Catholics can show charity and compassion to others. Since my husband and I teach Natural Family Planning, we have always tried to practice the spiritual works of mercy through our NFP ministry. Many Catholics do not understand the Church’s teachings on sexuality. Mother Teresa once said, *“If you judge someone, you have no time to love them,”* Sharing the truth with charity and without judgment is extremely important.

Admonish the Sinner and Instruct the Ignorant

I often find myself in conversations about these intimate topics with acquaintances and relatives. For example, while I was attending a First Penance meeting with one of my sons, the instructor handed out a “Examination of Conscience” pamphlet. On page three, under “Thou Shall Not Kill,” sterilization was listed correctly as a mortal sin. The woman next to me gasped and whispered, “I thought the Church changed her teaching on this. I had my tubes tied and didn’t know it was wrong.” I then gently said, “The Church has never changed this teaching. Birth control and sterilization have always been considered mortal sins.” The woman glanced away, then turned back to me, tears in her eyes. I patted her shoulder, then said, “You know, if you didn’t realize it was wrong, then it’s not a mortal sin.” I pointed out the section in the “Examination of Conscience” pamphlet which stated that all three of these conditions need to be in place for mortal sin: it must be 1) serious matter, 2) the person must know it is serious and then 3)

freely commit it. I strongly encouraged her to seek spiritual direction from a faithful priest. When she left the meeting, she thanked me.

Counsel the Doubtful and Comfort the Sorrowful

A few years ago, when we were speaking at the local marriage prep course on “Sexual Honesty Within Marriage,” we talked about the importance of keeping the marital embrace free, total, faithful and “fruitful.” During the last part of the talk, we explained that contraception removes the fruitful aspect from the marital act. All of a sudden, a young woman rushed out of the meeting room, in tears. James and I continued our talk while one of the other host couples followed her, but we were concerned. After the talk, I immediately went to speak to the woman. I learned that she was the mother of a 13-year-old daughter from a teenage relationship. The young woman shared that she was currently in remission from terminal cancer. Because of the aggressive treatment, her doctors told that she would not have any more children. She told me that it upset her to hear the suggestion that her marriage might not be “fruitful” since she and her fiancé would never have children. (Of course, we didn’t say that in our talk, but this is how she interpreted it). She admitted that she had mistakenly thought she had already dealt with the fact that she and her future husband would not be having children together. But our talk seemed to bring her sadness and regret to the surface. She then sobbed and I embraced her as she released emotions that had obviously been pent up for a while. When she stopped crying, I explained that fruitfulness was much more than giving birth to children. We discussed adoption. We talked about the fruitfulness of being a good example as well as other ways she and her husband could be ‘fruitful’ in their marriage. After the course finished that evening, she came up to me, hugged me and thanked me for being so “kind.”

Bear Wrongs Patiently, Forgive all Injuries

Bearing wrongs patiently has never been something I have done well. And the following example shows that not everyone I “admonish” or “instruct” has been open to the information.

Ten years ago, a woman called for NFP counseling. She and her husband had taken an NFP class years earlier. Her husband, she said, had made an appointment for a vasectomy and he had indicated the decision was not up for debate. After using NFP for many years, he no longer had any patience for the abstinence it entailed. The wife sounded like she was crying. “What can I do to stop him?” she asked. I spoke with her, then sent her information on the moral, spiritual and physical implications of sterilization. I encouraged her to seek spiritual direction from a faithful priest I knew in the area. Four different times we spoke on the phone, her tone frantic and desperate. Finally, she stopped calling. I continued to pray for this couple. Some months later, she called to inform me that her husband had indeed gone through with the vasectomy and they were now ‘very happy.’ She wanted me to know that, although she knew I didn’t agree with ‘their’ decision, she had come to accept it and that it had been the ‘right’ thing for them.

Admittedly, I have no idea what happened in between her frantic calls and the vasectomy. I suspect she never called the faithful priest I recommended. However, I calmly responded, “But sterilization is against the fifth commandment as well as the sixth, it separates a couple...it causes an increase in prostate cancer, it – ” She cut me off by angrily telling me that she only called to inform me, not to hear what the Church teaches, that she already knew that. Her husband then got on the phone and yelled at me, his tone sharp, accusing me of trying to “sabotage” his marriage. I listened, heart pounding, as he screamed at me over the phone. It took a lot of self-control not to hang up nor respond to his verbal abuse. I prayed and waited until he stopped yelling, although by that point, I was nearly in tears and my hands were trembling. Then I said, my voice breaking, “I will pray for you and I wish you both well...goodbye.” My hands shaking, I hung up the phone and cried. I forgave them long ago for their verbal abuse, and I have prayed for them

from time to time, but I've always wondered how they are doing.

Pray for the Living and the Dead

Prayer is so powerful, more powerful than any of us can ever imagine. Even if you're not comfortable speaking up, you can always pray for anyone at anytime. Praying for others is an important part of the spiritual works of mercy. I pray daily that more couples can discover the joy of following the Church's teachings on sexuality by learning NFP: to be chaste before marriage, to be generous and open to life within marriage. I pray for all the student couples to whom we have taught NFP over the years. I pray for the engaged couples who have listened to our testimony and talks at marriage prep courses. I offer up many prayers for relatives and friends who have chosen to lead alternate lifestyles, and those deceased ancestors and relatives who were not faithful to the Catholic Church's beautiful teachings of sexuality.

Practicing the spiritual works of mercy through the Theology of the Body is **an ideal way to show charity and compassion** to others. It's not always easy to do. However, I know that, for me, it is the right thing to do, even if the person or persons are not open to the message. The truth is, we never know when a seed of truth will be planted and someone will experience a change of heart.

Copyright 2014 Ellen Gable Hrkach

This contribution is available at <http://ellengable.wordpress.com/2015/07/22/spiritual-works-of-mercy-and-the-theology-of-the-body/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Stumbling Blocks on the Road to Sanctity [at FranciscanMom]



Via [Seinfeld Daily on Tumblr](#).

Get into a car with me and you'll meet a whole different Barb. While I'm not Road Rage Incorporated, in the sense that I don't get aggressive and tailgate or illegally pass people, I do vocally (with windows safely rolled up, but within earshot of my children) express my frustration with people who drive 30 or even 45 when the speed limit is 50, who leave the turn signal on for miles or don't use it at all, or commit the Cardinal Sin of Driving: neglecting the "Thank-you Wave."

I mean, *how hard is that?*

And then I remember Luke 14: 13-14:

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

In other words, I can't be a saint until I stop expecting a thank-you wave.

This contribution is available at <http://franciscanmom.com/2015/07/29/stumbling-blocks-on-the-road-to-sanctity/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

18 Years Ago Today We Said "I Do" and 18 Special Marriage Mementos [at A Slice of Smith Life]

It's July 12 again which means another wedding anniversary for my husband and me! 18 years????? Hard to believe!

If you have followed my blog awhile, these pictures and even this post may look familiar since last year

[on our 17th wedding anniversary this was my post](#)

. (Copy and paste is a wonderful tool, especially when I should be doing a million other things besides blogging!) But, hey I love the post so much, why not keep reposting it?

Today, Sunday, July 12, I will be traveling home from

[The Edel Gathering 2015](#)

! I can't wait to share about the weekend here on my blog! I'm looking forward to getting home to see my family after a fun time with amazing women over the weekend and I'm looking forward to going out to dinner with my Prince Charming for our anniversary tonight!

Ok, now on to this special edition of A Slice of Smith Life...the anniversary post with 18 special mementos...



18 years ago today we made a covenant and said "I do!".

Together, hand in hand, we have shared so much since first meeting on the beach in 1992.

Today we celebrate our marriage of 18 years.

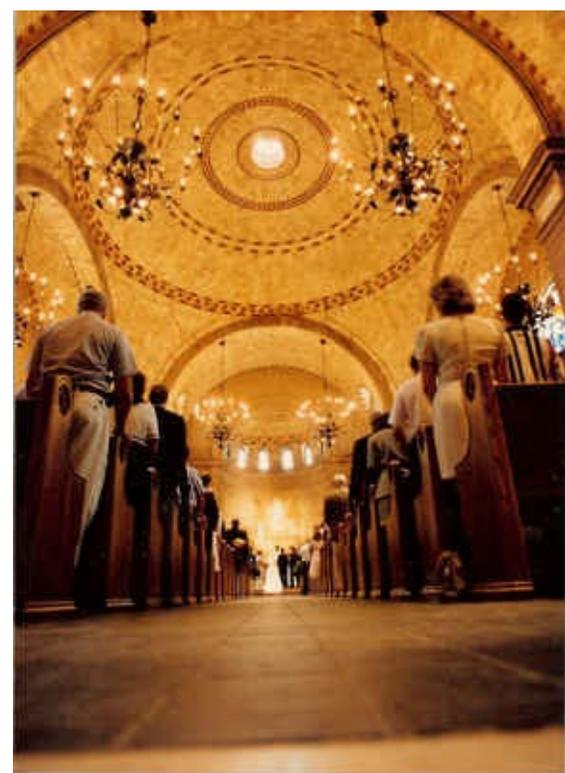
This wonderful journey has been filled with many memories, blessings, trials, and joyful tears.

With 5 blessings, I continue to love growing old with you!

Everyday with you is a gift and so much fun too!

Happy Anniversary to us!

I love you!



This photo of the church's ceiling is one of our favorites.

The photographer captured this beautiful shot during our wedding ceremony.



On our way to the reception after our ceremony

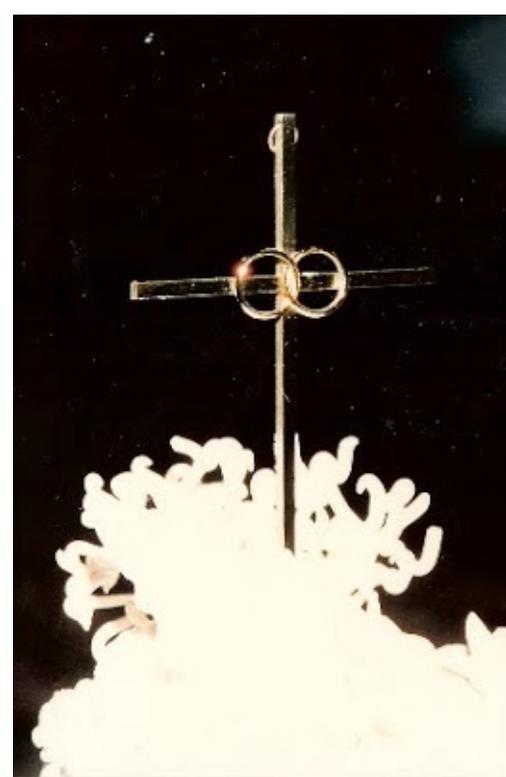


Since my hubby and I met on the beach we had a beach themed wedding cake complete with realistic-looking and delicious candy seashells cascading down the cake. The cake was so beautiful! She also made the shells so realistic that some of our wedding guests would not bite into them because they thought they were real seashells!



A close-up photo of the candy shells on our cake. Thank you Nancy for your beautiful cake art!

On top of our cake was this cross uniting 2 wedding bands placed in the candy coral. This cross is now hanging in our home as a constant reminder of Who keeps our marriage and love strong.



Two are better than one: they get a good wage for their labor. If the one falls, the other will lift up his companion. Woe to the solitary man! For if he should fall, he has no one to lift him up. So also, if two sleep together, they keep each other warm. How can one alone keep warm? Where a lone man may be overcome, two together can resist. A three-ply cord is not easily broken. Ecclesiastes 4: 9-12

In our home we have wedding momentos hanging or displayed in various locations. I always enjoy looking at them as a constant reminder of our marriage promises and gifts. To celebrate our 18th wedding anniversary I thought I would share 17 wedding momentos that are dear to us that decorate our home and 1 photo that shows something special my husband made for me. :)

Warning: long post with even more pictures. I feel like I'm back 18 years ago as I make this post so scroll down fast if you don't have time to read everything and walk down memory lane with me. Plus, 18 years ago I wasn't blogging, but if I was, you can be sure I would have our wedding posted in more detail and pictures :) Memento 1: This is a pre-wedding picture that I thought I would throw in here. This was taken on the beach in July 1995, two years before our wedding.



Memento 2:

We have this poem hanging near our kitchen/dining room and it was written by my mother-in-law one night in the middle of the night when it just popped into her head, as she explained it. She surprised us with this framed poem and read it to us at our rehearsal dinner. She scanned my husband's and my foot prints from our birth certificates and placed them onto the poem. Anthony's prints are in the top left corner, while mine are on the bottom right. We will treasure this gift always and it's one of my favorite wedding gifts!

It reads: ***God Knew...***

God knew what He was doing when He made these little feet.

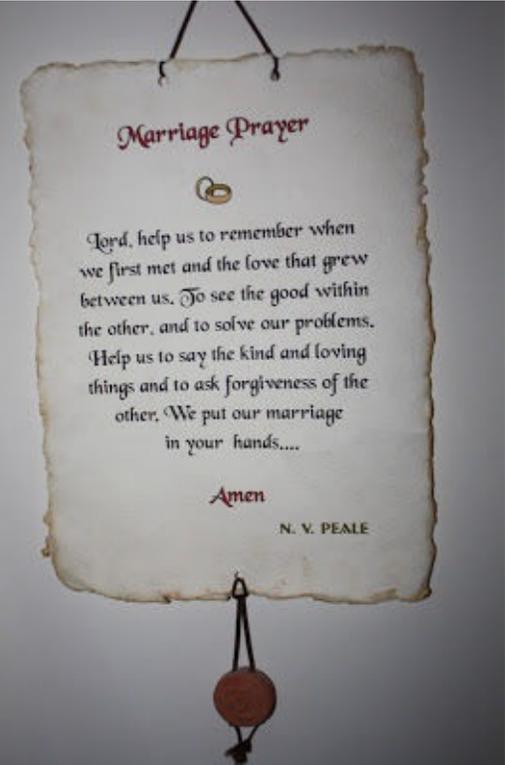
He knew it would be our destiny that someday we would meet.

He knew that we would fall in love and eventually wed.

He knew the path we would follow and in His foot steps our feet would tread.



Memento 3: Here is a Marriage Prayer that was a wedding gift from one of our friends (who is now a priest). We have this prayer hanging in our bedroom and I love its simple, yet meaningful words.

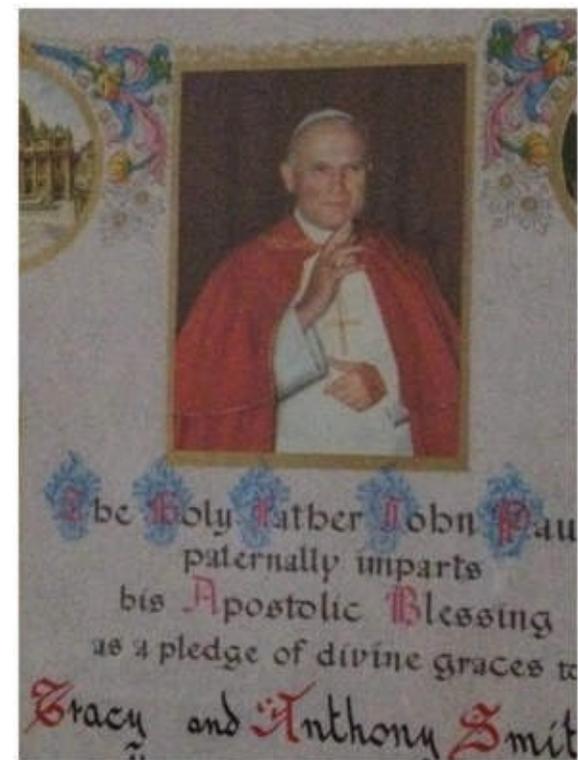


It reads:

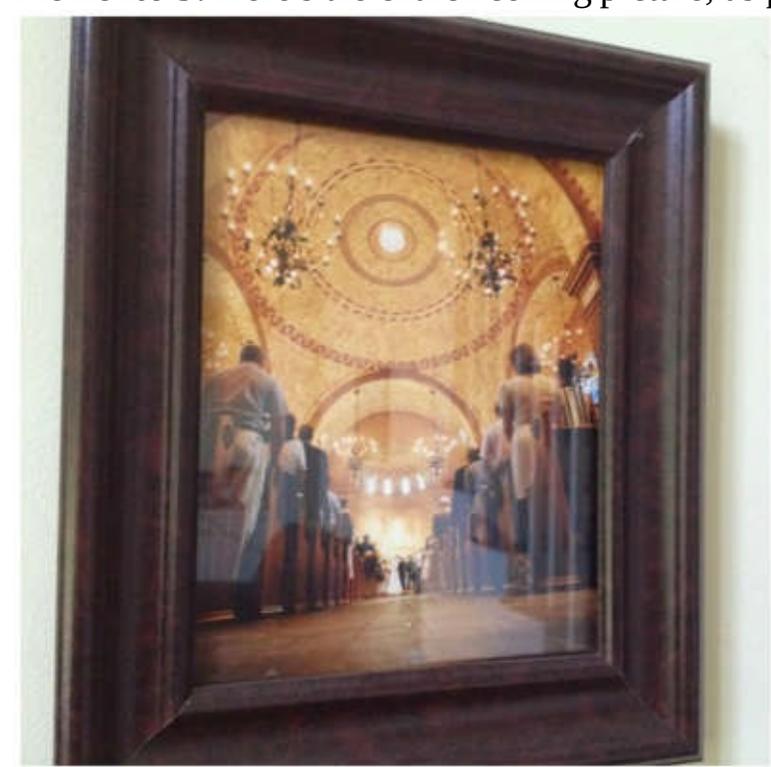
Lord, help us to remember when we first met and the love that grew between us. To see the good within the other, and to solve our problems. Help us to say the kind and loving things and to ask forgiveness of the other. We put our marriage in your hands. Amen. ~N.V. Pearle

Memento 4: This was a gift that we have hanging in our bedroom...an apostolic blessing from then Pope

John Paul II who is now Saint John Paul II!



Memento 5: Here's the church ceiling picture, as posted above, framed on our wall. I love this picture!



Memento 6: Going to the reception photo in a glass frame



Memento 7: My wedding portrait taken by my Dad who is a professional photographer, but he hired his photography friend to take our wedding.



Memento 8: Mr. and Mrs. Smith at the altar



Are you still with me? Halfway there! ... :) **Memento 9 & 10:** Our wedding invitation that my parents framed for us. Our invitation has seashells on the border to go with our beach themed wedding. I edited the bottom of it to distort some location details, hence the funny looking print :) Our wedding album sits on our dining room buffet and occasionally I'll see our children flipping through it.



Memento 11 & 12: I love this bride and groom plate painted by our friends from college. On the back of the plate they accidently wrote "Love one anoter" so we all had a good laugh about that. I love the plate for the fact that they took time to make it so cute and unique with it's own "unique" spelling :) The white candle is decorated with our wedding invitation that was glued on by a relative and given to us as a gift. We light it each year on our anniversary.

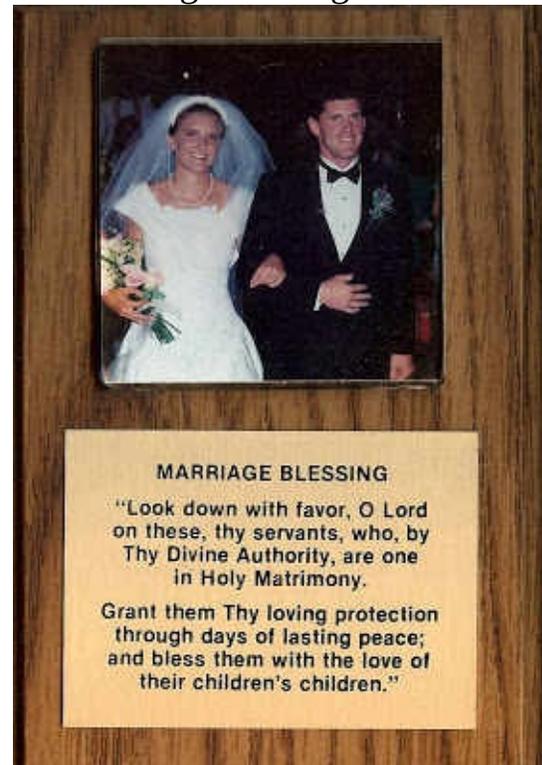


Memento 13 & 14: Our unique starfish frame that was gifted to us that holds a picture of us cutting our wedding cake at the reception. In the background is a picture of flowers that are popular in St. John Virgin Islands where we went on our honeymoon. The picture on the right side shows the cross that was

on top of our wedding cake and also hanging on our wall is a plaque with a beautiful marriage blessing on it.



The marriage blessing is so beautiful I'll share a close up shot so the words can be read:



Memento 15: Here's another unique and special gift that we have hanging in our foyer. It reminds me of Asian artwork. When you look closer, what do you see? The drawing is actually each letter of my first name and my husband's first name. Tracy...Anthony



Memento 16: Our ["domestic church"](#) was established in 1997



Memento 17: Scenic pictures hang in our home from St. John, Virgin Islands, where we took our honeymoon. We would love to go back to this beautiful place. Maybe one day...



Memento 18: In 2010, Anthony was powerwashing our house and he surprised me by creating this special message for me on our driveway. Awww...I love you too Anthony! :)



OK, so if you stuck with this post to this point, I'm impressed and I thank you for taking the time to read it and view the pictures. If anything else, maybe some of my mementos will give someone wedding gift ideas :)

One tradition that we have done each year on our anniversary since our first anniversary is watch our video from our wedding. Now we did get married before the digital age so the color quality is...90ish, but the memories of our day continue to be with us each time we play our video. We did copy it onto a DVD to help make it last longer.

It is a joy to now watch the video with our Cupcakes as the younger ones have asked through the years why they weren't there to celebrate with us ;-). Each year we are not only reminded of our holy vows we took in front of our Lord, family, and friends, but we also get to see friends and loved ones that are no longer with us here on earth. You know I still get "butterflies" and filled with excitement just before I watch the part of the video where I'm about to meet my true love at the altar and begin our lives as

husband and wife!

Finally I'll sign off this loooooooong wedding anniversary post with one more picture (I really promise, just one more) :)



The reason I post this picture is because recently I came across this blog post about [Why Should Men Propose on One Knee?](#) and I thought I would share the author's insights about this honorable and well-known tradition. Of course, my husband isn't proposing here, but you get the point.

Tracy

This contribution is available at <http://www.asliceofsmithlife.com/2015/07/18-years-ago-today-we-said-i-do-and-18.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

When Tolerance Simply Isn't Enough [at A Faith-Full Life]

In the wake of the Supreme Court decision regarding same sex marriage, I had an interesting dialogue with a friend on Facebook the other day. The fact that she was on one side of the issue and I was on the other wasn't a problem for me, but as our conversation progressed it quickly became clear that this was an issue in which respectful disagreement wouldn't be tolerated.

— 1 —

The SCOTUS decision has been a controversial one, and one with many different facets. There are gay people who disagree with the decision and straight people who applaud it. It is an issue which has been primarily, and loudly, argued from an emotional perspective. It is an issue which has even deeply divided Christians. We have allowed our emotions to cloud the issue rather than engaging in reasonable and charitable discourse – both sides are guilty of this offense.

As I point out in my article [Feel Good Religion](#):

“Everything is filtered through the screen of our emotions. The facts of a particular situation rarely come into play; rather we choose to focus almost exclusively on our emotions, feeling that they are far more trustworthy than our intellect in helping us to make decisions.

We feel that the rights of the individual override any other considerations (even the rights of other individuals), and we speak of things like personal choice, sex, and marriage as God given rights for all; because after all – wouldn't God want us to be happy?

We feel that it is intolerant and judgmental for us to disagree with anyone on matters of philosophy, religious belief, or moral actions, because ultimately we feel that we have no way of determining objective truth – rather we must rely on what makes us feel good to guide our actions and beliefs, and trust that others will do the same.”

— 2 —

I really liked what Steven Greydanus posted on his FB page under the title of ‘So, What Do We Do Now?’ Here is an excerpt:

“I'm not going to add to the suck. I'm not going to embrace bitterness or anger — or unnecessarily give anyone else a reason to be angry with me. I plan to avoid going around freaking out, panicking, wringing my hands and anxiously huffing and puffing. I have it on excellent authority that does no good.

I intend to love my neighbor, not just in pious fiction but in practical fact, and, insofar as it is within my power, to be at peace with all men. I have no plans to insult, demonize, hate, disrespect, or harbor animosity toward anyone; indeed, I plan to resist insults and hatred toward anyone whenever and wherever I encounter it.

If you are celebrating the Supreme Court decision on marriage, you are my neighbor, and blessings on

you. *We disagreed yesterday and we disagree today, but I had no feud with you then and I have none now.*

If you are lamenting the decision, you are my neighbor and I commiserate with you. If we trusted God yesterday, let us continue trusting Him tomorrow. “

— 3 —

In the wake of the SCOTUS decision I reposted several articles and quotes on my FB page. In the interest of full disclosure I have put links to them below:

Articles:

[Catholic, Gay, and Feeling Just Fine](#)

[The Supreme Court Just Gave Evangelicals a Gift](#)

Statements:

Sacramento's Bishop Jaime Soto

Dr. Michelle Cretella, President of the American College of Pediatricians *“[T]his is a tragic day for America's children. The SCOTUS has just undermined the single greatest pro-child institution in the history of mankind: the natural family. Just as it did in the joint Roe v Wade and Doe v Bolton decisions, the SCOTUS has elevated and enshrined the wants of adults over the needs of children.”*

Supreme Court Justice Kennedy *“The word that keeps coming back to me is ‘millennia.’ This definition [of marriage between two people of the opposite sex] has been with us for millennia, it's very difficult for the court to say, ‘Oh, well we know better.’”* Same-sex marriage has been legal in parts of the U.S. now for just more than a decade, and Justice Kennedy also said there hasn't been enough time to see the effects of same-sex marriage. *“If we're not going to wait, it's only fair to say we're not going to consult the social science.”*

— 4 —

As you can see, there is a wide variety of perspectives here. Many individuals looking at the issue from different perspectives. And that's good. We need to be able to take a look at emotional and controversial issues while calmly and carefully examining the different perspectives that exist on an issue.

But here's the thing. Regardless of which side of the issue you are on, we can still engage in reasonable discourse – right? We can still disagree with each other with charity and respect – correct?

Certainly you wouldn't want to forcibly coerce my beliefs, take away my right to free speech, or prevent me from following my conscience on matters of religion and morality. You wouldn't....right??

— 5 —

A work colleague and friend responded to the statement from Dr. Cretella and asked, *“Just curious, is this also your perspective, Adam?”*

Well, ...I'm no pediatrician. Bah du dum.

But in all seriousness, none of these are my perspectives. They are quotes and articles from others. A gay Catholic man who practices chastity. A Bishop of the diocese of Sacramento. A Supreme Court Judge. An Evangelical Christian. The president of the American College of Pediatricians. These are people that I may not agree with completely, but who nevertheless have something to offer to the conversation. As does my friend, who is a lesbian, married to her partner, and has a son through IVF.

Except that over the course of our conversation we came to this, *"I am actually at peace with those who are 'on the fence' or struggling to accept this for whatever reason be it Religious or otherwise. I can coexist peacefully and respectfully with those who don't believe my marriage and family deserve the same protections as theirs. I do it literally every day. However, I choose not to share personal moments, celebrations, triumphs, and [the] experiences I share with my son and wife with those who believe my family deserves less dignity...I will always be kind to you Adam. It isn't even in my nature to be otherwise. But, **tolerance simply isn't enough for me.**"*

And I was summarily un-friended.

— 6 —

I have to admit, I was floored.

Not because I was un-friended on Facebook – I think I'll survive. What floored me about this statement was her assertion that she would not be friends with anyone who didn't share her personal beliefs. That she chooses not to share her life experiences with those who don't agree with her. And then the follow up statement – tolerance simply isn't enough.

How did we get here?

When pushed to give my personal perspective I responded with this:

"As a Catholic I believe and profess all that the Catholic Church teaches, believes and proclaims to be

revealed by God – even the stuff I have personally had to really struggle with  *– and I fundamentally disagree with the decisions made by the Supreme Court yesterday.*

I personally choose to share my personal moments, celebrations, triumphs, and experiences with people who disagree with me on any number of issues and have wildly different philosophies, religious, and political views than I do; but who nevertheless are still very close as both friends and family.

I certainly hope that we can still continue to be friends in spite of the fact that I disagree with the Supreme Court on their ruling. Blessings."

— 7 —

Because for me, tolerance is the bare minimum. The inherent worth and dignity of every person as a human being *demands* tolerance, respect, and charity – *at a minimum*. Again, all emotions aside, it’s not a question of the rights of every person to legal protection, or a question of the inherent dignity and worth of all humans. Even if we disagree (*even if we disagree passionately*), on important issues you are still my neighbor and I love you.

It is tempting, but oh so dangerous, to only associate with others who share our own values and beliefs. People who affirm our every decision and tell us we are right no matter what. People who vote as we do, believe as we do, live as we do, and even raise their children in the exact same manner as we do. But it is incredibly valuable for me to have people in my life who disagree with me. To have people in my life who disagree with me on *fundamental* issues involving morality, religion, politics, and philosophy. People who can help me to see the world through a different lens and be more empathetic.

When encountering someone with a different perspective than mine will I change my views? Perhaps, or perhaps not. I will not stray from the teachings of Christ or His Church. It is His Church that helps me to properly form my conscience and develop my beliefs and worldview. But either way, there is value for me in seeing the world from another perspective.

So, is tolerance enough? Maybe not. I think she was right. Tolerance isn’t enough. No one wants to feel merely “tolerated.” And if I made her feel that way, then I am truly sorry.

Christ never preached a message of tolerance. Rather he preached love. And not just love for our friends and our family. Not just love for those who agree with us, or our neighbors. He told us that we were to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. And that kind of love goes far beyond merely “tolerating” someone. But to love others in this way demands that we are willing to have relationships with people that we fundamentally disagree with. People who rub us the wrong way. People who don’t share our views and beliefs. People who, if not our enemies, certainly are not our friends. And people

who are our friends but still manage to disagree with us on virtually every topic imaginable



So perhaps tolerance isn’t enough. But love is. And I for one choose love.

!

This contribution is available at <http://adamncrawford.com/when-tolerance-simply-isnt-enough/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

How a Mystic Prepares for Holy Communion [at The Shield of Faith]

The mystic Luisa Piccarreta was a victim soul, confined to her bed and living solely on the Eucharist and the Divine Will for [some 60 years](#). She received the command of obedience from her confessor to reveal how she prepares herself to receive and thank Jesus at Holy Communion. Here is what she wrote on April 10, 1910:

I write to obey, but I feel my heart crack from the effort I am making. But, *Viva Obedience – Viva the Will of God!* I write, but I tremble, and I myself don't know what I am saying. Obedience wants me to write something about how I prepare myself and thank blessed Jesus at Communion. I don't know how to say anything about it, because my sweet Jesus, in seeing my incapacity and that I am good at nothing, does everything Himself: He prepares my soul, and He Himself administers the thanksgiving to me; and I follow Him.



Now, the way of Jesus is always immense, and together with Jesus, I too feel immense, and as if I were able to do something. Then Jesus withdraws, and I remain always the stupid one that I am, the little ignorant one, the little naughty one. And it is exactly because of this that Jesus loves me – because I am ignorant, and I am no one, and I can do nothing. Knowing that I want to receive Him at any cost, so as not to receive dishonor in coming into me, but rather, highest honor, He Himself prepares my poor soul. He gives me His own things, His merits, His clothing, His works, His desires – in sum, all of Himself. If necessary, also that which the Saints did, because everything is His own; if necessary, also that which the Most Holy Mama did. And I too say to all: ‘Jesus, give honor to Yourself in coming into me. My Queen Mama, Saints, all Angels, I am so very poor; everything that is yours – put it in my heart, not for me, but for the honor of Jesus.’ And I feel that all of Heaven contributes to preparing me. And after Jesus has descended within me, I seem to see Him all pleased, seeing Himself honored by His own things; and sometimes He tells me: “*Brava, brava*, my daughter, how happy I am – how pleased I am. Everywhere I look within you, I find things worthy of Me. Everything that is mine, is yours; how many beautiful things you made Me find!”

Knowing that I am so very poor, that I have done nothing, and that nothing is mine, I laugh at the contentment of Jesus, and I say: ‘Thank goodness Jesus thinks like this! It is enough that He came – this is enough for me. It doesn’t matter that I have used His own things – the poor must receive from the rich.’ Now, it is true that a few glimmers here and there remain in me about the way Jesus has at Communion, but I am unable to reunite these glimmers together, and form a preparation and a thanksgiving. I lack the capacity; it seems to me that I prepare myself in Jesus Himself, and that I thank Him with Jesus Himself.

From the approved Volume Nine of the spiritual "Diary" *Book of Heaven*, of the Servant of God Luisa Piccarreta. Imprimatur of Archbishop Joseph Leo and Nihil Obstat of (now Saint) Fr. Annibale Di Francia.

This contribution is available at <http://divinefiat.blogspot.com/2015/07/how-mystic-prepares-for-holy-communion.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

The Gentle Mastery of Christ [at These Joyful Mysteries]

I have attempted to start a new blog post a bunch of times over these past two weeks only to come up empty. There's so much to blog about but for some reason my mind goes totally blank when I try to write anything of substance.

Which, if you've read this blog for any period of time, that last sentence probably sounded like a joke because we all know I rarely post

anything

of substance here.

My mind has been occupied with some heavy stuff. You see, my sister in law--Bill's "baby" sister-- was in a serious car accident. We are so grateful Jenny's alive, but she has a long recovery ahead of her.

So many times over the last two weeks I've had a heavy heart. When I think of my faith and remember that God is in charge I literally feel the burden taken off of my shoulders.

I feel a little funny saying that....obviously my burden doesn't quite compare to what Jenny's parents, siblings, and even closest friends are feeling. Most of my burden just comes from concern about all of them. It can be so easy to let yourself be overwhelmed with worry.

Then last week at mass, the gospel was a familiar one. Matthew 11:28

"Come to me all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest."

Sounds good, doesn't it? It does if we remember the most important part of that verse.

"Come to me."

Because God always hears those who seek him.

So far I've witnessed blessings come out of Jenny's accident.....a family holding each other up, a relationship healed, more hugs as we walk out the door. And that is just the stuff we can see. Imagine all of the hidden work God is doing that we don't know about.

I know some of my blog readers are big time prayer warriors. If you could spare some prayers for Jenny and our family we would be so very grateful.



This contribution is available at <http://thesejoyfulmysteries.blogspot.com/2015/07/the-gentle-mastery-of-christ.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Centering Prayer's Errors About God [at Contemplative Homeschool]

Connie Rossini



TERESA OF ÁVILA
DEBUNKS
CENTERING PRAYER

I recently decided to dig deeper into understanding Centering Prayer, so I could advise readers on it. I bought Fr. Thomas Keating's book *Open Mind, Open Heart* and wrote a review that will appear at SpiritualDirection.com in September.

But one blog post was not enough. The errors in this book were so many and so serious, I decided it needed a more thorough response. So I am writing a quick ebook called *Teresa of Avila Debunks Centering Prayer*. It should be ready for publication in a couple of weeks. Here is an Excerpt, on Centering Prayer's errors about God. It still needs to be edited, so please excuse anything my editor/husband would refer to as "infelicities."

The first error concerns the distinction between God and man.

Here is a key point of contrast between New Age and Christianity. So much New Age literature is shot through with the conviction that there is no divine being 'out there', or in any real way distinct from the rest of reality. From Jung's time onwards there has been a stream of people professing belief in 'the god within'. Our problem, in a New Age perspective, is our inability to recognise our own divinity, an inability which can be overcome with the help of guidance and the use of a whole variety of techniques for unlocking our hidden (divine) potential. The fundamental idea is that 'God' is deep within ourselves. We are gods, and we discover the unlimited power within us by peeling off layers of inauthenticity. The more this potential is recognised, the more it is realised, and in this sense the New Age has its own idea of theosis, becoming divine or, more precisely, recognising and accepting that we are divine.^[1]

Perhaps the greatest error, and the one most widely known, is Keating's blurring of the distinction between God and man. Accused of pantheism, he and other Centering Prayer advocates responded that they teach panentheism. What is panentheism? *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* notes that it is an attempt to find a middle ground between a theistic view that sees God as only transcendent, and a

pantheistic view that sees God as only immanent. However, there is no fixed set of beliefs for panentheism.^[2] Therefore, invoking the term cannot settle the question: what do Thomas Keating and his movement teach about who God is?

Here is just one quote among many from Keating's book *Open Mind, Open Heart* that shows the problem: "God and our true Self are not separate. Though we are not God, God and our true Self are the same thing" (158).

Similarly, in a Youtube clip of a movie about Keating's life, the abbot says:

The beginning of the spiritual journey is the realization that there is a Higher Power or God, or to make it as easy as possible for everybody, that there is an Other; Capital O. Second step: to try to become the Other; still a Capital O. And finally, the realization that there IS no Other; you and the Other are One. Always have been, always will be. You just think that you aren't."^[3]

And in a frank online interview, Keating seems to be saying that the only thing holding him back from embracing a Hindu way of speaking about the divine is what Christianity "requires" him to say. In other words, he suspects that there is no real distinction between Buddhist, Hindu, and Catholic views, but only distinct traditions and ways of using words to talk about mystical realities.^[4]

In orthodox Catholic teaching, even at the highest stages of union with God, the soul remains a distinct personality.

What does St. Teresa of Avila say on this matter? Here is a section from the beginning of her classic work *Interior Castle*:

As I see it, we shall never succeed in knowing ourselves unless we seek to know God: let us think of His greatness and then come back to our own baseness; by looking at His purity we shall see our foulness; by meditating upon His humility, we shall see how far we are from being humble.

There are two advantages in this. First, it is clear that anything white looks very much whiter against something black, just as the black looks blacker against the white. Secondly, if we turn from self towards God, our understanding and our will become nobler and readier to embrace all that is good: if we never rise above the slough of our own miseries we do ourselves a great disservice.^[5]

Keating might respond that Teresa is in this passage using the word *self* to mean what he calls our *false self*. He never identifies our false self with God, only our true Self. Such a distinction is unknown to Teresa, however. To her, the self is one thing and God is something else, from the lowest depths to the heights of spirituality.

In another passage she speaks about entering into oneself, but very clearly distinguishes that self from God:

It is absurd to think that we can enter Heaven without first entering our own souls — without getting to know ourselves, and reflecting upon the wretchedness of our nature and what we owe to God, and continually imploring His mercy. The Lord Himself says: 'No one will ascend to My Father, but by Me' (I am not sure if those are the exact words, but I think they are) and 'He that sees Me sees My

Father.’ Well, if we never look at Him or think of what we owe Him, and of the death which He suffered for our sakes, I do not see how we can get to know Him or do good works in His service.^[6]

We will return to this idea when we consider Centering Prayer’s errors concerning sin and redemption.

Connie Rossini

^[1] *Jesus Christ: Bearer of the Water of Life*, 3.5.

^[2] <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/panentheism/>. Accessed 7/10/15.

<http://www.livingrosaries.org/interview.htm>, Accessed 7/10/15.

^[5] *Interior Castle*, translated by E. Allison Peers. First Mansions, Ch. 1.

^[6] *Interior Castle*, Second Mansions.

This contribution is available at <http://contemplativehomeschool.com/2015/07/22/centering-prayers-errors-about-god/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Preparing the Troops [at Declaring the Whole Counsel]

So the Episcopal Church in the USA (the heirs of the protestant tradition I came out of most recently) has authorized their priests (and priestesses) to perform "same-sex weddings" (insert sound of *yawn* here). "Saddened, but not surprised" is my current reaction. Others have commented on how this is a logical outgrowth of the theology of the Church of England (in spite of the warnings of many within), so I will not repeat that here.

Allowing same-sex marriage is an attack on the entire family, not just on the definition of marriage; it harms couples, it harms the children who are subjected to these so-called marriages, it harms genuine love. Certainly we need to deepen our understanding of the Church's definition of marriage. Yet, if all we work on is definitions, then that will only ensure that the coming generations will know what they are rejecting. With marriage under attack, it is

the family as a whole

that needs to be strengthened. Many already want to take away the parental authority in the education of their children, and so parents need to return to their place in teaching their children the faith.

Looking out at the world today, many have asked what we should be doing now? While much of American society (as well as the rest of the world) wants to judge everything by whether or not it gets us more sex, the rest of us who still think of sexual activity as a fantastic blessing of God (and not a god itself) are wanting to see something being done to get us out of this--or at the very least, help us to survive the coming disaster so that we can rebuild after things collapse.

There is one clear direction we need to go in, and it is not to "circle the wagons". No, rather we should be working on teaching our children the faith more clearly and more emphatically. I do not mean, by this, to teach them with an iron fist. Instead, I am speaking about teaching them to love the faith. It does not take a genius to teach facts--anyone can say "the Church believes x, y, and z". It is an entirely different practice to teach something in a manner that results in the listener loving it.

The wisdom literature of the Scriptures is almost completely forgotten by modern Christians. Which is not a remarkable thing when you see how unwise the general population is. Teach the children wisdom. Teach them this with a winsome and joyful manner. Teach them that these truths are filled with beauty and joy. Then, protect them from the world's temptations. This last point means that parents need to learn to say "no" to their children once in a while. They need to stop indulging them (and this can begin when they are toddlers).

This is exactly what we need to be doing. We need to be working diligently on the coming generation to ensure that they do not fall for the foolishness that is being perpetuated today. When they grow up and become the leaders of tomorrow, we need them to be well grounded in their faith, and firmly established in the truth of God's moral law. This is where it all begins, and this is where we need to change our actions. It is time to stop saying "what else can you do with kids these days?" (which is just an excuse to avoid disciplining them).

The family needs to be restored. This does not mean just: "one man, one woman"; as important as that is, that is not the sum total of faithfulness. This also does not mean just: "one man, one woman, with lots of kids" for even the book of Sirach says that numerous children is not a blessing if they lose their faith (Sirach 16:1ff). What needs to be restored is the godly, committed and devout family. This means the family with fathers leading and providing for their home, mothers caring for their children and attending to their domestic duties, and children growing in a loving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ on a daily basis (who do not just tolerate the Church, but genuinely love it).

If we can teach children truth, goodness and beauty, then they will be turned off by the world's lies, sins, and ugliness. If we can show them just how unpleasant the consequences of worldly living really are, then they will not be duped by the glitzy lies that are being thrown at them daily. Do not just teach them sin is bad, teach them to be repulsed by sin. Teach them to see the Church as a blessing of God and the sinful pleasures of the world as a threat to their eternal joy.

In doing this, we are doing more than helping them secure their eternal salvation, we are also preparing the troops for the future. It is our children who will be fighting (or losing) the battles of the rest of this century. It is because there were so many children who were not properly trained to love God first (like the five justices in the American Supreme Court and our President who supports them) that we have so many ungodly choices being made by our leaders today. It is not a small task, and it is not impossible (with the Lord's help). What are you going to do to prepare the troops of tomorrow?

This contribution is available at <http://declaringthewholecounsel.blogspot.com/2015/07/preparing-troops.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Rejection [at The Word for the World]



14TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – B

In one way or another, we have experienced rejection. As a social being, we always want to belong that is why to be rejected is always painful.

All his life, Jesus was met with rejection: from the moment he was born until he died on the cross and all those times in between, he was rejected. Whilst many people were drawn to his very charismatic personality because of his wisdom and miracles, his superstar-status earned him the hatred and jealousy of those who despised him which eventually cost his very life.

The people of Nazareth could have heard the wonders Jesus performed in the surrounding areas and we would expect that he, being a Nazarean, would receive a hero's welcome upon his homecoming. This is very common for a town or a city to give a tribute to a local who has given them honour by excelling in a particular field. They do this by offering a plaque of appreciation or maybe a motorcade around the place for people to acknowledge. But instead of excitement and acceptance, the Nazareans took offense of Jesus and rejected him. The reason? Not because of anything bad that Jesus did but because they were scandalized by him going beyond his being ordinary. They knew him too well, at least they thought. And what about Nazareth? When Jesus was introduced to Nathanael as coming from Nazareth, he asked "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" The inscription on the cross made by Pilate "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" was meant to ridicule the Jews that their king came from Nazareth. So the people of Nazareth must have thought "If we are doomed in our being ordinary, so you must." They made no exception, not even to Jesus in the saying: "familiarity breeds contempt." They thought they were too ordinary and so why would Jesus, who was one them, should rise above their ranks? For them, he was

just too human to be divine.

The deepest rejection that Jesus experienced was in his abandonment by his Father on the cross: "*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?*" Nothing is more painful than to be rejected by the one we love most! This is the pain of God which he does not want any one us to experience at all.

In moments when we feel rejected by a member of our family, kins and friends and especially by someone who is significant in our life, something deep within us dies away! The precious bond that connects us is shattered and we become incomplete; our self-worth as a person is broken!

Salvation is God accepting us in our brokenness; loving us in our sinfulness and embracing us in all our filth. For the Father, we are more than just ordinary because he sees the image of his Son in us that is why he accepts us and we are loved beyond all imagining....

This contribution is available at <http://www.frvlad.blogspot.com/2015/07/rejection.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

On Cultivating Patient Irrelevance: The Benedict Option 2.0 [at One Thousand Words a Week]



“The monks waited.”

~ [Walter M. Miller, Jr.](#)

It seems that I’m more out of touch than even my teens realize. Here’s how I know.

The *Wall Street Journal*’s “House of Worship” column appears every Friday, and I always make a beeline for it. For someone interested in religious matters – as I am – it’s a feature that never fails to inform and enlighten. Sometimes theology and politics, sometimes spirituality and culture; Christianity one week, Islam or Judaism the next, and occasionally Buddhism, Hinduism, and other world religions – you never know what will be there, but it’s always a fruitful, provocative read.

This past Friday was no exception. Evangelical author [David Skeel’s](#) concise summary of Rod Dreher’s “Benedict Option” and the controversy it has lately engendered was elucidating, but, for me, a revelation – how could I have missed this? Apparently, this is a big deal on the web, but I don’t recall encountering it. In fact, my first thought as I read Skeel’s article was that he must be referring to retired Pope Benedict XVI – the “option” part was a mystery.

Obviously, I’m clueless, for Dreher’s idea has been around at least since 2013 when he floated it in an *American Conservative* [article](#). After a brief review of the Benedictine history of tactical disengagement and cultural preservation, Dreher asked,

Is there a lesson here for Christians? Should they take what might be called the “Benedict Option”: communal withdrawal from the mainstream, for the sake of sheltering one’s faith and family from corrosive modernity and cultivating a more traditional way of life?

That’s the gist of Dreher’s proposal, and he’s gone on to write about it extensively on his blog and elsewhere. Moreover, plenty of others have commented on, expanded, and/or criticized Dreher’s scheme, and yet I’m just now running across the whole business – and this pleases me, you see. I suppose I take it

as a sign that I've naturally gravitated to a certain degree of disengagement myself, even without Dreher's recommendation.

That might sound like a backhanded compliment, so let me hasten to add that the basic Benedict Option thesis definitely resonates with me, especially when it comes to Dreher's prognosis of our crumbling civilization. "We are fighting a losing game," Dreher declared in a recent [interview](#). "This is not our culture anymore. Maybe it never was our real home, but we have got to prepare ourselves and our families and our churches through intentional living, through disciplined living, and through an awareness of the cultural moment to deal with perhaps even persecution." Yes, yes, and yes, I say, *hear hear!*

Yet, really, this is old news, and that's my only complaint about Dreher's suggestions. For example, he recommended in that interview that Christians "stay involved in the outside world, but let's also do a strategic retreat" – join the club! Any Catholic who has paid the price of taking [Humanae Vitae](#) seriously already has scads of strategic-retreat experience, and that's only the beginning.

In the interests of expanding the applicability of the Benedict Option for those who've already been fighting the good fight for a while – decades for some, even generations – I'd like to attempt a slightly different spin on the idea. Dreher acknowledges that the whole concept occurred to him after reading Alasdair MacIntyre's [After Virtue](#), and he included a paraphrase of one particular passage from that 1981 book in that recent interview:

MacIntyre says, "We're waiting for a new and doubtless very different Saint Benedict to bring those who want to live the moral life together in community to survive through this current darkness."

In a prologue for a new edition of *After Virtue* published in 2007, MacIntyre himself commented on that passage: "So it was twenty-six years ago, so it is still."

So, while we're waiting, let's look to some other saintly Benedicts from the past that might help orient us to the resurgent Christian culture that a future Saint Benedict will presumably usher in.

1. [BENEDICT THE MOOR](#) (1524-1589): Despite his first name, St. Benedict the Moor was a Franciscan, and his title derived from his African heritage, not his religious background. His parents were slaves in Italy, although Benedict won his freedom by his late teens. Known for his piety and intense prayer life, Benedict held various leadership positions in his order, but his preference was always to return to the kitchen where he'd long served as a cook. After a lifetime of service – including enduring the mockery of those who derided him for his skin color and lowly family background – he begged to be returned to his pots and pans that he might live out the rest of his life in obscure and humble service.

**BENEDICT OPTION PRINCIPLE #1: In a world given over to acquisition and status, strive for downward mobility.*

2. [BENEDICT JOSEPH LABRE](#) (1748-1783): This lowly son of a Belgian shopkeeper desired nothing else than a monastic vocation. His youth held him off at first, but later his sickly constitution and personality quirks made his admission to any religious community an unlikely prospect. Consequently, St. Benedict Joseph took to the road, and he became a freelance mendicant, ever on the move, ever homeless, and ever given over to a rich life of deep prayer. He rarely bathed, dressed in rags, and begged alms – never keeping more than he needed for a day, giving away any surplus to his fellow beggars. The end of his life was spent primarily in Rome where he made the rounds of the

various pilgrim churches there, often sleeping in the shadows of the [Colosseum](#).

**BENEDICT OPTION PRINCIPLE #2*: In a culture obsessed with image and aggrandizement, have a healthy disregard for self.

3. [BENEDICT XV](#) (1854-1922): A relatively overlooked heir of St. Peter, Pope Benedict XV is an exemplar of attempting the good despite overwhelming odds. Shortly before Benedict's election, World War I had erupted, and the new pontiff made every effort to alleviate the ensuing wide scale human misery as well as bring a halt to total war. In 1917, Pope Benedict sent a seven-point [plea for peace](#) to all the nations involved in the conflict. This entreaty was met with polite demurrals that essentially translated into a continental and very public rebuke. "The debacle of this peace effort," writes W.H. Peters, "was perhaps the greatest disappointment that Benedict XV suffered during his pontificate." Nevertheless, the Holy Father never gave up on his vision of a reunited Europe, and at the war's conclusion, he issued his encyclical [Pacem Dei Munus Pulcherrimum](#) – "On Peace and Christian Reconciliation."

**BENEDICT OPTION PRINCIPLE #3*: In a society fixated on security and the elimination of enemies no matter the cost, remain steadfast in a fundamental peace orientation.

That last principle – the peace-orientation principle – is an especially important one. We face growing violence and threats of violence these days, both here at home and from abroad. Nevertheless, our faith demands that we stand with Benedict XV, as well as John Paul II and [Pope Francis](#), in our insistence that any war or potentially lethal violence carried out *in our names* must be an absolute last resort – and that's simply not the case today. Thus, it's all the more disturbing when we read that [Dreher](#) nimbly lumps together "we conservatives" with "we Christians." To the extent that "conservative" is associated with support for targeted drone killings, "acceptable" collateral damage, and a constant national war posture, then political conservatism is something the Benedict Option ought to shun just as much as political, pro-abortion liberalism.

Putting aside political labels in an age of extreme partisanship is a good way to hemorrhage membership. No matter. It has [never been about numbers](#) anyway. In that regard, it's helpful to turn to one more Benedict – the one I mistakenly called to mind when reading Skeel's article the other day: Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. Here's what Pope Benedict had to say about the "remnant" Church when he was still [Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger](#):

From the crisis of today the Church of tomorrow will emerge—a Church that has lost much. She will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning. She will no longer be able to inhabit many of the edifices she built in prosperity. As the number of her adherents diminishes, so will she lose many of her social privileges.

But when the trial of this sifting is past, a great power will flow from a more spiritualized and simplified Church... She may well no longer be the dominant social power to the extent that she was until recently; but she will enjoy a fresh blossoming and be seen as man's home, where he will find life and hope beyond death.

That's a vision that encapsulates the principles of the other three Benedicts listed above – downward mobility, disregard for self, and peace – with the added dimension of *endurance*. The real Benedict Option, in other words, is simply waiting out the storm, be it cultural, moral, political, or otherwise. In a word, it's *persistence* – a refusal to give in to the prevailing anti-Church, come what may.

Intentional communities subsisting on the edges of society might be part of that, but they aren't necessary. However, I certainly agree with [Skeel](#) when he recommends "perhaps turning off the TV more often." If nothing else, that's a good place to start.

A version of this essay appeared on [Catholic Exchange](#).

This contribution is available at <http://onethousandwordsaweek.wordpress.com/2015/07/26/on-cultivating-patient-irrelevance-the-benedict-option-2-0/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The privilege of eating; the privilege of flesh

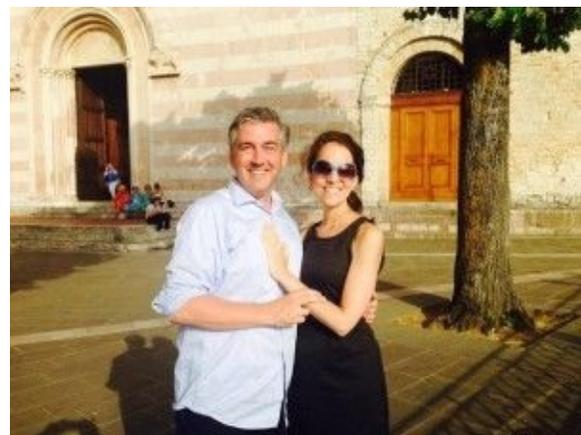
A year ago I was beautiful.

One sunny afternoon on our second summer in Assisi, Robert and I decided to explore the bosco, a forest walk next to the Basilica into a valley where Francis is purported to have walked.

Robert carried a backpack with a wedge of cheese for snacking and I carried the pain that had taken up residence in my gut during my long and complicated Crohn's flare. I was so used to it that I hardly noticed it as we descended the shady paths through the bosco.

We reached a clearing with a chapel and a shop, and we spread on the grass with our cheese and bread. I nibbled, not having had much of an appetite that summer. My dress, size small, was loose on my wasting frame. The cheese tasted good.

I had worn sensible sandals knowing that our ascent could be arduous. Despite not having been able to run since the spring I still fancied myself an athlete and wasn't worried about the climb. About 1/3 of the way up I stopped to throw up. We sat on a bench and I breathed through spasms of pain as a cold sweat broke out across my face. The rest of the walk was a lightheaded rotation of walking, vomiting and resting while my dear, patient love encouraged me and rubbed my back.



Later we rested, and I felt well enough again. A few days later he took me out on the Piazza Santa Chiara, he threw confetti in the air and got down on one knee, and we agreed to be bound together in sickness and health. A crowd of Italian tourists congratulated us and one offered to take our picture. We were smiling like crazy and the diamonds on my fingers glittered. My bony shoulders shone in the afternoon sun and each angle of my face could cut glass.

I ate that night, after the priest travelling with the music festival offered a special blessing and a number of our friends gave toasts. I didn't think about how I would feel after, and I filled up. I don't remember the outcome specifically, but it's safe to assume I threw up later.

When we returned from the states we joined my parents for a celebratory dinner. We all met in the restaurant, and I spent the hour prior with the seat back in my SUV in the parking lot, laying back with NPR on the radio and trying not to think about the fatigue and pain. I ate two ravioli at dinner.

We told the story of our engagement and our plans for the wedding. It was only my father who had the good sense to lean over at dinner and say to me “you look like hell in that picture.”

When people complimented me on my weightloss I was always careful to point out that it was due to not feeling well, and they would often tell me it was a silver lining, at least I looked good if I didn't feel good, some even dared to say they envied me. Those must have been the ones who weren't listening.

The crisis finally [reached a breaking point](#) and they cut out the diseased part of my guts, and voila, I could eat again. My body began its crawl back to the soft and round equilibrium that appears to be its preferred state.

And then the terror came: what will all those people who cheered my weight loss think? Will they judge me for being lazy or gluttonous or simply ‘bad’ in the way we judge women who dare to carry flesh upon them? The praise I had never sought for wasting away lingered in my mind.

I lay awake at night, channeling my post-operative stress into obsessive thoughts about my hideous, disgusting body. It felt like those [adolescent days of self-hatred](#), when my insecurity directed itself at the most obvious target: the flesh. All the hard work I did in my adulthood to be comfortable in my skin was wiped away.

The few pieces of clothing I allowed myself to buy during my emaciation don't fit. The dress I wore in the bosco overflows.

[Working out ferociously](#) both assuages my weight-guilt and helps me sleep at night. I considered not eating again, but I don't have it in me. Dread and insecurity can't quite overpower the marvelous gratitude I feel for being alive, in remission, and no longer frightening my family.

I am grateful for the hundreds of types of crunch, from the crisp salt of a Cape Cod potato chip to the fresh mouthfuls of lettuce and sunflower seeds to the creamy collapse of peanuts between my teeth.



I am grateful for cold glasses of white wine on the porch with my husband in the evening, for sharing a pizza and having more than a few bites, for not having to scrutinize salsa for bits of corn.

I am grateful for not being anemic anymore, for not passing out when I am singing, for the energy to hike and bike and paddle and run.

I am grateful, though I can't believe I'm writing it, for this flesh, for all of it that dances and sings and serves and yes, even eats. I labor to let that gratitude outweigh my confusion and shame over how I look, and my fear that the illness will return soon. I want to just be grateful. I am privileged beyond measure to be well for a time, to return to the joy of eating, the joy of the flesh that I had almost forgotten.

Like what you read, or want to stay in touch? [Subscribe](#), or catch me on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

This contribution is available at <http://margaretfelice.com/2015/07/10/the-privilege-of-eating-the-privilege-of-flesh/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Are We Joyful, Humble, Fleshly Ciboria? [at Harvesting The Fruits of Contemplation]

Remember how the Israelites grumbled during their desert journey - there being no bread? And how they later rejoiced when they received manna from heaven to satisfy their physical desires??

Recall that it wasn't too long after this food was showered upon them that they complained about seeing "nothing before us but this manna" and longing to have the food they enjoyed while in Egypt - meat, cucumbers, melons, leeks onions and garlic they enjoyed in Egypt? (Numbers 11:4-6)

The Jews began to take this manna for granted. Instead of its arrival reminding them of the magnificence of the God who provided it to them and Who was delivering them from their Egyptian slave masters, they complained about what food they did not have. They preferred nourishment for their stomachs, rather than their physical and spiritual freedom.

Are we Catholics much different from our Jewish ancestors in the way we treat and respond to the Eucharistic manna – the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity – that our Loving Lord offers us each day?

Have we become so casual about our Eucharistic Lord and our undeserved participation at the heavenly banquet that we have forgotten Who it is Who chooses to unite Himself physically with the sinful creatures we are?

Do we believe there is nothing else on this earth Which can be more satisfying or worthwhile than to welcome the King of Kings and Lord of Lords into our tarnished bodies?

Are we joyful, humble fleshly ciboria radiating the Love of the Lord within us to those about us?

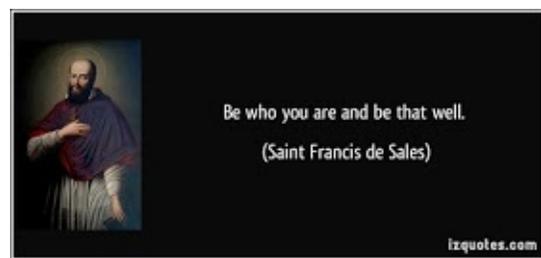
The honest answer - not in the manner fitting the Gift we receive.

What do you think?

This contribution is available at <http://harvestingthefruitsofcontemplation.blogspot.com/2015/07/monday-musings-are-we-joyful-humble.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

St. Francis, I'm Glad We Had This Talk [at String of Pearls]



I love St. Francis de Sales. There are so many wise and inspirational quotes attributed to this holy saint that totally resonate with me and make me want to be a better person. Words that inflame me with the desire to amend my life, atone for all my sins, and just...DO BETTER.

This is one of those quotes:

"Be who you are and be that well."

Just as you sometimes feel like the priest is looking directly into your very soul when his homily seems to be tailor-made for you, I feel like St. Francis de Sales is speaking to me here. Because although I am well aware that, as they say (they, or maybe it was Theodore Roosevelt),

"comparison is the thief of joy,"

I too often compare myself, with all my real and perceived shortcomings, to those about me; and when I do, I sometimes feel that even if I'm the very best me that I can be, it will never be good enough. When I do this, I know that I'm forgetting that God made me the way I am for a reason, and that He loves quiet, introverted, shy (and sometimes socially awkward) me as much as he loves the guy who walks into a party and immediately lights up the room. When I do this, I know that I'm like a petulant child, flinging a birthday gift back at the giver, upset that it's not the toy I had hoped for. When I do this, I know that I'm too busy not loving myself to love others well.

And yet...and yet, I fall back into this sinful way of thinking, time and time again!

I give lip service all the time to the idea that it would be a very boring world indeed if we were all created exactly alike. But almost in the same breath, I wish for a bigger personality, a more outgoing and engaging personality--forgetting that just as the world needs spirited storytellers, it needs listeners. And just as it needs people who are good at talking off the cuff at a party, it needs people who may not be so great at that, but whose unique gifts include the ability to express themselves quietly, through the written word.

You'd think that at about-to-turn-57, I would have learned by now to be comfortable in my own skin, to realize that there's nothing wrong with just being the way God made me. Well, that's the birthday gift I'm going to give myself this year: acceptance--and with it, I hope, unadulterated joy. I'm going to be who I am; and I may not be that as well as possible, but I'm going to give it the old college try.

St. Francis, I'm glad we had this talk. You can talk to me anytime, and I'll try to listen.

(P.S. I know you've been waiting with baited breath for the next book club "meeting," so look for a Grace-filled Tuesdays post next week.)

This contribution is available at <http://mumsie2five.blogspot.com/2015/07/st-francis-im-glad-we-had-this-talk.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Toxic Soup and spiritual warfare [at JOY Alive in our hearts]



In the classic struggle between good and evil, the Genesis account of Joseph and his brothers shows how God’s power far surpasses Satan’s. Joseph’s jealous brothers sold him into slavery, yet that’s how their tribe was able to survive the famine. When God saved the family from starvation and reunited them, Joseph told his brothers, “*Even though you meant harm to me, God meant it for good, to achieve this present end.*” (Gen 50:20).

Today, the enemy still tries to manipulate our thoughts and circumstances to harm us, while God redeems our circumstances for good. In his *Manual for Spiritual Warfare*, Paul Thigpen explains, “The ordinary activity of demons is subtle and occurs within our thought life. . . . Demons may also have a role in arranging circumstances around us in a way that leads to certain thoughts.” Here’s how it worked in our home recently.

My husband Phil was ill from flu-like symptoms for several days. I asked him what he felt like eating, perhaps his standard chicken rice soup? He gave me the recipe for Tonic Soup from a doctor he trusts for advice on natural health supplements. The recipe listed exotic healing vegetables and herbs, some unfamiliar to me.

Soon I was off to Whole Foods for the ingredients that promised healing. Two hours after lots of chopping, measuring and simmering, we enjoyed bowls of this healthy, aromatic brew.

Later that day Phil took a cold medication and threw up the soup, leaving me with a sicker husband and a rejected pot of soup that I meant for healing. My immediate reaction was sympathy for Phil.

Then came disappointment that my efforts to help made things worse. Negative self-talk began to deride my good intentions and myself as a failure. But nothing we do for love is ever wasted, nor was the Tonic Soup. I put it in the back of the refrigerator rather than completely give up on the remedy I’d worked so

hard to prepare.

The next day he ate his chicken rice soup, and I ate the Tonic Soup. Then I put it back in the refrigerator. On the third day, he was well and chose the Tonic Soup for lunch. “Delicious!” he declared. I felt vindicated!

Although I can’t control my circumstances, only my reactions, it seemed like the enemy orchestrated these circumstances to frustrate and anger me. It was just like Satan to manipulate the healing soup for his evil purposes to produce more sickness, frustration, confusion, disappointment and failure. In his perfect time frame, God meant the Tonic Soup for Phil’s healing. God used it to teach me patience and to remind me not to give up when bombarded with negative thoughts. He gave me the opportunity to curb my fear and anger when circumstances changed for the worse. He gave me the grace to fight and the patience to persevere.

Combat deceptive thoughts and circumstances

I forget so easily how the enemy constantly works to invade my thoughts with negativity, self-doubt and temptations to react with anger and self-defense. St Benedict gives me a good strategy, “When evil thoughts come into your heart, dash them at once on the rock of Christ and disclose them to your spiritual father.” I can expose the lies of the enemy to my husband, who is my spiritual leader, and my parish priest, my spiritual father in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Tonic Soup scenario shows how Satan takes my good deeds and tries to turn them against me. He takes advantage of circumstances — illness, exhaustion, or my over-striving — to put stumbling blocks in front of me. He can arrange circumstances to lead my thoughts into his realm, mistake his thoughts for mine, or plant thoughts to provoke me.

Circumstances can give a false illusion. I can’t trust their surface impressions, much less their outcome, as God’s final word. I needn’t look at the obvious and fear defeat; for I know that God is present in every situation — such as a near collision.

I was driving home from church and ready to turn left at a busy intersection. The turn signal was blinking yellow to allow a left turn with caution. When the on-coming lane cleared, I began my turn. A car a block away sped up. I cried out to God and my guardian angel, knowing I could only do so much. It took supernatural strength to jam on the brakes. I stopped inches from the driver’s door. I did my part, and God provided the strength to finish the job. I couldn’t believe I didn’t collide with the other car. The driver sailed by, shaking his head as if I should have known better than to try to cross him.

Renounce Satan’s lies

As a cautious driver, I don’t take chances. The enemy caught me off guard and tried to use the situation for disaster. His plan for a collision would result in serious injury or possibly death, destruction of two vehicles, devastation in two families, a traffic ticket and maybe a lawsuit.

The enemy blitzed me with accusations that I am irresponsible and a careless driver destined for a head-on collision. This time I shut Satan up with a practice St. Isaak of Syria taught,

“Do not oppose head-on thoughts that the enemy sows in your mind. Instead, cut off all conversation

with them by prayer to God.”

We can pray against evil influences, always confident that the outcome God wants will happen. The prayer of St. Michael the Archangel banishes evil. I resorted to the prayers I learned in my [Unbound](#) training to help people renounce the attacks of the enemy. I renounced Satan’s accusations as lies and thanked God for staying with me always.

“In the name of Jesus I renounce as lies all thoughts that enter my mind from the Accuser. By the authority of Jesus, I command them to leave me. I consecrate my mind to God for transformation into his thoughts for my protection, salvation and his glory.”

Without my permission to harass me, the raging negative thoughts fled, proving what St. Francis de Sales wrote is true:

“Let the enemy rage at the gate, let him knock, let him push, let him cry, let him howl, let him do worse; we know for certain that he cannot enter, save by the door of our consent.”

I drove the remaining five miles home singing God’s praises for his love, faithfulness and protection in all the battles of my life.

Never give up

When collisions seem imminent with vehicles or relationships, we can trust God with all our heart, and try with all our strength to avoid disaster. I didn’t give up fighting the enemy who attacked my thoughts. I used the tools of spiritual warfare the Lord provides to smite him.

I didn’t give up fighting for my life, even knowing God could take it instantly. He showed his mercy and I escaped physical suffering and the emotional pain of injuring the man in the speeding car.

I don’t know why God spared me, and the other driver. I cannot solve the mystery of God’s will. I can only respect it, honor it and embrace it with awe and thanksgiving.

What frustrating situation or close call has brought you closer to God?

Tonic Soup and a near collision appeared in [SpiritualDirection.com](#)

(© 2015 Nancy HC Ward)

This contribution is available at <http://joyalive.net/toxic-soup-and-spiritual-warfare/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Beautiful Womanhood [at TASTE and SEE]



My older son is coming home to visit soon and my mind stepped back in time to when the Empty Nest Syndrome was ruling my roost. I was reminded of when he & his younger brother were steadily in college and not at home. My heart ached - and was elated for them as well. At different times, I experienced different layers of all that is associated with children flying the coop. This time, I reflected back to when I was pregnant. I reflected on the fact that I cannot be and never will be pregnant again. I have gone through menopause, and as many positive things there are about this phase of my life, I rue about what at times feels like a loss of my femininity. No more menstrual cycles, no more pregnancies, no more babies to rear, no more soccer games to attend.

Many women embrace and are glad about those facts. I, however, still yearn for another child. I want to be vibrantly pregnant again. I want the chance to be less neurotic. In between, I want my menstrual cycle, not only because it signifies that I could get pregnant (God willing), but because it was integral to my womanhood. It provided a cadence to my female life. Without it, I have at times been at a loss about who I am. Of course, the loss has diminished with time, and with prayer and Jesus and the Catholic faith, I have been blessed with the opportunity to expand my development of the word womanhood into later stages of life.

Given the fact that I was repulsed by and even afraid of my womanhood for so long in my younger years (see [my conversion story](#)), this is a miracle of sorts. I love being female. I love being a woman. I love men being men. I love that I can let men be men, unlike my pre-Catholic-conversion when I was angry and usually felt that women got short changed.

Perhaps if my marriage did not end up in divorce, and perhaps if my husband and I had ten+ children, my yearning to have more would have less pull on me. But maybe not.

My mind will now step back into today where I can appreciate the depth and beauty of God's gift of

reminiscing. He truly is amazing.

In JMJ+,

Kathleen

image - http://beautifulwomanhood.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/BW_logo.png

This contribution is available at <http://www.tasteandsee2.blogspot.com/2015/07/beautiful-womanhood.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Stopped by Trains [at Busy Catholic Moms]

A couple of weeks ago, we were rushing to an evening basketball game. Unfortunately, the game was about 40 minutes away and we were still in the tail end of rush hour. Feeling pressed for time, we took off as the GPS jinxed us by saying, “Without unexpected traffic or delays, you should arrive at your destination at 6:55.” Perfect! Five minutes before we needed to be there for the pregame warm-up. Traffic moved along and we found ourselves at the first of two train crossings, just in time for a nice long train to



stop us. We waited semi-patiently as it seemed to crawl by. We made it through the crossing and around a corner to find ourselves stopped by a guy in a pickup truck who was readjusting his cargo in the back end, right in the middle of the road. We joined in line, waiting for our opening to pass him, and got around him just in time to be stopped by a second, even slower train. Frustration mounting, our GPS shared with us that we would still get there by 7:10, with 20 minutes for warm up. Not ideal, but doable.

We continued down the road and as we passed a bike on a highway (what was he doing there?!) it sounded like he honked at us. Knowing that was likely impossible, we were puzzled. After another quarter of a mile, we realized it wasn't the bike, but rather snippets of a tornado siren as we drove by it. We knew there was a chance for severe weather but we weren't even under a tornado watch! I alternated between looking about frantically at the seemingly clear sky and trying to pull up radar on my phone. I finally gave up and called a friend who was likely to be at home. She said that everything looked clear on



the news so we continued on. But a few minutes later, the sky got dark, green and eerie at the same time that my friend called back that we were heading into a possible tornado. We immediately began looking for the next exit. The kids became increasingly more afraid and anxious as we watched other drivers pulling over to take pictures of the weird wall cloud and the electrical sparks from transformers blowing just ahead of us on the highway. My husband looked at the exit up ahead and spotted a sign for a local community college. We figured a college was more likely to have a protective basement so we headed there as the weather looked more and more ominous. He drove much more calmly than I would have, obeying all the traffic signals and signs. We pulled up to the closest building on college grounds and saw a lady talking to another vehicle outside. We asked if they had a basement and she said to come inside. We parked quickly and went inside, and as the security lady (on her first day) walked

from room to room trying to find the right key to unlock the right door, the wind worsened outside. Finally she found a door that opened to her key and we found ourselves in a long hallway with a bunch of other people, mostly students from canceled classes. Looking around, I realized that there was no basement and we were standing in a wind tunnel of a hallway. I led us further in and found a place to sit the children down. The girls were fighting off tears and everyone was anxious.

Looking at the radar, we were right in the middle of the mess, and it was reforming, making the threat recurrent. After about a half hour, the security at the college requested that we relocate further in to the building.

We visited with one of the security staff to inquire about the status of the tornado and she told us not to worry. She informed us that we were locked into one of the only FEMA shelters in the area. The building we were in was built to withstand F5 tornadoes! Breathing a sigh of relief and protection, we reassured the kids that we were in the safest building in the whole town!

After a few minutes, a small voice piped up from our 10 year old daughter, “Mommy, maybe God had those trains stop us so we would make it to this safe building at just the right time. He stopped us from getting further toward the tornado.” Humbled and amazed by her faith and insight, I just hugged her.

Sometimes in life, we can be on our own path, rushing on track to get where we want at the time we want. We know where we are going and what we are doing. But then suddenly, our journey is stopped – sometimes by a giant train blocking our way – and we are slowed down, or maybe even rerouted, from going to where we want to go. Maybe we are even diverted two or three times before we get back on our perceived track. But what we consider as a frustration or annoyance, God may be using as a tool. Perhaps, He is redirecting us and keeping us safe from some bigger, more ominous storm in our path. He is allowing us to take shelter in his love and mercy at the exact time we need it. And what we may see as a serendipitous coincidence is actually part of God’s divine plan and will for our lives.

What trains are taking you off your path right now? How are the trains actually positioning you for God’s will for your life even better than you can imagine?

This contribution is available at <http://busycatholicmoms.com/our-kids/stopped-by-trains/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Why genuflect? [at Convert Journal]



When we Catholics initially enter a pew or when we exit the pew before leaving church, we “genuflect.” That means that we briefly kneel, bending our left leg and touching our right knee to the floor. Why?

Some possible reasons:

1. It is a charming habit.
2. Everyone else does, so to fit in.
3. It is a tradition, a “Catholicity” thing to do!
4. We are acknowledging the fact that we are literally in the presence of Jesus Christ, the Lord of Lords, the King of Kings. He is really, substantially before us in the Holy Eucharist – in body, blood, soul and divinity – reserved in the tabernacle. We acknowledge this and submit to His divine Kingship in humble adoration.

The correct answer of course is the last one. Genuflecting reminds us of who and where we are. We are not God and He is. We are in the MOST sacred space, where the passion, death and resurrection of our Savior is made present through the Mass. At that once and for all time sacrifice, we are assembled with far more people than those of the parish present. We are together in communion with all the angels and saints (known and unknown) and with the faithful of every past and every future Mass everywhere.

Sometimes when we genuflect this is not foremost in our mind. We may be thinking of other things or acting out of habit. That friends, is really sad. Properly genuflecting may be the most important thing we do to prepare our hearts and minds for the Mass. A quick mini-curtsy or head nod toward the front does not do it.

Catholic brothers and sisters, recommit yourselves to getting this right. Do so at the very next Mass you attend (and every one after that):

- Think.
- Find the sanctuary lamp. Is it lit? You are in His presence.
- Face the tabernacle and touch you right knee to the floor. Completely.
- Optional: bow your head (I prefer that) and/or cross yourself (the preference of most other people).

If you need to steady yourself, by all means hold on to the pew as necessary. If you physically can not do this, just do what you can (we are never expected to do the impossible).

Non-Catholic visitors, welcome! I wrote how your visit might seem like you are [in a strange land](#), but will summarize. We Catholics believe (actually, know beyond any doubt whatsoever) that our communion bread literally becomes Christ just as He said. Not all of His most Holy Body is consumed by those receiving. That which is not is “reserved” (safely and respectfully kept) in a “tabernacle” (a special dwelling place harking back to that which Moses constructed). While rare (e.g. after Holy Thursday and throughout Good Friday), it is possible that the tabernacle is empty. When empty, Christ is not present and we do not genuflect (it would not make sense). A special lamp (typically a candle in red glass) is mounted

close to the tabernacle and lit as a signal to us when He is present. For your visit, please just have a seat for now (it's OK, really). We pray that you too will one day join us at the Eucharistic table.

This contribution is available at <http://www.convertjournal.com/2015/07/why-genuflect/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

An Appeal to Young Catholics Leaving Home [at The Contemplative Catholic Convert]

So, you've graduated high school and you're headed away from home for the first time. Whether your destination is college, the military, marriage – or anywhere else far from the familiar of family, church, and friends – you must read this. Your spiritual health *will be tested many times*, and how you handle those tests will determine the memories you will deal with thirty, forty years (and longer) from today.

I know what I am talking about. In the forty-three years I have been walking with Jesus, I have seen it happen over and over to young men and women who left home after high school. For a short while, it even happened to me.

I wish I had known then what I know now about the danger. And I wish someone had given me strategies that could have helped me avoid the moral failures I committed. So here are some time-tested suggestions to help you avoid the many hidden – and not-so-hidden – traps you will encounter.

1. Don't succumb to pride which whispers in your ear, "It won't happen to me." You are subject to the same enticements of sin to which everyone else is subject – regardless how long you have been a Christian. Solomon warned, "*Pride goes before disaster, and a haughty spirit before a fall*" (Proverbs 16:18). St. Paul picked up that same theme in his letter to the Corinthians, "*So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall*" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

2. Make up your mind ahead of time to avoid situations and places where you can be tempted to sin. Be doubly vigilant to avoid being alone in a house or dorm room with someone of the opposite sex – even if he or she is a Christian. Such a situation is a recipe for bad decisions. Remember what St. Paul said to Timothy: "*So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart*" (2 Timothy 2:22). Memorize this maxim: *Sin will take you farther than you want to go. It will keep you longer than you want to stay. And it will cost you more than you want to pay.*

3. Avoid hanging with people who do not share your faith in Jesus. Again, King Solomon advised: "*Make no friends with those given to anger, and do not associate with hotheads, or you may learn their ways and entangle yourself in a snare*" (Proverbs 22:24-25). One can easily substitute "drunkard," or "an immoral person," or "liar," or "cheat," or any other ungodly characteristic into this text, and the principle remains constant. As St. Paul wrote: *Bad company ruins good morals* (1 Corinthians 15:33).

4. Pray each morning for God’s protection. Each evening, review your day and thank God for specific situations in which you made the right decisions. However, if you did fall into sin, be quick to confess, repent – and determine with God’s help to avoid doing the same thing again. The Holy Spirit’s promise through St. John has always proven a comfort for me when I sin: *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:8-9).

5. Establish a habit of daily prayer and reading Scripture. Be consistent with this. It is no surprise the psalmist wrote: *How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to Your word . . . I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you.* (Psalm 119:9, 11). Do you remember Jesus’ experience in the wilderness during Satan’s three-fold temptation? At each test, Jesus responded with Scripture (Matthew 4:1-11). For decades I have practiced what I call the 2+2 = 1+3 Scripture Reading Method. If you read two chapters of the Old Testament every morning and two of the New Testament every evening (or vice versa), by the end of the year you will have read the Old Testament once and the New Testament three times (2+2=1+3). On average it takes less than 10 minutes to read two chapters of Scripture. In five years you will have read the Old Testament five times and the New Testament *fifteen* times. In ten years – well, you can do the math. With so much of God’s word sown year after year in your heart, think how the Holy Spirit will mature you more quickly into the image of Christ.

6. Establish a *habit* of weekly attendance at Mass and frequent reception of the Sacraments of the Eucharist and of Reconciliation. Prayer, the Scriptures, and the Sacraments are supernatural gifts the Holy Spirit gives to empower believers on their faith journey. Fighting spiritual battles without those spiritual “weapons” is nothing less than a guarantee for failure.

These strategies have proven effective for me over the last several decades of my walk with Christ. And they will also help you avoid many of the spiritual traps that lay ahead of you. Satan is a cruel and merciless liar, thief, and murderer. We must not be ignorant of his schemes (see John 8:44 and 2 Corinthians 2:11). As you prepare to leave home for the first time I hope you will apply these strategies to your life. You will not be sorry you did so – even forty-three years from now.

This contribution is available at <http://thecontemplativecatholicconvert.blogspot.com/2015/07/an-appeal-to-young-catholics-leaving.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Another Death Sentence [at CF Family]

Along with

I don't care if it's a boy or girl as long as it's healthy

, I've come across another sentence that raises my eyebrows and deflates my heart. Here's how I discovered it.

There's a writer that I like. I mean, like so much that I look for her articles and gobbled up her memoir in a single weekend. I was stuck in a medical clinic waiting room a few weeks ago with a son who had a spider bite gone very wrong (He's fine now, after antibiotics, anti-inflammatories, and anti-something I can't remember now.) and flipping through a ladies' magazine. My writer's name caught my eye and I was pleased to settle in with her article about the international adoption of one of her daughters.

About how she and her husband fell in love with the toddler's video: her sweet face, shy smile, little twirls, and halting English, "Will you be my parents?" About how the paperwork process moved quickly. About how her husband got Serious and said:

She can't have any health problems

. About how my writer scurried to the computer to fire off a breathless question to the orphanage. About how the answer of perfection brought on a sigh of happiness. They would rescue this darling because she had no health problems.

My heart started to pound and I felt dizzy and clenched my teeth but I completed the article. What if the orphanage director had told them this beautiful child that they "loved" had cystic fibrosis? She'd still be there, of course. They wouldn't bring her home and give her enzymes or hook up her nebulizer with a Little Bear DVD. They wouldn't buy her potato chips and peanut butter cups to help her gain weight and laugh about how great it was to have such a good excuse for keeping chips and candy in the house. They wouldn't hang out with her in the hospital for IV times, doing puzzles, watching movies, or good-naturedly harrasing nurses. Do orphaned kids with CF in former Eastern Bloc nations even have pulmonary care?

I know, I know, if we could order a child up like a burger on a menu (or pick through embryos like picking through trail mix for the candy), we would choose perfection (Which is a joke; we are all perfect in some things and flawed somewhere else). But she actually wrote it down and had it printed with her own name:

She can't have any health problems

, and the unwritten but necessary conclusion:

Or we'll leave her there and pick someone else even though we said we loved her

.

I've been fussed at over the internet for being too cheerful about cystic fibrosis. And it's true. I want to combat this culture of

perfect humanity or nothing at all.

But yes of course it's hard. Yes of course I cry. Yes of course I don't want to consider the death of my children. But neither did my friend who lost her healthy son at 17 from a car accident. Neither did the mother of a healthy toddler who drowned down the road from me. Neither does any mother. It's not just CF, it's life, even when you adopt a healthy orphan. I hate to think of children with CF languishing in orphanages. I'm sick to think of babies killed in utero over those genes. It's like saying my kids aren't worth life and loving. I wish my writer had brought home whatever child reached out to them when they decided to adopt.

I want to fire off a letter to "instruct the ignorant" writer but it won't do any good at this point; after all, the child is now a mother herself. I will teach my own children, though, and try my hardest to live at peace with all (Romans 12:18).

Clearly, I haven't yet formulated an excellent answer. I haven't yet made peace with my messy feelings. There is still an air of melancholy hanging over my head.

But (!), now I am heading outside to set up the sprinkler and a picnic in the sun to play with my kids (with and without CF). My adult son (who happens to have CF) will probably bring me my favorite Kickstart drink when he gets home from work because he's nice. They were not left in an orphanage. And the world is a better place.

I hope my writer can learn this someday.

This contribution is available at <http://northernccfamily.blogspot.com/2015/07/another-sentence.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

What do you desire? Who do you desire? [at Catholic Deacon]

Desire is constitutive of our humanity. We all have desires. For the most part, we order our lives so as to get what we desire in the belief that is what will make us happy. It's a very safe observation that what every human being desires most deeply is to be happy, meaning to be completely fulfilled, to be sated and satisfied. We walk the path of desire seeking that for which we most deeply long. Most of the time, perhaps only after years or decades, you realize that a particular desire is not going to deliver on what it promised when you began pursuing it. Stated simply, these paths are dead ends, or only satisfy briefly and then evaporate. Nonetheless, we can't help ourselves, we continue to desire. Even should we grow cynical, believing that happiness is unattainable and our desires are nothing but a cruel cosmic, or evolutionary, joke that ultimately show us that our existence itself is dead end, our desire persists.

Today on

The Gospel Coalition

website I read a post by Matt Smethurst,

[“20 Quotes from Rosaria Butterfield’s New Book on Sexual identity”](#)

. I appreciate Rosaria's witness so very much. I read her autobiographical account of her conversion -

[The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert](#)

very quickly. One of Mr Smethurst's 20 quotes is this one:

How do we make an identity out of temptation? By collapsing what you desire with who you are. By collapsing what tempts you or what trips you up with who you will become. . . . God's revealed purpose for my identity always nails me to his cross

Before proceeding, I want to make it clear that (I think) I agree with her, even while refusing to give up on desire.

I think in making that statement she presumes, rightly, that many of our deepest desires are disordered and have been distorted. We look for love in all the wrong places. This is consistent with my understanding of being a broken person living in a fallen world. What is evil is not having desires. Our disordered and distorted desires are temptations primarily because, by pursuing them, we seek what they will never and can never give us.



It seems to me the problem with our desires is that they lead us to seek fulfillment in other human beings, in things, or experiences, none which can bear the weight of our need. I will readily admit, as almost every honest man should, that, while heterosexual, my sexual desires are often disordered. I don't lust after a person, but for what I want that person to do for me and to me. All I have to do, really, to snap out of it is ask myself, "Then what?" Our ultimate desire is not for a what, but for a who, a person: "Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring."

The axis around which the entire teaching, or method, of Msgr Luigi Giussani revolves is that the human heart

is

a desire for God, a longing for infinite and eternal Love. Our true desire doesn't collapse into our identity, but reveals us to ourselves. So, rather than repudiate desire, we need to be ruthlessly honest about what it is we really want. Once we have some inkling that what we long for is infinite and eternal we are no longer willing to settle for cheap substitutes, for what will never and can never satisfy.

God only wills and seeks to bring about what is good

for us

. God does this by working providentially through the circumstances of our lives; grace builds on nature. So we must be open to God's grace and when we recognize it not merely cooperate with it, but pursue it with everything we have. But what might this look like? It depends on your circumstances. Here is something I found recently, relevant to the subject at hand, that I think makes it more concrete:

["How the Gospel ended My Same Sex Relationship."](#)

God's decrees are not arbitrary. He gives them only not only to help us, but to complete us. God - who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit- created us, redeemed us (justified us, assuming we've accepted His free gift of redemption by faith), and now wants to sanctify us. God desires us to attain "to the extent of the full stature of Christ, so that we may no longer be infants, tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching arising from human trickery, from their cunning in the interests of deceitful scheming" (

[Eph 4:13-14](#)

). Rosaria is absolutely correct, this cannot occur without honesty or without a struggle, which is the pain of forsaking the ephemeral for the lasting. Jesus, I trust in You.

This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2015/07/what-do-you-desire-who-do-you-desire.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

- This simple mindfulness helped me to turn to God frequently throughout the day. Every hunger pang, errant thought, or niggling temptation brought me back to my Father in Heaven.
- I felt privileged to suffer (ever-so-slightly) for these intentions. Doing so brought me joy.
- Numerous opportunities to make small but significant sacrifices exist every day, no matter how “good” or “bad” a day I’m having. How many opportunities have I routinely wasted that could’ve been offered to God for the needs of those I love or others’ intentions?
- Fasting in this manner inclined me to pray more frequently and more earnestly, even if the prayers were [simple ejaculations](#).
- My choices, however small or personal, are not all about me. My actions – whether virtuous or sinful – are not truly private. They affect not only me but others as well.

The day I fasted with the intention of my two-year-old’s physical safety in mind (because he’s that kind of crazy), I posted this status update on Facebook:

“Toddler damage report. 7/3/2015 – One afghan ripped from the wall. Three dresses thrown down stairs. One roll of toilet paper, unrolled. One stick of butter, unwrapped. One bumblebee, dead. Fresh cherries, squished. Salt shaker, emptied.”

That same day, I also turned my back on my son for a half-second at pool’s edge to grab his sister’s goggles. He was seated on the edge, where I’d been keeping hold of his arm. I asked his sister to watch him, turned my back, and in an instant, he was under water. He was just fine, as I was right there to scoop him up, but I wondered if something more dramatic may have happened had I not been fasting for this intention. Maybe not, but I’m glad I’d been sacrificing for the wiry little guy that day.

And, to top it off, I lost about eight pounds over the past month.

This contribution is available at <http://carolynastfalk.com/2015/07/27/i-fasted-for-your-intentions-heres-how-it-went/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Thankful Summer [at Lord, Make Me a Saint]

for weeks! I thought this would be the best way to catch up.

I haven't done anything that special, just life.

Sometimes life just takes over.

And it should.

Because it's fleeting.

This time with my children will be gone in a flash.

I try to be more present and I admit,

I shouldn't have to

try,

right?

With all the world's distractions sometimes it's

hard to focus and just tune it all out.

Sometimes I wish there was no Facebook, or Pinterest,
or blogs or just busy-time stealing-wastes of time out there.

All in balance.

Balance, because there are a lot of good things

that come out of those things I listed.

That's where the word

try

comes in.

Anyway, remembering to always be

Thankful

to God for His many blessings.

Here's a catch-up from June:



Thankful

for time with my beautiful cousin Kristin.

She's so thoughtful and fun to be around.

Thankful

she's so close now, because I'll miss her so much when we move.



Her kiddos are so sweet and beautiful!

Thankful

for Nolan and Samantha and that my kiddos get to play with them!



Thankful June had parades....we have unicyclists in!

I really enjoy going and watching



We are parade pros man!



Thankful for girl summer camps

(I drove 10 wonderful girls down to this camp-it was such a fun drive!)



Thankful

the sisters in charge are so COOL!



Thankful

for our diocese's Vocations Camp for boys!

(hosted by the lovely Mrs

[12 Lives at the Lake +1](#)

and her family)



Thankful

the priest in charge and seminarians are also very COOL!!

(Fr Scott here)



Thankful

my children have the best father in the world!

Celebrating Father's day here



And here with my father.



Thankful for summer.



Thankful

for loving, caring big older brothers....



Thankful

pre-school speech classes started for Simeon here

He was not too crazy about mama leaving here, but he did fine.



With a crash nap afterward, of course!

Thankful

even Superman takes a nap sometimes!



Thankful

for bedtime stories in bed with my littles!



Thankful

he has this deep hearty laugh, "Mwaaaahahahahahah"

Thankful

these water shooters are the best thing you can buy for only 99cents!



Thankful

for summer time feet-washing at the sink!



She's out of water here,

but,

Thankful

I have big kiddos that help me water the flowers!



Oh, my!

Thankful



Thankful

we spend lots of days here



Thankful

for my beautiful porch to hang our beach towels to dry.

Summer....I love summer.



And to end

(Finally)

Thankful

I tried this new salad!

Found it

[HERE](#)

(updated, I forgot I did not add mango or avocado,

but added craisons for added sweetness!)

I'll leave you with this yummy salad for now

and be back with my July Thankful's soon.

This contribution is available at <http://makemeasaint.blogspot.com/2015/07/thankful-summer.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |



Today would have been my maternal Grandmother's 107th birthday. We affectionately called her "Maw Maw", but we spelled it Mama. When I give talks on my personal walk of faith, Mama is always talked about. I attribute the reason why I am a committed Catholic to her personal witness of faith and fervent and constant prayers for me. Her faith has inspired me in many ways and I often think of her when making decisions about my own family and I am sure as time passes and I become a grandparent this will only intensify.

A Faith Filled Life

Mama was born in 1908 as Ruby Duhon and her family lived in Lafayette, Louisiana.



Their home was next door to [St. John's Cathedral](#) ([Sound familiar?](#)) and today a Knights of Columbus

Hall sits on the property where she grew up. She met her husband Allen Joseph Broussard at USL as she was pursuing her MRS degree (her words not mine). She didn't graduate, but she did get the Mrs. title. My grandfather took a job at Humble oil (now ExxonMobil) and they moved to Houston. They bought a modest home in Garden Oaks and were founding members of the parish of [St. Rose of Lima](#). My grandparents tried and tried to have children, but as Mama was approaching her mid thirties, she began to give up hope, but then according to local legend, her doctor made an adjustment to her womb and she got pregnant with her only child, my mother, Stephanie.

My Grandmother did a lot of praying, my earliest memories of her were of us doing things at church. Her whole life was centered around her faith. She was a member of the [Blue Army](#), whose members pray for the conversion of Russia, she prayed her rosary and attended mass daily, and kept her [Pieta prayer book](#) and many prayer cards and scapulars in her purse. But her faith was not just personal, she shared it with our family and with her faith community at St. Rose. Even though Mama had a car and could drive most of her life, she asked my mom to pick her up for Sunday mass, which ensured that we never missed. She was a smart woman.

She would often speak of my Grandfather, Allen Broussard, and tell me how much he loved the Church and how he was such a good husband who died too young albeit peacefully in his sleep. She always told me how much I reminded her of him. I am sure she prayed that I too would have the strong faith that he had. She would take me to daily mass and to the [Thursday club](#) to play dominoes during summer when I was out of school. As I got older and became a teenager, she would do whatever it took to keep me around her, even though I wished to be chasing other pursuits, by paying me to pull weeds in her flower beds. While I was working, she would give me advice and tell me how she was praying for me. As I moved away to attend college, I talked to her less, but she kept the relationship up by sending me care packages of snacks and sodas and she always made sure that I carried a scapular in my wallet and continued to remind me that she was praying for me.



I remember the day well when I got the call that she had passed away. I was on an overnight business trip in San Antonio and I was woken up around 2 or 3 AM with the news. I immediately packed up my stuff and started driving home crying the whole way. I still can't really think about her or visit her grave without tearing up. I have often wondered why this is the case and I think I know. She gave me the greatest gift of my life, the gift of faith and there is no greater gift that I could receive. She didn't give up on me through my tumultuous teenage or college years, she love me unconditionally and prayed that I would be the man that God knew I could be.

The Value of Grandparents

Grandparents, do not underestimate your value and your worth and your influence. Parents, do not underestimate the value of your parents in your children's lives. There is something about grandparents, they link us to the past and provide a valuable source of formation for our children. They have run the race, and while none of us are perfect, in your children's eyes, they see mainly perseverance and wisdom. Children, you will only have your grandparents for a short time, do not squander it, you will miss them greatly when they are gone, hopefully you will have built up some good memories to lessen the pain. The mission of the family is to guard, reveal and communicate love, grandparents do this extremely well and we can learn much from them.

I love you Mama and thank you for giving me the greatest gift a grandson could ask for. Happy Birthday, tell mom I said hi.



This contribution is available at <http://www.yourhollyfamily.com/the-gift-of-grandparents/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

For the Supreme Court, It is All About the L-U-V [at Kitchen table chats]



Like the free-love advocates of the 1960's, the Supreme Court has declared that marriage is just a piece of paper. There is nothing unique or transcendent about this union. What is really important is all the happy-clappy, rainbow-filled "luv".

I am not happy with this development, but I am also not surprised. Perhaps now those of us who believe that marriage is something more than the legal recognition of the mutual affection of consenting adults will awaken from our delusion that the state ever shared our view of marriage.

It has been decades since legal marriage has been more than a partnership that impacts taxation and property ownership. With the onset of no-fault divorce it became easier to dissolve a marriage than to dissolve many business relationships. While the words of the ceremony may say, "until death do us part", the state view of marriage is "until it is no longer fun for one of the parties".

In my latest article at the

[HLI Truth and Charity Forum](#)

I talk about the appropriate response to the Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage. Just as

Roe v Wade

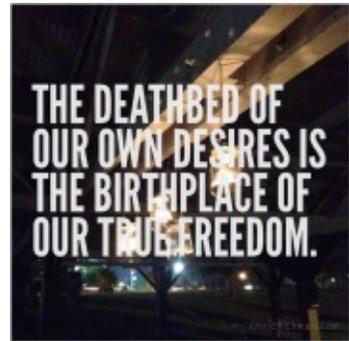
was a call to evangelize and educate on the sanctity of all human life, this ruling is a call to evangelize and educate on the unique nature and grace of Holy Matrimony.

Matrimony is more than a self-serving pleasure experience. It is vocational, self-giving, and sacrificial. It is about the joining of one man and one woman to serve God together and to cooperate with the creation and nurturing of new life, if that is God's will for them. Matrimony is intrinsically and inseparably linked to procreation.

The secular world wants its luv-fest. They call it marriage. We need to speak of matrimony.

True Freedom [at The Veil of Chastity]

Today is July 4th and it is **Independence Day** for those of us in America. The theme of this post is **True Freedom** and in this Summer Rerun series I did a search for the word “Freedom” on the blog and found several posts from the past discussing Freedom....true Freedom....Freedom in Christ.



Posts About Freedom

The first post I found is called [“Freedom In Self-Control”](#) where I share the words of Dietrich von Hildebrand.

*“...As our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and we are made in the image of God, we are told to **glorify God with our bodies**. The body is of great worth in Christianity. God came to us in flesh and blood and **revealed how important the body is to the human condition**. Within our bodies we have many passions. **Either we are able to control them or they will control us. Freedom is found by self-control....”***

Dietrich von Hildebrand

The next post is called [“Does God ‘Take Away’ Our Desires?”](#) which was written in response to a question about why God does not immediately and automatically take away our desires.

*“...In my experience, God does not take things from us when we are tightly gripping on to them. Instead, when we live a Sacramental life of grace, He sort of **‘heats things up’** so that we feel it burning in our hands and let go of it on our own...”*

*“The more one does what is good, the **freer one becomes**. There is no true freedom except in the service of what is good **and just**. The choice to disobey and do evil is an **abuse of freedom** and leads to “the slavery of sin.”By deviating from the moral law man **violates his own freedom**, becomes **imprisoned within himself**, disrupts neighborly fellowship, and rebels against divine truth.”*

The Catechism of The Catholic Church: Freedom; Paragraphs #1733 and #1740

Mass With Healing Prayers

We have been attending Mass with Healing Prayers over the last year or so. These take place one time a month in our area. The evening Mass follows a healing prayer service where several priests pray over us

during Eucharistic Adoration of our Lord. Every priest has the [charism of healing](#) (see Acts 5:15 “*Thus they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and mats so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on one or another of them.*”) A Charism is: any good gift that flows from God’s love to humans.

I have received healing in the form of Freedom from these Healing Prayer services. If you have a chance to attend these, I highly recommend them. Of course, every Mass is an opportunity for Healing and the gateway to freedom.

Books About Freedom:

I am reading a book right now called ***Unbound*** by Neal Lozano. Soooo good! There is a Catholic version which I have on order and can’t wait to receive. It is called: [Resisting the Devil: A Catholic Perspective on Deliverance](#)

God bless you with True Freedom!

p.s.s.s You can do a search of the blog by using the Search function on the right side of the page all the way down at the bottom.

p.s.s.s.s.s Write to me anytime at theveilofchastity@gmail.com

This contribution is available at <http://theveilofchastity.com/2015/07/04/true-freedom/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Cavity [at With Us Still]

I fully expected a measure of pain today, but it never materialized.

It's been about ten years since I last had a tooth cavity filled, so I was pleasantly surprised to discover how the technologies of dentistry have advanced in that span.



Treading dreadfully toward the door...

[The doc](#) used something on my tooth that sure *looked* like a drill from the bad old days—but it came with none of the unpleasant sensations or acrid odors I recall from days gone by.

The [filling material](#) is apparently new, too: troweled in place with a couple of quick flicks...and then hardened with some sort of light-saber contraption, wielded by the dental assistant. Its color even matches that of the tooth it repairs.

Best of all, the whole thing was over in less time than it used to take for the shot of Novocaine to kick in. And as an added bonus, I didn't wind up drooling—or slurring my words—for the next hour or two.

There was, in short, nothing to warrant even the low-grade anxiety I'd been feeling in advance of the visit. My fear (such as it was) far exceeded the reality of the situation. And that got me thinking: It's often the same way when we approach opportunities for *spiritual* maintenance in our lives. Who looks forward to going to confession, after all? Or how many times have we artfully dodged an invitation to attend a retreat...or take part in an evening of prayer?

I suppose we come by this reluctance honestly. It's been that way for holy men and women throughout the millennia. In [today's reading](#) from Exodus, we're told how the Israelites reacted to a vision of holiness in their midst:

When Aaron, then, and the other children of Israel saw Moses and noticed how radiant the skin of his face had become, they were afraid to come near him.

It's certainly not an isolated episode: [Scripture is replete](#) with stories of those who allowed fear to [keep them from fully embracing](#) God's promises. But maybe we're just cheating ourselves when we allow that to happen.

Imagine the power that comes instead from *faith*: The unshakeable conviction that there IS a God-shaped filling...for every cavity we experience in our lives.



Let us pause now...to recall that we are in the presence of the Holy One.

IHS

This contribution is available at <http://withusstill.wordpress.com/2015/07/30/todays-find-cavity/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Time for a cranial-rectal extraction [at On the Road to Damascus]

Dr. Walter Palmer has become the most hated man in the world. Dr. Palmer is the Minnesota dentist who killed Cecil the lion during a hunt in Zimbabwe last week. Dr. Palmer is a big game hunter who has killed bear, including a polar bear, and other big game animals. The hate for him was immediate. Protestors gathered outside of his business to show their disgust, leaving stuffed animals at the door and even going as far as to dress their children up as lions. One man left a sign on his door that read, “Rot in Hell”. Protestors are even targeting his home. Police are on the scene, not to protect the doctor, who, as they put it, “Can fend for himself”, but to ensure the safety of the people gathering due to the increased traffic. All of this outrage and vitriol over one lion.

This story effectively knocked the recent Planned Parenthood story out of the news cycle. David Daleiden, a pro-life activist with the Center of Medical Progress, conducted a three year investigation into the selling of fetal organs from abortions provided by Planned Parenthood. Mr. Daleiden has more than ten separate videos of leading Planned Parenthood doctors talking about the price to buy aborted fetal organs. In one video Planned Parenthood Federation of America’s Medical Directors’ Council President, Dr. Mary Gatter was heard haggling over the price to obtain these aborted fetal body parts. She started by suggesting \$75 a specimen. Dr. Gatter didn’t want to lowball the amount she charged and was heard in one video stating, *“Let me figure out what others are getting, and if this is in the ballpark, then it’s fine, if it’s still low, then we can bump it up. I want a Lamborghini.”*

In almost all of the mainstream news media Planned Parenthood has been portrayed as an innocent victim of an extremist anti-abortion zealot. Even the President of the United States has referred to Davis Daleidan and the Center of Medical Progress as “extremists on the right”.

“There is ample reason to think that this is the tried-and-true tactic from some extremists on the right to edit this video and selectively release an edited version of the video that grossly distorts the position of the person who is actually speaking on the video.” - Josh Earnest , White House Press Secretary.

The above statement was issued by the White House before any investigation into wrongdoing by either side was made.

fe·tus

noun

fetus; plural noun: **fetuses**; noun: **foetus**; plural noun: **foetuses**

1. an unborn offspring of a mammal, in particular an unborn human baby more than eight weeks after conception.

synonyms:

We in America have not officially defined when life begins but science has long defined a life as beginning at conception. If life begins at conception and a fetus is an “unborn human baby” then abortion is nothing short of murder. Even if you cannot accept a “fetus” as a “human life” there is no denying that a fetus will develop into a living human if left to develop naturally.

According to the best statistic we have available, at the time this post was written;

637, 820 babies have been aborted this year in the United States.

191,410 babies have been aborted by Planned Parenthood this year.

23,700,000 babies have been aborted worldwide this year.

30,616 babies have been aborted after 16 weeks gestation in the United States this year.

58, 129,690 babies have been aborted in the United States since abortion became legal in 1973.

6,828,758 babies have been aborted by Planned Parenthood since 1970.

1,343,401,400 babies have been aborted worldwide since 1980.

One lion in Africa was killed by a Minnesota Dentist and the world is outraged with some people calling for nothing short of his crucifixion.

One prolife group in California catches a major abortion provider admitting on video that they are selling body parts of murdered human babies for money and the group is referred to as right wing extremists by the head executor of the United States, someone who took an oath to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States to the best of his ability. The Constitution of the United States protects all humans within the borders of the United States and her territories, that is, with the exception of the most vulnerable humans among us, the unborn.

1 lion = worldwide outrage.

23,700,000 babies = a good start?

The devil is beside himself with joy at how far he has gotten God’s children to fall. What will it take for us to wake up and get our priorities straight? Another flood? A global pandemic greatly reducing our population? The second coming? We are more worried about what man made climate change will do in 500 years than we are about murdering our children by the millions today. Maybe that is the solution - kill the babies now and there will be less people to cause climate change tomorrow.

To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven. There will be a time to reap

what we have sown. God have mercy on us for we know not what we have done.

This contribution is available at <http://damascusroadsojourner.blogspot.com/2015/08/time-for-cranial-rectal-extraction.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Beside Still Waters [at Theologyisaverb]



Anyone close to me knows that despite sometimes bemoaning my busy schedule, I am indeed blessed and appear to thrive on chaos. On my already full plate there's been ample room to take another helping of "Would you be able to join us?" , "Oh, and another thing", or "I cannot be there." Yet over the last few weeks , I have felt the pressing need for a break -a respite to gather my thoughts and silence to find my peace in the midst of the all that I am being asked to do. With my head swimming with service commitments, recordings, preparations, and conversations, the question of just when I would take this break was weighing on me too. That is until the answer came to me in prayer once again.



What began quite simply as a bodily sigh, gave way to a petition, and then to a surrendering of my very self.

“Lord, I need you... You have graced my life with so many wondrous opportunities to love and serve you. And while I cannot believe that you have called me, and given me the gifts necessary to answer that call, I am in need of some time with you alone. I want to be joyful in all that I do, not just simply go through the motions. I want to be close to you, so that others can come to know you through me. Come Holy Spirit..”

Then closing my eyes, I sat in silence in recognition of that which had kept me busy, my deep desire to serve and God’s ever presence through it all. Suddenly, I became aware too of the missed moments I had failed to take advantage of, glimpses of God inviting me to sit a spell and simply be. No sooner was this acknowledgment expressed, than was God’s beautiful gift to me revealed. The vision that now lay before my still closed eyes was that sanctuary that I had pleaded for. Waters so tranquil and glassy that they could not help but reflect the beauty of the heavens that stretched across the bright blue sky. There was truly no separation between the two, and I understood that this was his lesson as well.

You are my vision..



As St. Ignace of Loyola’s own experience has shown, if we are to reflect God’s love, joy and beauty in our world this time of contemplation with our Creator and loving Father is essential. In our surrender, the ripples of fear and doubt are dispelled , and our self

reliance gives way to a peace that can only come from the One who has created and ordered it all. So, yes the One who set the sun and stars in motion also set aside for rest and serenity. And, this time need not always be extensive but as was the case here, just a cursory foretaste of what awaits when our time here on earth is done.



For the remainder of this week, whenever I have needed a short break, I have returned in prayer to find God 's invitation still present. So much so, I know that the smile and joy that breaks forth has been more than visible to others. If this were not enough, God whose generosity is not to be outdone, has spoken to me again in Word and song. No surprise here, the responsorial psalm that I led with the children for this Sunday's liturgy was ...

***The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack.
In green pastures he makes me lie down;
to still waters he leads me;
he restores my soul... (Psalm 23:1-6)***

The invitation is there for you as well..to be led beside still waters. Are you in true need of a break in your life? Have you found God calling you to spend some quality time with Him today? He's there..already waiting for you!

Peace,

Elizabeth

This contribution is available at <http://theologyisaverb.com/2015/07/20/beside-still-waters/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

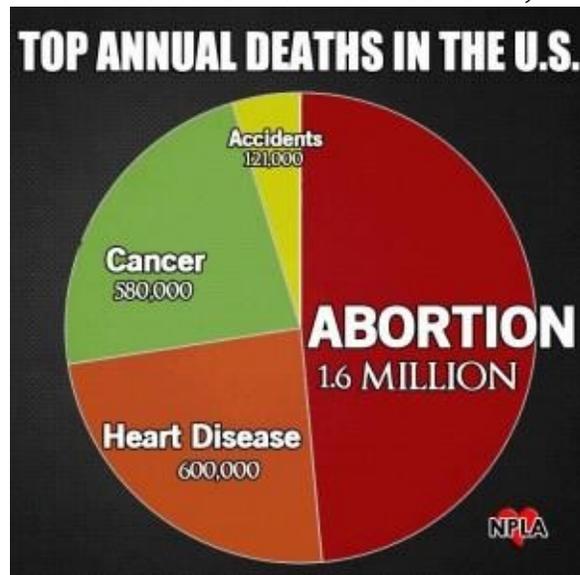
| [Contents](#) |

How Low Can We Go [at The Wayward Catholic]

July 30, 2015

I am so glad to see we have our priorities straight. Finally, there is outrage throughout the world about needless, senseless, and horrible death. The mainstream media has covered this extensively. All the news channels have had their say expressing horror that this could happen. Even late night talk show hosts have broken down on the air over this.

Yes, it is true, all of this over Cecil the Lion. What? Did you think I was talking about the latest undercover video exposing Planned Parenthood's selling of body parts? Honestly, who cares about that when Cecil the Lion has been shot, brutally murdered, by a dentist no less.



We don't need any more evidence than this to show how far we have fallen, how upside down our moral compass is. We don't care about babies being chopped up, but we care about one lion, who from what I have gathered was shot legally.

I came across this graph from the NPLA that shows rather dramatically how much impact abortion has on life. We constantly educate people on how they can prevent these other three killers. Yet we spend nothing on the largest and easiest to stop. We don't have to spend any money on research. We don't need to develop new drugs. All we need to do to save 1.6 million lives is stop abortion.

What can we do? How can we change this culture of death? How do we educate people? How can we make people realize that the death of one lion is NOT more important that the life of even one child?

Are YOU Aware it's NFP Awareness Week? [at A Shower of Roses]

[It's NFP \(Natural Family Planning\) Awareness Week](#)

! I was somewhat surprised by that fact at Mass on Sunday when our new priest mentioned NFP. Now, this was his first Sunday with us, which just happened to coincide with NFP Awareness Week, but I think if he hadn't been celebrating Mass, I would have been kept in the dark about it. Unfortunately.

It's unfortunate that more priests don't talk about NFP, either this week or at all, because it's one of the most beautiful teachings of the Catholic Church. The Church teaching on sexuality is one of the things that sets it apart from all the protestant churches....and pretty much the whole world!

There was a time when we knew this week was coming and did something to prepare for it at our parish, but we've let that fall by the wayside since we reached a tipping point in our childbearing years that made teaching too difficult. And now we're past all that, anyway. Don't snort because we stopped teaching because we had "too many children" thanks to NFP! We had those children because we wanted them, not because NFP didn't work.

For us, NFP was (and is) a huge gift to our marriage. We've been very blessed to have little trouble conceiving, but even with my irregular cycles, we were able to avoid pregnancy when we needed to and able to conceive fairly quickly when we were ready for another child. It wasn't always easy to abstain and it made for some difficult, stressful times in our marriage, but, on the whole, it strengthened our marriage enormously AND brought me into full communion with the Catholic Church.

I didn't start out using NFP because I believed the Church teachings, but because we needed some way to space our children (Yes, I had a "contraceptive mentality"!) and, with my tendencies toward more natural living and fewer pharmaceuticals,

[I was happy to learn NFP](#)

. Win for both spouses! Nevertheless, my eyes were opened by the changes in our already-happy marriage, and if the Church was right about the reasons for married couples should not use contraception, maybe She was right about other things, too.

Feel free to share your experiences or thoughts! NFP is a huge hurdle for many couples in this age of sex anytime, anywhere, with anyone. The widespread belief that we shouldn't have more than 2 children these days is also a challenge for couples. Rest assured that you don't have to have a dozen (as I thought) or a half-dozen, but you do have to invite God into your sexual relationship (because He created it, and He's there whether you like it, or admit it, or not!). And there are no guarantees that you will be given all the babies you want, either, but you will find grace and joy in abundance even through the struggles and the sorrows.

Lost [at Blogging For A Better Life]

For the Son of Man has come to seek and save what was lost. (Luke 19:10)

Do you ever feel like you are lost?

Not physically lost, or briefly lost, as in a senior moment where you can't remember what you were about to do, but lost due to life altering changes that are out of your control.

Next question is . . . where do you turn?

There are many vices easily accessible at our disposal. The picking is plentiful, e.g., a six-pack to tied you over, a few too many five o'clock martinis, a handful of prescription pills meant for pain, a whole chocolate pie, a whole day zoning out in front of the television set, and so on.

There are other options. One example is calling out to God.

I never cease finding this particular Bible verse to be so powerful.

When I'm feeling lost, it takes me to the one who loves me the most—Jesus. I read it often and I'm blown away by the simple words that make up the complete sentence.

For the Son of Man has come to seek and save what was lost. (Luke 19:10)

So breathtaking!

He came to earth for all of us who are lost, to tell us that we are saved. There is nowhere you can go that He can't find you. Furthermore, never are we so far gone, so lost, that we can't be saved.

I'm forever grateful for these words that seem to be written for all, including me, who might feel a little lost from time to time.

When was the last time you turned to Him for help?



*For the Son of Man
has come to
seek and save what was lost.*

Let the power and the love of these words filter into your heart and whenever you are starting to feel lost, lonely, hopeless, tired or worn-down in life—turn to Jesus.

How breathtaking is that?

This contribution is available at <http://blogforabetterlife.blogspot.com/2015/07/lost.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Nature's Gold [at Grace to Paint]

by Maresa Lilley, SND on July 23, 2015 · [0 comments](#)

in [Paintings](#)



6×8" oil on primed canvas sheet; use "comment" below to inquire.

Here is a small companion piece to the wine and grapes posted two days ago. (See below).

This contribution is available at <http://www.gracetopaint.com/2015/07/23/natures-gold/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Sadness of Loss [at Quiet Consecration]

The news has been filled with the Planned Parenthood Undercover Video sting. The left is outraged and scrambling to explain why this organization, founded on a hatred of women different from the White Intellectual Elite, should continue to receive about 15.00 of my money in tax support every year.

I have, I think, a unique perspective because I was a willing participant in the murder of four of my children through legal abortion. I was assured that my choice was my right and that I was only getting rid of a blob of tissue. I knew it was wrong at the time, but I was frightened. I was young, I was sexually active for all the wrong reasons, I was increasing my use of alcohol and drugs to numb the pain I felt from being me. No one, including the family member who helped me, ever sat me down and said, "What the hell is going on here, Girl? Why are you doing this to yourself?" No one at Planned Parenthood ever looked over my chart and wondered why the Girl with the Tear Streaked Face kept showing up, shaking, sometimes with bruises, in the same 'predicament' time after time.

For me, it took losing everything and having to flee Los Angeles to get out of the hell I had so willingly walked into - all in the name of freedom. However, it was many years before I could face what I had done; to myself, to my family and to my children. Losing a child to miscarriage years later was the straw that broke this camel's back. I reacted to that loss by plunging deeply into the alcohol and drug scene, bloating up to 300 pounds so no man would ever want me, and then not really trying to kill myself but, instead, wanting to just wake up dead.

Listening to the pundits on both sides of the aisle this past week has stirred up a lot of old emotions for me. Nothing horrible. No bad dreams. No crying jags. No reaching for the bottle after 23 years of successfully battling my demons (one day at a time). Nothing quite that dramatic, I'm afraid. Rather, the emotions that have stirred have caused me to reflect deeply on how grateful I am today for the life I have right this minute. I am grateful for the journeys of healing and recovery of which I have played a major role and I am even grateful for those who have chosen to walk away from me for being "too Catholic". I am grateful for the occasional bouts of loneliness and I am grateful for the vast freedom that is mine, unfettered as I am by husband or children. I am grateful that the pain I feel is pain that is real and that I can accept unflinchingly my responsibility in my past life and blame no one for the choices I made. I was, and remain, an adult. I had been raised right. I had been given a loving and merciful God and I had been given the pathway to Him through the Sacraments. I was the one that walked away because I was attracted by the glitter of potential fame and possible fortune. I was the one that let that man into my life and chose sexual pleasure over faithfulness to God.

Because I take full responsibility for my life I do not blame anyone or anything - including Planned Parenthood - for not protecting me from myself. However, I think it is funny that I live in a country that is up in arms about no kill shelters for animals and would never, NEVER stand for the dismembering a kittens in order to sell them for testing or research somewhere but actually DEBATES whether it is okay to do this for humans.

Now look...I love my animals. I absolutely love my newest dog, Shaw's Rob Roy MacDuff (Robbie) who, by the way, is a Rescue Scottie from a No Kill Shelter. I accidentally stepped on Robbie's paw last night and I don't know who felt worse, the dog or me. I understand the value of animals and I always

point to St John Bosco as having his Guardian Angel manifest as the Grey Dog.

What I am acutely aware of is this: we have, as a society, lost any idea of the value of human life. We have already put ourselves on the same level as animals. We are no longer Creatures made in the Image and the Likeness of The Creator. Because we are not that important anymore to each other, we cannot see the irony of having more laws in place to protect the eggs of a California Condor than a woman living in California.

What Planned Parenthood has done is a natural extension of how society has come to view itself - we don't really matter. Black lives, Brown lives, Female lives, White lives, Children's lives - all in all none of us really matter and so who cares if a doctor carefully crushes the skull of an infant inside the womb and then sells the liver for profit?

Why I love being a Christian is I have been given a reason to exist. Why I love being a Catholic is I have been given the fullest way possible to worship God as a Christian. Because of that alone, I now know that I do matter and so it makes me sad and stirs up old feelings of grief when it becomes clear to me how little society as a whole cares about itself.

Today, let's think deeply about why we are outraged when a dog or cat is abused and why those photos and videos that show these animals being restored to health give us such a wonderful feeling. Let's ask ourselves why we are not outraged over the words uttered by that doctor about dismembering children for profit and let's examine if becoming outraged over that would REALLY be a betrayal of our Right to Choose.

After all, do we really have the right to choose this kind of horror?

This contribution is available at <http://quietconsecration.blogspot.com/2015/07/sadness-of-loss.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The "Shameful Silence" -- It Honors Evil [at It Makes Sense to Me]

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran theologian in Germany during the reign of Adolf Hitler. His book, "The Cost of Discipleship", has become a classic. Focusing on the "Sermon on the Mount", the book more or less spelled out what Bonhoeffer thought was the true way to follow Christ. In addition to his theological writings and teaching, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a staunch, anti Nazi dissident. He spoke out vigorously against Hitler's euthanasia and genocidal persecution of the Jews and, in so doing, became a hated enemy of the [Third Reich](#). As such, he was arrested in April, 1943. Accused of the ambiguous crime of "plotting against the Nazis", he was hanged on April 9, 1945.



Moving

ahead to the year 2014: The following is a statement from His Grace, Bishop Suriel of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Diocese of Melbourne from one year ago:

"The world watches in silence as the last Christians are expelled from Mosul, Iraq, in one of the most merciless and barbaric acts of genocide we have seen in the 21st Century."

We are absolutely fascinating creatures, we humans are. Many of our species can be so kind and compassionate, loving and gentle, sweet and understanding. Many people will save a tiny bird with an injured wing or a cat stuck up in a tree. There is a world-wide outrage going on directed at a dentist who killed a lion. There are so many people who will feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and give drink to the thirsty. One thing about the animal kingdom: the different species are predictable. One thing about we human beings: we are not.

You flip the coin and you have many of the very same species who are filled with a self-gratification which culminates in a hate and disdain for others of their own kind. These include those who will torture and kill their fellow humans because they *HATE* their: religion, skin color, birthplace, political beliefs or whatever other self-serving, hate-filled reason a murderer may come up with. Many kill and torture

saying they were "only following orders" and had no choice. Others kill because of pride fueled by envy and greed.

[Planned Parenthood](#), a non-profit, government funded organization, employs people who perform over 320,000 abortions a year on babies of ALL sizes. They even sell their body parts for profit and say "it is LEGAL". Barely a word is said by many folks who are part of the main stream media (print & broadcast). The leading Democratic candidate for President of the U.S. says that those reports are "disturbing". Are you kidding me! Disturbing! How about heinous, hateful and/or murderous. So I ask why? Why the "Shameful Silence" from so many?

Why are we, all of the same species, so different in our hearts? How can some of us kill and others forgive them for doing so? Why do some of us willingly and joyfully give of ourselves for people we may not even know? Why do some of us hate others they may not even know? Why are there those who love their fellow human being unconditionally? And why the "Shameful Silence" from so many? The answer has to be because of the very existence of "Good vs Evil" that is always trying to invade our very souls. Many people fight back and conquer the invader. Many others give in and welcome him and embrace his twisted deception.

What is "Good vs Evil"? I can tell you what it is and I do not care if you disagree. It is the war waged by Satan and those that follow him against the God of Love that created him and all of his followers. If you take a breath and look at the world of today and then glance back at yesterday and the centuries before, what has changed in the hearts of man? Apparently, not very much. Love and Hatred have danced "toe to toe" since Cain slew his brother Abel. Why did that happen? Pride and envy. What drives the evil of today? Pride and envy.

God is real and Satan is real. God is the Creator of the Universe and the Master of Goodness and Love. His most beautiful creation, Satan (aka Lucifer) thought he was greater than God and turned against Him. He was cast from God's presence by those angels that stayed true to their Creator. Filled with an unimaginable hatred for all that is good, Satan and his minions prowl the earth fomenting lies and deception to all who will listen. He and his fallen angels have used their cunning to gain entrance into the hearts of those who, before all else, love themselves. These are the easy prey for the king of deceit. And, there is a gaggle of easy prey available, especially in today's secularly charged world dominated by 'meism'.

[Mosul](#), the very cradle of Christianity, can trace the followers of Jesus back to the first century. As of today it seems that the entire Christian population of Mosul has been purged from this ancient and historic city. Murder, including the beheadings of civilians and the wanton murder of women and children, has virtually eradicated the city's Christians. And what did we see and hear from the print and broadcast media a year ago? We heard the sound of almost nothing. What do we hear today about the atrocities of killing pre-born babies and selling their body parts under the guise of "savings lives"? We hear the sound of almost nothing. A "Shameful Silence" from many seems to reverberate throughout world when persecution is running rampant.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it, "*Silence in the face of evil is evil itself.*" He was hanged by the Nazis for his "crimes" over 70 years ago. What has changed? The press was quiet then as the Nazis purged the world of the "hated Jew". Most of the main stream media (print and broadcast) has been quiet as the [Islamists](#) purge the world of the "hated Christian". There are many people in the United States of America, who go to work every day and kill living babies in utero and sell their body parts and have no problem whatsoever doing it because, as the Nazi workers said so many years ago, "it was legal". [Josef Goebbels](#) was the propaganda minister for Adolf Hitler and made sure the press and broadcast media kept news of the [Nazi Final Solution](#) quiet. There existed a Shameful Silence. That Shameful Silence among many is apparently alive and well in 2015, right here in the USA. Nothing has changed, nothing at all.

©2015 Larry Peterson All Rights Reserved

This contribution is available at <http://slipperywillie.blogspot.com/2015/07/the-shameful-silence-it-honors-evil.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Threat of the Pink Blankie [at Peace Garden Passage]

When the little girl first arrived with her mama on the sidewalk where we were praying, she was clutching a bag of fruit snacks. She stopped to eat them, grabbing them with her chubby fingers, her eyes, blue as the sky, her wispy hair golden as flax. We smiled, watching her tap her purple rubber rain boots into the small puddles that had formed as a result of the light sprinkling.



morguefile.com

At some point, though, she needed to rest her little legs, so her mama began spreading out her small pink blankie there on the sidewalk, just in front of the building where we were standing, the place where abortions happen every Wednesday.

In response to our increased prayerful presence of late, the facility had begged for reinforcement, asking on their Facebook page for more volunteer escorts to shield the women seeking abortion from us. The tension was heightened. The escorts seemed extra purposeful as they strutted past us, flanking the women, whom we were praying for, and if possible, speaking words of hope to.

As the mama spread out the pink blankie smooth, the lead escort, the one who is always there — the young lady, “J,” with the beautiful blue eyes and freckles but all-too-stern expression — turned abruptly and said, “You can’t put that there. It’s against the law.” She then rattled off something about placing articles in front of a place of business. “Well sure I can,” the mother said, and proceeded to plop her daughter on the blanket. The little girl sat there, quiet and cross-legged, finishing her half-eaten snack, with her little dolly and a few other toys nearby.

Would the police come to drag away the little girl and her mama, I wondered? Had they broken the law? We knew we weren’t to touch the building. We knew we weren’t to step foot on the green rug in between

the windows. We knew we were being closely watched through cameras hooked into the facility's upper floor, where the "clinic" is situated. But it had always been legal for us to take up a post on the sidewalk. We'd come with our umbrellas and purses and signs before. And yet the little pink blankie was an affront somehow?

I shared this with a friend, and she shared with me a story in turn. A few years back, a local priest had received a visit from local police. They had acquired a statue and wondered if the priest would have use for it. When the priest received the statue, it was in a box — a box that had been mangled up like crazy. When he finally was able to pull out the statue, it was a statue of the holy family.

He learned then that the statue had been sent to the abortuary, and they had assumed it was a bomb or something of that nature, so using proper protocol to investigate the possibly dangerous contents, the package went through the ringer. And at the end of all that, what they found inside was the least threatening thing of all — a likeness of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and his parents. They didn't want a thing to do with it.

"Why are they afraid of the family?" my friend asked. "What is it about that little girl and her pink blankie that threatens them?"

That's my question, too. And it's a deep question; a question that could garner a variety of answers, depending on whom you are asking. I will simply share my emotional response to what I witnessed that day on the sidewalk. Seeing the escort yelling at a mother, there with her child, telling her she was being unlawful, when all the mother was doing was finding a place for her beautiful little girl to rest for a while, brought on all kinds of "this isn't right" feelings. Something is wrong with this picture, and it touches on something troubling about where we're at, if we can turn on the mother and the baby, and feel justified, feel righteous, feel like we are saving the world.

The little girl with the pink blankie stands for something. She stands for peace. She stands for love. She stands for innocence. She stands for the things we are lacking and have turned from, but need so desperately.

The little girl with the pink blankie can teach us something. I will never stop thinking of her.

Q4U: What does she teach you?

This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2015/07/the-threat-of-the-pink-blankie/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

The Me I'm Meant to Be!



“Don’t you know that a midnight hour comes when everyone has to take off his mask? Do you think life always lets itself be trifled with? Do you think you can sneak off a little before midnight to escape this?” — Søren Kierkegaard

We all wear masks; sometimes to cover our insecurities, sometimes to be an accepted part of a social group, sometimes as a defense mechanism and often to try to ease the task of survival. And, after a while, we begin to think that these masks are our reality. We begin to think that we are the person we portray.

For many of us, something happens in our life that gives us a glimpse, even for just a moment, of the real person we were meant to be. God is calling us to be the most authentic version of ourselves.

“For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them.” –Ephesians 2:10

The star athlete, who spent his high school years making fun of the frail kid in gym class, is paralyzed in a horrific automobile accident, gets a glimpse of the person he could become and dedicates his life to those in wheel chairs.

The loner, not letting anyone in school know that her family was homeless, living in her parents car, gets a glimpse of who she can become, volunteers at a food pantry and helps found a homeless shelter in her early 30’s.

For me, being diagnosed with colon cancer was one turning point in my life. I realized that many of the things I valued were fleeting. My priorities were set by a society whose values are not my own.

On that very day, God gave me a glimpse of the person I could be. Not being better, holier, smarter, or more loving than anyone else. Just being better than the person I was that day.

“There is nothing noble in being superior to some other man. The true nobility is in being superior to your previous self.” –Old Indian Proverb

Has God ever given you a glimpse of the person you could be? Have you ever thought about the real you, the “me” you were meant to be?

If so, have you begun to move in the direction of a more authentic you?

This past week, at the jail, we spent some time with a young man arrested on a heroin charge. He didn't know much about God, but came to our service just to check things out.

As a young man, he was kicked out of the house, lived homeless in a park, got addicted to heroin, overdoses 15 times, using drugs to mask the pain, depression, and feelings of failure.

Later in our conversation, he talked about having a girlfriend, a job until his arrest, getting his GED, and maybe even going to college.

“Awe,” I exclaimed. “You have been describing a different person than the one that got you in jail. You have been describing the “me” you might become with God's help.”

“So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.” –2 Corinthians 5:17

“Picture yourself, with a job, a place to live, a husband and father, who would never let happen to your family what happened to you, heroin free, living the me you were meant to be.”

There was no miracle conversion that night. I'm not even sure if he made the connection of asking God for help, calling on a “Higher Power” as AA and NA suggest. But, I hoped that I helped give him a glimpse of the person he could be.

Heavenly Father,

I pray that each person reading this might be given a glimpse of the authentic person they might be.

I pray that as a new creation in Jesus, as our old selves pass away, we might, for a moment, behold the new things yet to come.

And, I pray that with Your help, I can become the me I was meant to be!

In Jesus name, Amen

If you enjoyed this reflection, you can have them emailed to you every Monday morning, and not miss a single one. [Subscribe](#) by [clicking here](#). You will be sent an e-mail to verify your subscription. Just click on the link and you're all set.

Did you know that there is a Finding God's Grace podcast too? A new episode is posted every Wednesday. They are less than three minutes long and a great way to start your day. If you would like to [subscribe](#) to his podcast, delivered every Thursday morning at 7AM to your e-mail, simply [click here](#).

I love it when you share my stories with your family and friends. Below are [links](#) to share on your social media sites. Thanks for sharing!

This contribution is available at <http://tonyagnesi.com/2015/07/the-me-im-meant-to-be/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Assessing our Discipleship [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]

Assessing our Discipleship / Forming Disciples

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified....” (Rom.8:28-30)

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,



Are you being Conformed to Christ’s Image?

All believers are called to be conformed to the image of Christ! That is God’s purpose for us, and it is to this end we should be living out the fulness of His purpose for us.

One of the main problems we lay people have in living out our faith to its fullness is that most of us have left out one of the main facets of entering into a truly and complete living faith journey, namely, our personal relationship with Jesus and subsequent yielding ourselves to the Holy Spirit so He may conform us into the image of Christ that is in us (Rom.8:29). Without this facet of our faith life we cannot be “true disciples” or what may be called “Intentional Disciples”.

Sherry A.Waddell in her book ***“Forming Intentional Disciples – The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus”*** makes it clear that there are three concurrent spiritual journeys to what one might call “normative” Catholicism. She lists these as:

1. The personal interior journey of a relationship with Christ resulting in intentional discipleship.
2. The ecclesial journey into through the Church through the sacraments of initiation.
3. The journey of active practice (as evidenced by attending mass, receiving the sacraments and

participating in the life and mission of the Christian community).

She also makes it clear that in a study conducted by her and a Catholic Cleric indicated that the majority of Lay Catholic Christians basically assume that all that is needed to be “Catholic” are to be involved in paths 2 and 3 (the ecclesial journey and the practice of the religious tenets of the faith).

To complicate matters, most of the Catholic participants in the study did not even know or understand that without the personal interior journey of “Intentional” Discipleship (#1) the other two paths become essentially a self-driven religious journey that leaves out what should be our most essential journey, that is, the personal yoking ourselves to Christ so that He and He alone may empower the Living of our Christian Life to its fullness.

Counter to this lack of understanding in our laity, leaders in the Church have reiterated time and time again that “normative” Catholicism must begin with...

“... the proclamation of the Good News that is directed to a conversion of heart and and life and clinging to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; to disposing a person to receive Baptism and Eucharist and to strengthen a person in the prospect and realization of new life according to the Spirit”

(see on-line at: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortation/documents/hf_jp-11_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html as of May 8,2012)

Because of the lack of in-depth adequate faith formation teaching (catechesis) most Catholic Christians are not properly taught the scriptural foundations behind the essential need for all of us to participate in a personal spiritual relationship with Christ that directly leads us to commit ourselves as “intentional” disciples. Without our direct and intentional consent to becoming Jesus’ disciples the Holy Spirit will NOT force discipleship on us because He respects our free will. Thus unless we come to such a commitment in our lives we CANNOT consider ourselves as TRUE DISCIPLES of Christ no matter how well we practice our religion. Discipleship requires a commitment beyond believing in Jesus – it requires a decision to surrender our lives to the Father so that the Spirit of His Son may act in us and through us for the Glory of the Father.



True Discipleship is the process the Holy Spirit uses to conform us to the image of Christ during our lives (Rom.8:29). Discipleship is not a process that we perform. It is a divine process of Grace in our inner being that molds us and forms us to become more and more like Christ each day that we live. It is a process that works in every aspect of our being, body, soul and spirit as long as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit in His work of Grace. It is a process that leads to what is called a state of Holiness. That is, a state where every part of our being is set apart for God’s use and direction to accomplish His purposes, not ours.

In order to facilitate our meditation on assessing our discipleship. I will list below several scriptures and my commentaries so that my readers may pray over this theme and let the Holy Spirit guide them in discerning where they stand as disciples.

One of the first themes I propose we consider for meditation is that of the Good Shepherd. If we are to be truly His disciples then we must truly be one of His sheep.

<1> Jesus spoke of the relationship between Himself and His Sheep: ***“I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep....”*** (John 10:14-15)

Point: Jesus is declaring that to be one of His Sheep you need to have a “knowing, living” relationship with Jesus that emulates His relationship to the Father. Are you in your inner spiritual life living out and experiencing such a relationship? If not. Why Not?

<2> ***“The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”*** (John 10:2-5)

Point: Jesus leads His sheep through a personal interaction by speaking directly to them so they can recognize His Voice and not follow a stranger’s voice. Do you have a daily dialogue with Jesus in prayer so that you hear and know His Voice and thus are able to follow Him and learn from Him? If not. Why Not?

<3> Jesus answered [the Pharisees], ***“I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all ; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”*** (John 10:34-38)

Point: Those who are called to be disciples “know” who Jesus is in their hearts and thus have spiritual ears to hear and listen to His Voice and follow Him. If you have heard His Voice, then all you have to do to enter into discipleship is decide to follow Him and act on your decision by making a commitment in faith to Him directly!

Comment: In the above discussion we may be faced with a dilemma. We have a strong desire to act on our desire to follow Jesus but we have never experienced a dialogue with Jesus or really understood what the Kingdom of God that He preaches is about.

Well you are not alone. Nicodemus, a ranking member of the Sanhedrin was in the same situation that you are. So what did He do? He went looking for Jesus to ask Him directly. Of course he came by night because, like you, because it was a little embarrassing. Here is what happened:

<4> ***“Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come***

from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again ” (John 3:1-3)

Comment: Notice that Jesus equates the effects of God working through His ministry, that Nicodemus is referencing, as the evidence of the “Kingdom of Heaven” at work. Nicodemus, a cleric with standing, was shocked at Jesus’ response. How could this lay person say such a thing to a member of the Sanhedrin? And what is this thing about being “born again”?

Regarding the term “born again”, note how St. Peter comments on this in his first epistle: **“ Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for...**

**“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
but the word of the Lord remains forever.”**

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.” (1 Peter 1:22-25)

<5> Nicodemus, in trying to understand this saying, asks Jesus: **“How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”**

Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:4-8)

Point: Jesus indicates that a person’s spirit must be “brought to life” or “activated” in order to be sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can revive a person’s spirit by Grace, through The Word. Jesus refers to those who have received such sensitivity to the Spirit as having spiritual ears so they can hear His Voice.

He also tells Nicodemus that although he has been granted the grace of this sensitivity and has responded to it by coming to Him, yet in order to be a disciple and participate in His ministry (ie., enter the service of the Kingdom of Heaven) he must take a further step and make a commitment to Jesus to follow Him.

Jesus, is also telling Nicodemus the action he now needs to take to enter the Kingdom, that is become a disciple in His Ministry is two fold:

- 1) repent of his sins and accept Jesus for who He is (water Baptism),
and
- 2) yield himself to be empowered by the Holy Spirit (commissioned) to carry out the role he has been called to fill in the Kingdom.

Have you been moved by the Spirit to renounce yourself and your own goals and objectives, as noble as they may be, and turn towards God for the change of life He wants for you. And..., if you have done this, are you willing to freely and openly offer your self as living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2) so that the Spirit of Christ that is in you can work in you and through you to achieve the purpose for which the Father has called you?"

If your answer is "yes" to these latter two questions, then you should seriously consider making a declared commitment to follow Jesus. This is what being an "intentional" disciple is about.

Comment: Note that Nicodemus did not take up Jesus' offer of full discipleship at the time of his encounter with the Master. He did continue as a "discreet" or "undeclared" disciple which is the role most of us lay Christians, in our passive ignorance, inadvertently choose.

Brethren in Christ ...

I now implore you to meditate and pray on the themes and Scriptures I have presented to you and ask the Holy Spirit to Guide you to discerning your calling. Then...act on whatever He tells you! Praised Be His Holy Name, Forever and Ever, Amen!

***There are very few people
who realise what God would make of them
if they abandoned themselves into his hands,
and let themselves be formed by his grace. (Saint Ignatius of Loyola)***

Your Brother in Christ Jesus ... Bartimaeus

(© B.R.Timeo and Bartimaeus' Quiet Place, [2008-2015])

Important Links Relevant to the Current Article

[Hearing God's Voice and Obeying It](#)

[Prayer to Receive the Holy Spirit](#)

[The Cost Of Discipleship](#)

[Cast Your Net On the Other Side](#)

Blog Comments On Sherry Weddell's Book

<http://www.focus.org/blog/posts/forming-intentional-disciples.html>

Contacts Regarding Discipleship

The Catherine of Siena Institute

PO Box 26440

Colorado Springs, CO 80936

Web Site: www.siena.org

(719) 219-0056

(888) 878-6789 (toll free US)

(719) 219-0097 (fax)

This contribution is available at [http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2015/07/30/\\$-assessing-our-discipleship/](http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2015/07/30/$-assessing-our-discipleship/)
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

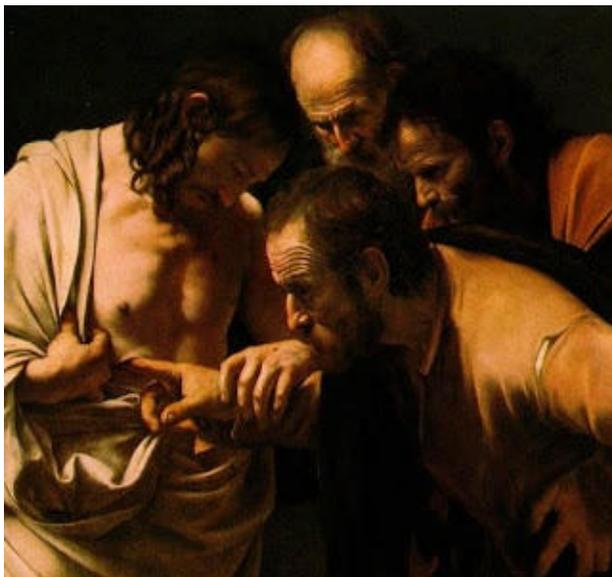
The Nature of Intimacy [at beautiful thorns]

People often ask me how it is that Tom and I left the Catholic Church for ten years, especially after I had a [dramatic conversion](#) experience through the Eucharist, witnessed a [Eucharistic Miracle](#), and started a women's household devoted to the Eucharist. I do not have an easy answer to that, except obviously I didn't get it.

I think often times we unknowing keep God at arm's length and we hold things back from him. Often, we think we want more of God but really what we are seeking is a nice, warm, fuzzy feeling. If we are just seeking a feeling, well, we can feel his love and his presence in other places other than a Catholic Mass.

If we are truly seeking intimacy with the Lord, there is no greater intimacy that we can have with Him apart from receiving Jesus in the Eucharist. Some Protestants however put Catholics to shame in this area and are able to have deep, intimate relationships with the Lord without having the Eucharist.

True intimacy requires sacrifice. To receive all the graces available through the Eucharist, we need to be willing to give it all, just as Jesus gave it all. Not only did he die for us, but he gives us his flesh to eat! We are called to surrender our whole selves back to Jesus and not withhold anything. The Eucharist is not meant to be one-sided. Soon after I left the Catholic Church, the Lord began to work with me in the area of intimacy. Through difficult circumstances, the Lord began to teach me to be still and rest in Him; to surrender all.



After coming back to the Catholic Church, I definitely gained a deeper appreciation for the true presence of Jesus in the Eucharist; often receiving him would even bring me to tears as I contemplated the intimacy available by receiving him. When I go up to receive him, I often pray that he will enter all the hidden, dark chambers of my heart that have not yet seen his light.

It could take a lifetime to comprehend, but it wasn't until I had a miscarriage a few years ago that I really **started** to "get" it. After my miscarriage, I realized that I had the opportunity, like St. Thomas the Apostle, to touch the wounds of Christ and join my wounds to his wounds.

I also love the metaphor of the pelican. If the baby of a mother pelican does not have anything to eat, the mother will rip at her own flesh in order to feed it. In a sense, that is what Jesus does for us! He knows that it is only himself, the Living bread come down from heaven, that will truly satisfy our souls (John 6:51)! He gives us all of himself, holding nothing back!

This contribution is available at <http://www.beautifulthorns.com/2015/07/the-nature-of-intimacy.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Question: Why did God Become a Man? [at Quidquid Est, Est!]

I'll get back to the [reflections on *Laudato Si*](#) next week. This week, I want to answer a reader's question. It's been a while since we looked at a Q&A.

Ironic, since that's the original purpose of the blog. . . .

Anyway, so Marcy asks, **“Why would God decide to come to us as one particular gender? It seems like such limiting form for an omnipotent and infinite being. And why male? Assuming heavenly omnipotence, why would he/she/it do something that would make many of his human creations feel so left out, disconnected, disenfranchised, and second-class, especially if said being could know all things and see how such a choice would be used against women? (Or anyone who wasn't a white male.) (And don't tell me about virgins and mothers. It doesn't help.)”**



Above: The Sinless One helps the Sinner.

There's a lot in this question, much of which neither I nor any other human being can answer, since it requires knowing the mind of God. But I have a feeling that Marcy doesn't want me to just write “I have no idea” and leave it at that. So I'll do my best.

Let's first look at the gender of God. God is pure spirit, meaning He does not have a physical body. As such, He does not, properly speaking, have a gender, since one's gender is linked to one's physical body. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) states, “God transcends the human distinction between the sexes. He is neither man nor woman: He is God. He also transcends human fatherhood and motherhood, although He is their origin and standard” (CCC 239). So God is beyond male and female.

So why did he reveal Himself as male? Why not female?

Remember something very crucial, something too many people who read the Bible forget: God did not give His Revelation to the modern world. I don't mean, of course, that He does not speak to us, for He speaks to all ages through His inspired Word. What I mean is this: the Bible itself was written in a specific historical time by specific historical people. God spoke to/through these people, and He used images that they would understand. That does not make what they wrote wrong or anything like that, any

more than a parent's attempt to explain something complicated to a child makes the parent's explanation wrong. We all do that, using metaphors to explain what we know, but others don't understand.

We see this in the creation story. It wouldn't have helped the Israelites understand God's role in creating if the creation story began, "In the beginning, God formed hydrogen atoms and compressed them into a tiny bundle of atomic energy. Don't worry about what atoms are; you won't be able to detect them for another three thousand years. And thus the atomic cloud expanded, and the atoms mixed and crashed into each other to form other atoms" and so on and so forth. It's hard to understand even today, and we HAVE the technology and science to understand. In fact, I'm pretty sure my explanation here is lacking in some crucial detail, but hopefully you, kind readers, will move past my poor understanding of astrophysics and see this crucial theological point: God teaches to our level of understanding. This includes when He teaches about Himself.

In the ancient world, it was understood that the male of an animal (people included) gave life through sexual intercourse. To use sort-of philosophical lingo, the woman was a passive receptor to the man's active fertilization. Remember that mammalian eggs were not discovered until 1827, and human eggs were not discovered until a century afterwards. For the majority of human existence, people thought that the seed of the man gave life to the woman's dormant womb. Hence the strange phrase "sprung from your loins," referring to a child of a man. You see this ancient sexual image in the creation account. God injects life into the passive world through His Word. John Paul II draws out this point in one of his reflections which makes up his Theology of the Body (specifically the one on September 12, 1979), noting that Genesis 1 uses terms like "separated" or "placed" when speaking of inanimate objects, but uses the terms "created" and "blessed" when discussing the creation of animals and man. When God creates living things, He gives them life in a unique way, different from the rest of creation.

In the ancient world, that makes Him the Father, the source of all life. In fact, the ancient Israelites called God Father for that exact reason, since He was the source of all that is. It wasn't until Christ came that we learned that God is Father in a completely different way: His divine paternity did not begin with His creating time, but rather is from all eternity as the Father of the Divine Son (see CCC 238-242 for a detailed discussion of this point).

So God revealed Himself as the source of all creation, as Father. However, He did not limit Himself to only masculine terminology. We see God compared to a mother several times in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 32:18 we read how Moses reprimanded the Israelites for rejecting God: "You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you / You forgot the God who gave you birth." This quote shows the creative paternity of God (begetting is typically a paternal term in the Old Testament) and an interesting maternal aspect of God, one where God gives birth to the Israelites too; in a sense, it is a double reference to the Israelite's dependence on God as a son would be dependent on his parents. The Old Testament prophets likewise draw out the image of God as a mother, usually in reference to animals (Hosea 13:8, in reference to those who embraced pagan worship, reads "I will attack them like a bear robbed of its young, and tear their hearts from their breast; I will devour them on the spot like a lion, as though a wild beast were to rend them") or to mothers of newborns (Isaiah 49:15 has the important comparison between a neglectful mother and God, that even if mothers forget their babies, or the child in their wombs, God will not forget us, and Isaiah 66:13 sees God comparing Himself to a comforting mother).

Keep in mind, just as with the references to God's paternity, we don't have God saying, "I'm a woman"

just as we don't have Him saying, "I'm a man." Also keep in mind that God isn't saying to the Israelites, "I am a mother," but is rather saying, "I'm like a mother." These are metaphors and analogies. Analogies are not the same thing as equivocations. God isn't equating Himself with a mother goddess, but He is comparing His love to a love which any human can understand, that of a loving mother.

The best example of Christ comparing Himself to a mother is in the famous passage in Luke 13:34 (the equivalent is found in Matthew 23:37):

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling!



Above: Don't mess with Mama Hen!

Again, we see the image of God as a caring mother who would do great things for the Israelites if they would only follow Him. But since they won't, "Behold, your house will be abandoned" (Luke 13:34).

So God revealed Himself using primarily masculine terms and images, but He also used feminine metaphors to explain other aspects of His divine love.

So why did God choose to be incarnated as a man instead of a woman, or in a particular gender at all? The phrasing of Marcy's question has two alternatives to Christ being incarnated as a man. On the one hand, Christ could have instead been incarnated as a woman, and such an incarnation could have allayed some of the sexism that has reappeared throughout human history, scandalously among Christians; on the other hand, Christ could have been incarnated as a hermaphrodite, a man-woman, and would theoretically have been "free" from gender roles, more indicative of God's genderlessness, as discussed above. Wouldn't either of those have been better ideas, in the long term?

Here's where I stir the controversial gender pot. From what I can tell, Christ's Incarnation as a male was not a divine coin flip ("Ok, heads I come as a man, tails as a woman; flip the coin, Gabriel"). God became a man, not just any human, as an essential aspect of the Incarnation. I will give three reasons.

The first reason involves creation. Remember the point we made about fatherhood in the ancient world seen as the cause of life, planting the seed in the fertile woman. Now, we know that you need a woman as

much as a man to have a baby, but as pointed above, as far as the creation of the world is concerned, only one source was needed: God. God made everything out of nothing (hence the earlier biblical language of God as father and mother, even though God has no passiveness in Him), so He is the only source of creation.

We need to keep this in mind when discussing Christ. Christ's coming is a new creation. He is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), and "All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be" (John 1:3). These phrases are reminiscent of the creating Father from Genesis. In coming Christ does not create a new physical world. Rather, He gives us new spiritual life. He is the source of that life, just as God is the source of life in the original creation. To emphasize this connection, it was more appropriate for God to be incarnated as a man.

The second reason is the historical context of the Incarnation, "the fullness of time" in St. Paul's words to the Galatians (Gal. 4:4). Christians reflecting on the historical context of the Incarnation, from earlier writers like St. Paul and St. Augustine, to modern writers like Warren H. Carroll and Brennan Pursell, note that the time of Christ's Incarnation was really a great moment for God to become man. The known world was "at peace" in the Pax Romana of Caesar Augustus; Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle had fertilized the intellectual world with discussions of existence, truth, and the immaterial world, ideas that had been spread through the conquests of Alexander the Great; Hebrew priests prayed and sought purification in preparation for the coming Messiah, understanding that soon the prophecies of Daniel and Malachi were coming true. These three cultures, the Greeks, Romans, and Hebrews, paved the way for the coming of Christ, and provided the historical context for the Incarnation.

This historical context provides a key to why God became incarnate as a man. Few would argue against the fact that the early Roman Empire was a man's world. In fact, one of the reasons some Romans avoided Christianity was because Christians taught that men and women were to be treated with equal respect. For the Hebrews, the testimony of women was often dismissed in court. These two points are crucial for understanding why God came as a man. If He had come as a woman, both the Romans and the Hebrews would have rejected His (Her) preaching out of hand, simply based on gender. By coming as a man, Christ gives weight to his teaching, touching the hearts of those who otherwise would not listen. Crowds of thousands gather to listen to Him speak; they wouldn't gather if He had been a She. In a similar way, Christ as a hermaphrodite might have done more harm than good, as such a figure would not command respect, perhaps less than a female Christ would.

Why did He come as a man? To get His Gospel spread throughout the world so that everyone could be saved, especially the marginalized women of antiquity. The love of Christ extends to all men and women.

The third reason involves the coming of the Messiah, as far as the Israelites were concerned. The Messiah was to come as a fulfillment of the prophecies regarding the Davidic kings of old. God promised David that his kingdom would last forever (see 2 Samuel 7); the Messiah would be the heir of David's throne, a son of David. Likewise, the Messiah was expected, somehow, to right the wrongs of Israel. Christ did this in an extraordinary way, by taking on the role of the New Adam (see Romans 5), atoning for Original Sin just as Adam was responsible for causing Original Sin (if you ever come across someone who blames Eve for the Eden issue, tell them to read the WHOLE Bible. Even though Eve was partly to blame for disobeying God, Adam ALWAYS carries the most weight for the sin).

The masculine aspect of Christ's Incarnation did not stop Christ from using women as his evangelists.

One needs to look no further than Christ's encounter with the woman at the well (John 4) and how she evangelized her entire village. We can see among Christ's early followers a lot of women, albeit not among the Twelve Apostles, but certainly among those who helped with the early Church and who listened to Jesus (remember the story of Martha and Mary? I wrote more about [that earlier](#). Of course, there is Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who holds a place in the Church higher than any other saint.

The most basic answer to all of this, to why God came as a man, and why we refer to God in masculine pronouns and titles, is that God wanted it that way. Remember something so crucial, so neglected in our day: we are not God. While we can theorize what could have happened, or why something happened one way versus another way, we have to keep in mind that things happen for a reason. God came as a man for a reason. Perhaps His reasons were none of the ones listed above, and my entire post has been a poor attempt on the part of a finite man to rationalize the actions of the infinite God.

One final point. This whole question centers on the issue of God limiting Himself in the Incarnation to one gender. In a sense, this issue falls into a classic idiom, missing the forest for the trees. Yes, by coming as one gender or another, God limited the physical body of the Incarnate Word. However, we must remember that the Incarnation itself was God, in a sense, limiting Himself. As that early Christian hymn recorded in St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians states, Jesus Christ,

though he was in the form of God,

did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.

Rather, he emptied himself,

taking the form of a slave,

coming in human likeness;

and found human in appearance,

he humbled himself,

becoming obedient to death,

even death on a cross.

Because of this, God greatly exalted him

and bestowed on him the name

that is above every name,

that at the name of Jesus

every knee should bend,

of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and every tongue confess that

Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:6-11)

The Incarnation shows the deep humility of God, for in emptying Himself of His divine splendor, by coming as one of us, He allows us to come to Him in a way we could not before. Adam sinned by trying to make himself a god. God rectifies what he did by making Himself man, with all his physical limits.



I hope this long answer actually answers your question, Marcy. If not, feel free to refine your question in the comment box below. Actually, everyone else, be sure to comment on the post with questions and thoughts, to further the discussion.

For Further Reading:

Brumley, Mark “Does the Bible Support the Feminist God/Dess?”

<https://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/jp2tb2.htm>

John Paul II, “Biblical Account of Creation Analyzed” Delivered 12 September 1979.

<https://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/jp2tb2.htm>

I also go more into the nature of God in my [second Reflection](#) on the first part of the Creed.

This contribution is available at <http://quidquidestest.wordpress.com/2015/07/29/question-why-did-god-become-a-man/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Agape Wins



There's been much talk lately about the moral purposes of history, especially from those celebrating the recent Supreme Court decision regarding gay marriage. History, we hear, is on the side of ever-expanding personal freedom, and those who counter this expansion are history's losers. This confusion of legal and cosmic victory deifies history. When exactly did everyone become a disciple of Hegel? As Robert P. George recently said, history isn't "a judge invested with godlike powers to decide, much less dictate, who was right and who was wrong." History isn't God.

We are all still sorting out the profound moral lessons of the civil rights movement (and even, in some ways, of the abolition of slavery). In its wake, we have adopted various unspoken beliefs that may or may not endure, for instance that all distinctions between groups of people are always morally dangerous; that we expand our rights by defining ourselves in reference to unchanging, inborn identities; and that talk of rights is inherently morally elevating. These sorts of beliefs have become attached to the notion of being on the right side of history, but it is possible that they are historically limited propositions, ideas that seem particularly powerful now only because of our proximity to the civil rights movement. And yet, there is one force in human experience that, over the long haul, always, without fail ends up looking wrong—hate. History isn't God, but God is, and God is love.

Read more at: <http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/07/agape-wins>

This contribution is available at <http://www.mollyoshatz.com/agape-wins/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Before the age of Starbucks and Costa Coffee



Before the Age of Starbucks and Costa Coffee I used to travel all over the country trying to spread the Good News that I hadn't really understood myself. Then, thanks to my aversion to the motorway coffee that looked like sepia soup that tasted like dishwater with a hint of soap suds, I bought two twelve volt kettles at a car boot sale to brew my own in the car. The good news is that it worked, the bad news is that it took two hour to boil and made me lose my temper. As soon as I got home I plugged the kettle into the mains and watched the flash as it went up in smoke. It was as the smell of burning rubber was invading my nostrils that I saw the light, this time it was a spiritual flash of light that enabled me to see what I'd never seen before. Just as I discovered the hard way that 240 volts into 12 volts will not go I simultaneously saw that infinite love into finite love will not go either. That was why, before Jesus came, nobody could get close to God, nobody ever saw him, let alone receive his love within them. Nevertheless people wanted to experience his love and wanted to spend the rest of their existence being possessed by that love and to all eternity. The desire was there but the means wasn't. That's why to this day, the prayers that they used, the psalms that they sung, and the poems that they loved can still be said today because thanks to Jesus their wildest dreams have at last become possible.

The ancient prophets knew that this time would come, and that it would be brought about through an unprecedented outpouring of God's infinite love, that would be for all, not just for the Jews. When Jesus came he promised the same, but only after his death, – immediately after his death, – as St John showed in his Gospel. Jesus had said that just as the rock struck by Moses to satisfy the thirst of his people in the desert, he would become another rock, a living spiritual rock, filled with the love of God that would pour out that love on the whole world and all who inhabited it, of every race and every colour, in every social position and none. The moment when the centurion struck the side of Jesus to be sure that he was dead, was the moment when the living water of the Holy Spirit poured forth from the rock that was Christ. This was not just the most important moment in the passion narrative for St John, but the most important moment in his Gospel. That's why he makes such a fuss of insisting that he was there to see it, and that what he saw was true and that the truth of what he saw is guaranteed because he John, the beloved disciple, saw it with his own eyes. However despite the conviction of his own eyes a certain time had to pass before what he saw could be received by himself, his other disciples and then the wider world for whom Jesus had come. First his triumph over death had to be seen to be believed so there could be no misunderstanding about what he had long since promised to do. Then he had to be seen returning from where he had come at the Ascension. Although Jesus returned to his Father to the home whence he had

come he took with him a part of himself that had never been there before. It was his human nature formed in Mary's womb which had 'grown in wisdom and truth' under the influence of the Holy Spirit, as he had matured with the years and with the love of his Father.

Now it was this human nature that was the key to God's plan for the whole of humanity. It would enable God to do what even he had been unable to do before. Now at last, and as so often promised, this the human nature of Jesus could not only be filled as never before by his love, but could be the mystical transformer that would enable him to transmit his infinite love to the finite human nature of those for whom he had originally created the world. When my first kettle had been destroyed by a far greater power, than it could not sustain, I bought myself the transformer that enabled me to understand the mystical transformer that God had chosen to use when he transmitted his infinite love to all human kind on the first Pentecost Day. Jesus was, and is, that transformer. And he is present to us at every moment of our lives and so is his love that only blindness and beastly behaviours keeps at bay.

Many years ago I was privileged to meet the holiest man that I have ever met. A Cistercian monk, who resided at a remote monastery in Africa. He told me that he had been plunged into a dark spiritual night for many years where he could only travel onward by the light of faith alone. Later he was to realise that during this time he was being purified by the love that had in the end sufficiently purified him to enable the love of God to penetrate every part of him so that he was conscious of his abiding presence at every moment. Strangely enough this breakthrough coincided with a physical ailment that confined him to the monastic infirmary for two week. Now he told me that on three distinct occasion, at the very moment when the Prior was giving him communion he heard these words – *'Only you have been keeping me out'*. The words were spoken in a loud and clear voice and yet with such compassion that he had no doubt to whom he was listening, nor why he had had to travel for so long by naked faith, for he was all the time being purified of the shortcomings that had shamed him.

I was about to continue by saying that no human eyes had ever seen the mystical transformer filled by the glory of God that Jesus became after the Ascension, but I would have been wrong. Jesus wanted his nearest and dearest apostles to see what they would communicate to others. He wanted them to see him in his glory, the glory given to him after his ascension into heaven. That is why he took Peter, James and John with him to the top of Mount Tabor. It was here that they saw him filled by, and radiating with that glory. The experience was so wondrous, so divine, and so enthralling that they begged Jesus to allow them to make their home there permanently. But this could not be, much had to be done by them and by Jesus before that desire could be realised. Remember the words of Mary to the little girls, who at the end of the apparitions, wanted to go back to their heavenly home with her. 'Your hands are as yet empty' she had insisted and so were the hands of the apostles. They had much work to do before their endeavour would enable them to go to the Father and to the final home that Jesus had promised them. This, their final destiny, would have to be 'earned' by many years on earth of human endeavour suffused by the divine and then transmitted in with and through Jesus to the Father. It is here always, in with and through him that we will experience the ecstatic and blissful joy that binds the Father to the Son to eternity.

This is the home that we have all yearned for, where we would glory in the family for which we have always longed, without the selfishness and without the sinfulness that marred the perfect family that we tried, but never fully succeeded in making on earth. Whenever we are still for long enough it is for this for which we yearn, that's why St Augustine wrote that often quoted epigram 'our hearts are restless 'til they rest in God'. If we have never, or rarely experienced this pull that draws us towards our ultimate destiny, then its time that we made time for what time was made for in the first place. Remember that it is only

now in the present moment that we can seek out the solitude to discover the place *where time touches eternity*. It is here alone that we can begin to experience that mysterious and mystical pull that comes from God that will, if followed, lead us onward to what John Donne called ‘*God’s glory*’ and our endless ‘*Sabbath rest*’.

This contribution is available at <http://blog.davidtorkington.com/before-the-age-of-starbucks-and-costa-coffee/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Life Moment is Here



Bev Ehlen, state director of Concerned Women for America, holds a sign outside of a Planned Parenthood facility in St. Louis July 21. She was among several pro-life supporters demonstrating after the release of two videos that showed Planned Parenthood officials discussing the method and price of providing fetal tissue obtained from abortions for medical research. (CNS photo/Lisa Johnston, St. Louis Review)

The [Weekly Standard](#) is reporting that [US Congresswoman Diane Black \(R-TN-06\)](#) has introduced the [Defund Planned Parenthood Act of 2015 \(H.R. 3134\)](#) into the House of Representatives. Some [eighty original co-sponsors](#) are supporting the legislative effort, which would have the result of placing “an immediate moratorium on *all* federal funding of Planned Parenthood for the span of one year while Congress conducts a full investigation into the organization’s activities,” according to an [official press release](#). One [Democratic Congressman, Daniel Lipinski \(D-IL-03\)](#), is among the co-sponsors.

On the other side of the U.S. Capitol building, “Twelve Senate Republicans have called for a ‘full investigation’ of Planned Parenthood Federation of America,” according to the [Washington Times](#), one of D.C.’s leading conservative newspapers. Among the US Senators are several Republican presidential candidates, including Ted Cruz (TX), Rand Paul (KY), and Marco Rubio (FL).

Authorities at the state level, including [New Jersey’s Governor Chris Christie](#), have echoed these calls for a full-scale investigation. Christie even vowed to permanently defund the abortion rights group altogether. And, earlier this month, Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal directed his Secretary of Health and Hospitals, [Kathy H. Kliebert](#), to [launch an investigation of Planned Parenthood in his home state](#), according to [LifeNews.com](#). [Kliebert submitted questions](#) to the abortions rights group in writing on July 15.

Undercover videos produced by the [Center for Medical Progress \(CMP\)](#) have prompted these state and federal demands for an investigation and the repeated calls to defund the organization. The videos are part of a campaign against Planned Parenthood entitled “Human Capital”. So far, [two videos](#) have emerged over the course of the last two weeks and additional videos are anticipated soon. The undercover footage raises questions about whether the organization founded by noted eugenicist Margaret Sanger has been involved in the sale of the remains of aborted babies.

CMP’s website describes “The Human Capital project [a]s a 30-month-long investigative journalism

study ... documenting how Planned Parenthood sells the body parts of aborted babies.” And, [the project’s website](#) explains that “Citizen journalists at CMP spent two-and-a-half years logging thousands of research hours to painstakingly gather hundreds of hours of undercover footage, dozens of eye-witness testimonies, and nearly two hundred pages of primary source documents.”

On the evening of Wednesday, July 23, CMP’s [David Daleiden appeared on Fox News’ Sean Hannity show](#). In the course of the six minute interview, Daleiden revealed that “Of the really, really shocking, compelling stuff, we’ve probably got dozens upon dozens of hours. And that will continue to be released in the days and months to come.” When the show’s host, Sean Hannity, asked Daleiden whether “we’re going to see tape after tape after tape as bad as the two that we’ve already seen or worse,” he responded by saying, “Exactly. Even worse.”

The release of the project’s videos is certainly well-timed. At a moment in American politics when liberals have been demanding the expansion of human rights for immigrants and LGBT couples, these videos reveal Planned Parenthood’s refusal to accord even the smallest degree of dignity to the most vulnerable members of society.

Former Bush speechwriter (2001-2006) and current *Washington Post* columnist, [Michael Gerson](#), writes, “All our best instincts push toward expanding the circle of inclusion and protection. ... But how does abortion -- particularly late-term abortion -- square with this trend in liberal societies? Many progressives paper over this tension by denying any value to a fetus until it emerges from the birth canal. But this is both medically and morally implausible.”

Writing for the *Washington Post*, [Charles Krauthammer](#), a Pulitzer Prize-winning Harvard educated physician whom President Carter made his director of psychiatric research, wrote, “Of all the major social issues, abortion is the only one that has not moved toward increasing liberalization. While the legalization of drugs, the redefinition of marriage and other assertions of individual autonomy have advanced, some with astonishing rapidity, abortion attitudes have remained largely static.”

Their claims echo the results of a poll published last January. Between January 7 and 13, the [Knights of Columbus sponsored a Marist poll](#) of 2,079 adults. The poll found that sixty percent of Americans believe abortion is immoral and that only nine percent believe a woman should be allowed to obtain an abortion at any time during her pregnancy. Sixty-nine percent of abortion supporters said the procedure should be permitted only during the first trimester or in instances of rape/incest or to save the life of the mother. [Eighty-four percent](#) of poll respondents supported significant restrictions on abortion, limiting its performance to the first trimester. And, sixty-eight percent said they opposed taxpayer funding of abortion while a minority of twenty-eight percent said they supported such funding.

Krauthammer conjectures that, as CMP continues to roll out the findings of its Human Capital project, “these revelations will have an effect on public perceptions.” He adds that, “Just as ultrasound altered feelings about abortion by showing the image, the movement, the vibrant living-ness of the developing infant in utero, so too, I suspect, will these Planned Parenthood revelations, by throwing open the door to the backroom of the clinic where that being is destroyed.” And, he insists that the “role of democratic politics is to turn such moral sensibilities into law. This is a moment to press relentlessly for a national ban on late-term abortions.”

Shortly after the release of the two CMP videos, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker signed into law a ban on non-emergency late-term abortions. The measure places the Republican presidential hopeful in

dramatic contrast to groups such as Planned Parenthood and Democratic candidates for president. [Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton](#) called the ban “dangerous,” “extreme,” and “unacceptable”.

[Ben Johnson](#) explains that “The measure would disallow abortions after 20 weeks except to save the mother’s life or if she would suffer major, irreparable physical harm within the next 24 hours.” According to Governor Walker, twenty weeks marks a “reasonable standard” because “At five months, ... [the] unborn child can feel pain.” Wisconsin’s forty-fifth governor further contends, “For people, regardless of where they might stand, when an unborn child can feel pain, I think most people feel it’s appropriate to protect that child.”

Johnson explains that abortions performed after twenty weeks of pregnancy “would be classified as felonies carrying a maximum sentence of three-and-a-half years in prison and a \$10,000 fine.” And, additionally, “The parents of children aborted after that point [could] also sue abortionists for damages under the terms of law.” With the signing of the bill, “Wisconsin becomes the 15th state to ban abortions at 20 weeks which is just a couple weeks before unborn babies are viable and can survive outside the womb,” according to [Steven Ertelt](#) of *LifeNews.com*.

Governor Walker signed the Wisconsin state ban after the US House of Representatives voted 242-184 to approve a similar bill last spring, according to *LifeNews.com*. The federal [Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act \(H.R. 36\)](#) met with approval and disapproval on both sides of the political aisle. Four Democratic representatives Cuellar, Langevin, Lipinski, and Peterson voted for the bill; but, five Republican representatives Dent, Dold, Hanna, and Frelinghuysen voted against it. Now, that bill will go before the US Senate after legislators return from their summer recess in August, according to the *Washington Examiner*.

Currently, late-term abortions account for [fewer than two percent of all abortions performed in Australia, Canada, England and Wales, New Zealand, Norway, Scotland, and Sweden](#). While several nations have outlawed the practice, only the [United States, Canada, China, and North Korea](#) permit abortions at all points of a pregnancy without any restrictions.

Opposition to state and federal restrictions on late-term abortions, commits Planned Parenthood and its allies to supporting an abortions rights agenda that puts the US in league with countries like China and North Korea. The Center for Medical Progress has unmasked the callousness with which Planned Parenthood endorses that agenda. In effect, the Human Capital project has catapulted the pro-life movement into a perfect storm of public opinion and pro-life legislation.

With more videos to be released in coming days and months, the pro-life movement is on the cusp of the fierce urgency of *now*. Now is the time to launch a full-scale investigation of Planned Parenthood. Now is the time to defund an organization that already receives over [one billion dollars in corporate donations and federal tax dollars](#) every year. Now is the time to demand a ban on late-term abortions.

Now is the pro-life moment.

Ryan Anderson's 'Truth Overruled' is a Bold New Defense of Marriage [at National Catholic Register]

Posted by Jennifer on Monday, Aug 3, 2015 3:45 PM (EDT):

cminca, I used to get annoyed to see you here commenting incessantly on this topic. I don't anymore. In fact, I actually feel pity for you because you seem to really believe that we all hate you and are bigoted toward you. And I truly hope you are paid by the Arcus Foundation, or something like that, otherwise how miserable does a person have to be engaging people you think hate you all day long like this. It takes a very shallow and superficial understanding of our faith to label us bigots for our views on marriage. Granted some people are bigoted towards homosexual persons, but a proper understanding of the teachings of the Catholic Church do not support that kind of assault on human dignity. As a primer for you, our views on marriage begin with our understanding of who God is, and who we are in relationship to Him. You would benefit greatly from knowing a whole class of people do not actually hate you, by learning what we actually believe. If you're into reading, this is a good book to start with, "The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss" by D.B. Hart.

Also, truth is universal. Truth is not true because the Church says it is. It's true, because it's true for everyone. It's not our religion we wish to propose to the world for the world's benefit, it's the truth.

Posted by mrsracker on Monday, Aug 3, 2015 11:47 AM (EDT):

Jerry Writer ,

I don't think it's an either/or question. It's the combined effect of all those issues which impacts marriage & society.

Posted by Nancy D. on Saturday, Aug 1, 2015 6:54 PM (EDT):

Ryan Anderson is a very talented writer. With all due respect, he fails to make it clear that same-sex sexual acts can never be reconciled to Love because they do not respect the inherent Dignity of the human person. Where do we go from here? We must begin at The Beginning by affirming that from the moment of conception every human person has been created in The Image and Likeness of God, not according to sexual desire/inclination/orientation, but equal in Dignity, while being complementary as a beloved son or daughter.

Posted by Jerry Writer on Saturday, Aug 1, 2015 6:26 PM (EDT):

I read Ryan Anderson's book. He did a thorough job of making his case, but I did not find anything new here. And his argument would make much more sense if we were replacing marriage as we've known it in order to mandate same-sex marriages for all (that is the way Ryan often makes it sound).

Ryan makes his living disparaging the marriages of same-sex couples. He has yet to write anything helpful for heterosexual marriages as far as I can find. Still, for those who agree with him already the book will meet with your approval. I think most others will find it dogmatic, rigid and cruel. It is surprising he is only 33 years old; he speaks like the old men he works for at the Heritage Foundation. He most likely believes what he is saying, but he has a bit of extra motivation; he is well-paid for making the case his

book offers.

Posted by Jerry Writer on Saturday, Aug 1, 2015 6:18 PM (EDT):

In Canada where marriage equality has been in place for a decade now, there is no big fuss. Over 99% of marriages still involve heterosexual couples. The real problem is not the less than 1% of marriages involving same-sex couples, it is the 98% fornication rate, the high divorce rates, the high adultery rates, the many people who remarry, too often again and again, not to mention the high rates of domestic abuse and domestic violence. It is not the fact of how we define marriage that is the big issue, it is how many people fail to commit to marriage all the way with love.

Posted by mrsracker on Thursday, Jul 30, 2015 2:08 PM (EDT):

cminca ,
I don't believe I've referenced the Catholic Church in my comments here.
Human rights issues are not specific to any denomination.

Posted by cminca on Thursday, Jul 30, 2015 1:25 PM (EDT):

@mrsracker—

So the CC has an issue about surrogacy and that should be reason enough that a percentage of the population should be denied equal access to the rights and benefits of civil marriage?

Even if they either don't want children or want to adopt?

And all because the CC says so?

Sorry—but a democratic republic doesn't work like that.

Posted by mrsracker on Thursday, Jul 30, 2015 12:44 PM (EDT):

JB,
Do you sincerely *not* believe same gender couples utilize surrogacy services? There's plenty of evidence/data out there.
The very first surrogacy business I randomly googled online features photos of same gender couples-exclusively as far as I've had the time to view. One of the site sections reads: "If you are an HIV+man, you can still have a biological child." Guess that's a whole different conversation.
And not to say that other individuals/couples don't make use of these services, as well. I knew of a Catholic couple who went to India for that.
Surrogacy's pretty much become a new form of bondage for women, especially in 3rd World nations.

Posted by JB on Thursday, Jul 30, 2015 11:46 AM (EDT):

This is to Ann Smith.

Where do you get the information that:

1. Gay male couples only adopt boys?

2. Babies are being aborted by gay couples because they are the wrong sex?
3. Children of same sex couples are being born via surrogate?
4. Same Sex couples are depriving the biological mother or father from the child?

My husband and I have a daughter and most of our friends are same sex couples with children. Even though our daughter's biological mother is in and out of prison regularly, we bend over backwards to include her as much as possible.

Our daughter was born from a drug fueled one night that my husband had with the biological mother before he found help for addiction, the mother to this day is quite happy in her state and doesn't care for help (which we've offered to pay for).

My husband and I are fantastic parents that prevent our daughter from being raised in a home with regular meth and heroin use, not to mention the kind of people who hang out there for those purposes. I'm a 15 year military veteran computer programmer, he's a pre-med bio major.

We were thrilled to get a daughter, we'd have been equally as thrilled to get a son. We love our child regardless of the sex. Changing a little girl's diaper consist of the same goal regardless of sex... make them clean. Bowties, cute shoes, funny socks, princess dresses, and makeup? We got that covered.

We are personal friends with at least 10 same sex couples with children. I don't know of a single couple that fits your description of an embryo aborting bio parent stripping gender preferencing something. They are all loving homes with fantastic parents and healthy happy children.

As far as gay sex being icky... I think straight sex is icky... so I guess we're going to just have to agree to disagree about that one.

Posted by mrsracker on Thursday, Jul 30, 2015 11:05 AM (EDT):

Michael,
I have family in Canada & am more familiar with Canadian history than some Americans. But that's not saying much.
Canada's decisions regarding its indigenous people were more based on economics & national interests. Canada couldn't afford to fight wars against the Indians as we did, so the plan was to erase Indian culture & pacify/assimilate them into the general population. Not a good plan, either, but possibly better intentioned than the American version.
And in general, I think Indians fared better in Canada overall as compared to the States. But again, that's not saying much.
God bless.

Posted by Michael Hogan on Thursday, Jul 30, 2015 10:35 AM (EDT):

mrsracker - While the civil government had an involvement with the process, it was the Catholic Church (and other churches in some cases) that encouraged and maintained the process of removing the children from their biological parents.

My point was a new approach of attacking same sex marriage by denigrating non-biological parents (of which same sex parents would be a small subset) unfairly stigmatizes parents who perform a selfless act

and could in fact encourage more abortions than adoptions.

Posted by mrsracker on Thursday, Jul 30, 2015 9:32 AM (EDT):

Michael Hogan ,

Thank you for your civility.

I think you present very good examples of how the state can deny certain classes of people, political enemies, or indigenous populations from the basic human right to grow up with one's biological parents & culture.

Australia also failed it's indigenous people. There's a long list of historical examples I'm sure. The slave trade is an obvious one.

One of the most disturbing to me was in Chile where the orphans of Pinochet's torture victims were given away like prizes to his supporters.

Fallen human nature.

Posted by Michael Hogan on Wednesday, Jul 29, 2015 10:55 PM (EDT):

I'm going to try to be charitable here but the need of the children to have their true biological parents is somewhat at odds with the recent history of the Catholic Church.

In Spain the Catholic Church work with the Franco regime to separate 10's of thousands of children from their parents and traffic them to "better" parents. In Ireland there was forced adoption of "illegitimate" babies and in my country, Canada, 100's of thousands of native children were taken away from their parents by the Catholic Church (and by other denominations) for 10 months of the year to be raised by nuns and brothers in residential schools.

And for a Church which admirably encourages adoption over abortion, to denigrate non biological families over biological families, is both a desperate attempt to find a reason to attack gay marriage, but can also lead to be detrimental to adoption.

Posted by mrsracker on Wednesday, Jul 29, 2015 10:33 PM (EDT):

cminca,

Freedom of speech is great and I think folks can disagree without losing sight of charity.

Conservative groups have tried to highlight the need of children to have both a mother and father in the home for as long as I can remember, and that's a fairly long time. It's a pretty old school concept.

I wish you all the best. You have a blessed evening.

Posted by cminca on Wednesday, Jul 29, 2015 10:21 PM (EDT):

Ann—

I challenge you to google "Ham Family Arizona 12 kids".

An male heterosexual adoption official challenged the two fathers with how they were going to change their baby daughter's diaper. Their answer? "Exactly how you change your daughter's"

They have teenage daughters—and they buy feminine hygiene products.

Then I'd suggest you google "Kordale and Kaleb, Chicago" and read about the vitriol the straight world rained down on two gay black (yep—black) fathers when they posted a picture of themselves getting their daughter's hair ready in the morning.

Your post is homophobic and misandric. As well as being just plain stupid.

Posted by Ann Smith on Wednesday, Jul 29, 2015 9:55 PM (EDT):

This name-calling and chalking up points for one side or the other is childish.

Cminca you can no more speak for the entire homosexual community than you could seriously expect anyone to buy into your characterization of heterosexual parents as a group. What do all these accusations accomplish except to avoid the subject? Gay sex is icky and kids need a mother and a father. Period.

I have asked elsewhere why gay men do not adopt females as much as they do males. I found the answer when one dad said, "Tie bows in her hair? Relate about girl stuff? I wouldn't know where to begin. I do know how to throw a ball, however and those are the things I know I can teach my son." You get the picture. So my mind goes to the surrogate mother scene and aborting embryos because they are the "wrong" sex. These little boys never get an answer when they ask, "Where is my mom? Why can't I see her?" The other children get picked up after school by their moms and they make stuff for them on Mother's Day. At what age does the truth get told? At what age does the dad tell this child that he paid a woman to have give birth to him and he paid her to sign a paper that forbids her her from ever being a part of this child's life?

If I'm that kid, how much is that going to sit well with me? How long do you think it will take the child to forgive his dad and his other dad for depriving him of his opposite-sex parent?

Posted by cminca on Wednesday, Jul 29, 2015 7:15 PM (EDT):

mrs cracker

problem with people like Anderson is that he is presenting his opinion as fact. Fact that should, in his mind, DENY other tax paying, law abiding citizens the same rights as other law abiding, tax paying citizens.

Because Anderson and the rest of you aren't just trying to stop the LGBT community from having children—you are trying to stop them from entering the CIVIL contract of marriage. The legal recognition of the pair bond.

The "just think about the children" argument didn't come up until you couldn't persuade people that the "gay sex is icky" argument was enough to deny civil rights in a secular, pluralistic democratic republic.

Posted by mrs cracker on Wednesday, Jul 29, 2015 6:48 PM (EDT):

cminca,

We don't get to choose but can express opinions. As you can also.

I think the bottom line is that there can be multiple ways to deal with children in families at risk. Foster

care is one way. Adoption can be too, but the example you cite still deprives a child from a mother in the home and maternal influence. Death and divorce do that, too but that's seldom the original plan.

Posted by cminca on Wednesday, Jul 29, 2015 5:32 PM (EDT):

@mrscracker

So nice that YOU get to decide what is best for everyone.

(You heterosexuals have managed to screw up marriage and more than a few children—let's not forget every mass murderer in history had two parents. And some had "relationships" with them.

Maybe those in the LGBT community—who have kids because they WANT to....because they have fought to have them.....can show you "breeders" what it means to be a good parent. Of either sex.)

Posted by mrscracker on Wednesday, Jul 29, 2015 4:23 PM (EDT):

cminca,

Adoption is a separate issue from surrogacy.

The foster care system, though originally well meaning, is broken. I think in many cases orphanages could be a better, more stable solution than the foster care merry go round & parents could still have a chance to get their lives back in order & reunite with their children.

If children are truly orphaned, then who exactly qualifies to adopt them is another conversation. As is surrogacy, which is what my comments referenced.

Posted by cminca on Wednesday, Jul 29, 2015 2:46 PM (EDT):

Mrscracker—look up "Ham Family Phoenix 12 children" and read about a FAMILY.

Then ask yourself if any of these kids would be better off with the egg and sperm donors who haphazardly created these kids.

Posted by mrscracker on Wednesday, Jul 29, 2015 11:32 AM (EDT):

Michael Hogan,

It's not so much about anyone's child rearing skills. It's about the rights of a child to be in relationship with their biological parents. That keeps getting overlooked.

All we hear about are adult needs, adult child rearing skills, adult rights & emotions. Nothing about the child.

And while surrogacy issues are not unique to homosexual couples, they comprise a large share of that market.

Posted by John Doe on Tuesday, Jul 28, 2015 6:15 PM (EDT):

IT'S ALL OOOVER PEOPLE!!! WE DONT HAVE A PRAYER!!! UUUUUUUUGGHH!!!!!!!!

Posted by prince on Tuesday, Jul 28, 2015 3:55 PM (EDT):

Yes, what we need is more books, more columns, that will save the day.

Remember, we have lost the battle and the war but all that could change if someone writes a great book that will change everything.

Posted by Michael Hogan on Tuesday, Jul 28, 2015 3:44 PM (EDT):

Will Nier - Totally agree. Many European countries do this now. All get civil marriages, and then those who want it can get a religious marriage.

Posted by Will Nier on Tuesday, Jul 28, 2015 3:32 PM (EDT):

The Church needs to end the practice of allowing it Priests and Deacons to witness a civil marriage while celebrating the sacramental aspect of a Church wedding. Let a couple first marry civilly by a Judge or Mayor or other official who has the duty to witness a civil marriage.

If a Catholic couple who have first been legally married then wish to sacramentalize the marriage then so be it. I think this would enhance the definition of marriage according to the Catholic Church.

This would protect the definition of marriage within the Church and prevent any same sex marriage form occurring.

Posted by Michael Hogan on Tuesday, Jul 28, 2015 2:28 PM (EDT):

“First, they expose the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in Obergefell vs. Hodges as an act of judicial tyranny.”

Using the word tyranny is a subjective loaded word. I’m sure Citizens United was viewed as tyranny.

“Second, they seek to defend what he calls our “freedom to speak and live according to the truth.””

Many Christians and non Christians hold to different truths that embrace same sex marriage. This ruling allows all to live according to their truth.

“And, third, they recommit to making publicly available arguments in defense of the truth of marriage”

The argument that to create a child you need a male and female is not disputed. But that unfortunately does not create two parents, as many heterosexual marriages can attest. Children need loving, caring, involved parents. If they are the biological parents, great, if they are adoptive parents, that great as well. I live in Canada where we’ve had same sex marriage for over a decade and I can say unequivocally that some of the best parents I’ve encountered are same sex parents. They are parents by choice and by conviction, not just by biology.

Posted by Ann Smith on Tuesday, Jul 28, 2015 2:21 PM (EDT):

CMINCA

So you think that America should just accept deviant sexual practices at the wholesale level and grant equality to a special class of citizens that has been formed based on these sexual practices?

For far too long the gay movement has demanded protections equal to those afforded to religious institutions and racial groups. I have about had it up to *here* with their demand that they shouldn't be "hurt." I have had it up to **here** and beyond with the patronizing talk (Now, now, you don't REALLY want to be a party-pooper, do you?") and the deprecating remarks such as, "The religious conservatives will all die out eventually anyway," and here is the big one, "What hypocrites!"

The gay movement does not see how bigoted they are by profiling and stereotyping an entire religion based on the bad acts or hypocrisy of a few. Excuse me, but just who do you all think you all are? Would you like it if I said, "See, look at that, that's just what Jewish people do (or gay, or black or fill-in-the-blank yourself). How much more blind to your bigotry can you be to accuse me of not believing in ALL of Catholicism just because you know some people who don't. This is the height of insult. Talk about hurt. Who is bullying whom here? [www.SincerityandWisdom.com]

Posted by Asmondus on Tuesday, Jul 28, 2015 2:03 PM (EDT):

cminca:

The word 'bigot' has ceased to carry any real meaning due to its overuse by people on your side of the issue.

Accept the fact that not everyone in the world agrees with you.

Posted by Asmondus on Tuesday, Jul 28, 2015 1:59 PM (EDT):

Peashooter - You are being misled if you think that the SCOTUS decision reflected the 'will of the people'. The vehicle for reflecting the will of the people in The USA is the voting booth, not polls and certainly not the opinion of four people on the Court. Same sex marriage lost in the great majority of instances here it was put to a formal vote, including California.

Posted by peashooter on Tuesday, Jul 28, 2015 1:32 PM (EDT):

The Heritage Foundation? I've always suspected the Heritage Foundation, and, find it a little too heavy on the unsubstantiated rhetoric for my taste. The SCOTUS was unfortunate, but in line with the public majority's desires. We cannot force upon others our beliefs. In the end it's a matter of, "free will". In a democracy the majority rules, right or wrong. What is left to witness; is whether or not minority rights will be upheld, because I am certain they will be challenged. Write your Congressman/Senators. I have, but I have received absolutely no commitment from either party. I feel they are ignoring the issue.

Posted by DALE O'LEARY on Tuesday, Jul 28, 2015 12:42 PM (EDT):

How did we end up in this mess?

We did not pray for persons with same-sex attraction disorder (SSAD). We believed the lie that they were born that way and couldn't change. We left them alone and hopeless. Now more than ever they need our prayers, our love, because being able to pretend they are married will not heal their wounded hearts.

daleoleary.wordpress.com

Posted by cminca on Tuesday, Jul 28, 2015 10:17 AM (EDT):

“The pro-marriage arguments Anderson offers in his book take three forms. First, they expose the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in Obergefell vs. Hodges as an act of judicial tyranny.”

In other words—“the decision didn’t agree with me”.

Second, they seek to defend what he calls our “freedom to speak and live according to the truth.”

In other words—“I want to continue to be a bigot with impunity.”

And, third, they recommit to making publicly available arguments in defense of the truth of marriage. According to Anderson, Obergefell vs. Hodges won’t be the last word about marriage.”

In other words—“Being a professional bigot has been a pretty cushy gig for me and I don’t want to get off the gravy train.”

Read more: <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/jpshimek/a-bold-new-defense-of-marriage/#ixzz3hCBex3GX>

This contribution is available at <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/jpshimek/a-bold-new-defense-of-marriage>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Five Things You Can Do Right Now to End Abortion [at CatholicVote.org]



Last week, I told readers of the [Catholic World Report](#) that we've arrived at the pro-life moment. I claimed that "the pro-life movement is on the cusp of the fierce urgency of *now*. Now is the time to launch a full-scale investigation of Planned Parenthood. Now is the time to defund an organization that already receives over [one billion dollars in corporate donations and federal tax dollars every year](#). Now is the time to demand a ban on late-term abortions." If I'm right, then we'd better not squander this moment.

To make sure we don't, here are the first two things we can do right now for the cause of life.

First, we can participate in one of the many [#WomenBetrayed](#) rallies that will be taking place this week across the country.

On Tuesday, July 28, [pro-lifers around the country will rally together in more than fifty cities](#) to demand that state and federal leaders open an investigation into Planned Parenthood and defund the organization suspected of selling the remains of aborted babies. Several pro-life organizations are coordinating these rallies, including [Students for Life of America \(SFLA\)](#). An [official press release](#) on the website of SFLA explains that "The rallies are called [#WomenBetrayed](#) because Planned Parenthood has betrayed the very patients – women and their children – [whom] they claim to care about."

While the demonstrations are part of a response to the [Center for Medical Progress'](#) undercover investigation of Planned Parenthood, they also offer an opportunity to honor one SFLA member, in particular.

Mayci Breaux was a twenty-one year old student at Louisiana State University-Eunice and [an active member of her school's chapter of SFLA](#). In 2011, she participated in the annual [March for Life](#). Last week, [she was shot to death](#) in Lafayette, Louisiana during a movie theater rampage that [resulted in numerous injuries and the death of three people](#), including the assailant. At least one [#WomenBetrayed](#) rally will take place in Breaux's home state of [Louisiana](#).

If you miss the rallies on July 28, consider sharing one of these [social media graphics](#) on Facebook or Twitter to promote the cause. Alternatively, you can order one of the free official [#WomenBetrayed Action Kits](#), which include “everything you need to get started defending women and children from abortion and ending taxpayer funding of Planned Parenthood in your town.”

Second, we can demand our elected state and federal officials launch a full-scale investigation into Planned Parenthood.

The rallies taking place around the country this week have been instigated by pro-life groups like the Center for Medical Progress and Live Action.

In 2004, [Lila Rose](#) founded the ‘new media’ organization called [Live Action](#). At the time, she was only fifteen years old. Like the [Center for Medical Progress](#), which produced videos featuring Planned Parenthood executives, Drs. [Deborah Nucatola](#) and [Mary Gatter](#), Rose’s group has been following the activities of Margaret Sanger’s Planned Parenthood for some time. A website associated with Live Action – [Planned Parenthood Exposed](#) – indicates that the organization “has been conducting multi-state investigations of ... the abortion industry since 2007.” These undercover “investigations and subsequent public education campaigns have revealed malfeasance, lawlessness, and contempt for human life and safety at all levels of [Planned Parenthood], from the local counselors and nurses all the way up to the CEO’s desk.” Investigative reports produced by Rose and her associates have exposed Planned Parenthood’s [deceptive counseling practices](#), [false advertising](#), [cover-up of child sexual abuse](#), facilitation of [sex-trafficking](#), and performance of [sex-selective abortions](#).

More recently, the Center for Medical Progress unveiled its [Human Capital](#) project, “a 30-month-long investigative journalism study ... documenting how Planned Parenthood sells the body parts of aborted babies.” The project’s website further explains that “Citizen journalists at CMP spent two-and-a-half years logging [thousands of research hours](#) to painstakingly gather hundreds of hours of [undercover footage](#), dozens of eye-witness testimonies, and [nearly two hundred pages of primary source documents](#).”

The first two videos in the series featured Planned Parenthood’s Senior Director of Medical Services, [Dr. Deborah Nucatola](#), and its President of the Medical Directors’ Council, [Dr. Mary Gatter](#). In the first video, Dr. Nucatola describes the use of the illegal partial-birth abortion procedure in order to obtain fetal hearts, lungs, and livers. And, critics claim she discusses the sale of the remains of aborted babies for profit. Such sales constitute a federal felony punishable by “ten years in prison and a fine of up to \$500,000 (42 U.S.C. 289g-2),” according to the project’s website. The second video shows Dr. Gatter haggling over the prices of fetal remains.

The Center for Medical Progress’ Human Capital project sparked a national debate about Planned Parenthood and its practices. And, in so doing, it prompted state and federal authorities to take concrete steps toward investigating the abortion provider. Currently, [three congressional committees](#) and [at least eight states](#) are taking a closer look at the abortion rights group. Recently, Republican presidential hopeful and [Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal](#) directed his State Secretary of Health and Hospitals, [Kathy H. Kliebert](#), to send [written questions](#) to Planned Parenthood Gulf Coast, Inc. as [part of an investigation](#).

Despite debates about the [investigative techniques of groups like the Center for Medical Progress and Live Action](#), too much is at stake to fail to investigate Planned Parenthood. Therefore, we should contact

our elected officials and tell them that we want these investigations to take their due course. Americans deserve to know what is going on with America's largest abortion provider.

Both the [Center for Medical Progress](#) and [Live Action](#), among other groups, have uploaded to their websites petitions for investigations, making it easy to bring our concerns before the proper civil authorities.

[Click here for Part 2!](#)

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicvote.org/five-things-you-can-do-right-now-to-end-abortion/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Benedict Option: It's Attractive, but We Shouldn't Do It! [at In Caritas Christiana]

I've seen a few posts in the not-too-distant past regarding something called "The Benedict Option." I was intrigued by the the idea, and I did some reading.

What is "The Benedict Option"?

As I understand it, the Benedict Option is to withdraw from politics, just like St. Benedict did when he came to Rome, found its morality crumbling before its ultimate collapse, and established the first monasteries.

It's mostly a response by some members of the so-called "religious right" to the realization that they might no longer represent the way most Americans think about matters of morality (the "moral majority"), because the country's morality has "crumbled" just as Rome's did.

This is only a partial characterization, but these were the details that stood out to me. It means that we would focus our evangelistic eyes inward only, and don't worry about everywhere else.

Why do people like it?

People are contemplating this for some of the same reasons that I essentially abandoned my personal Facebook account six months ago - not deleted, *abandoned*.

I found that no matter what the cultural battle of the moment was, it was being thrown into my face, and I was being dared to say something to somebody about it.

If I waded into the fray, I was maligned on every side. If I didn't, I felt like I was being a bad Christian. Catch-22, right?

It's an emotionally exhausting place to be.

You heard a joke about people's feeds looking like war broke out between the Confederate Army and a Skittles factory? I heard about that joke, and I thought it was funny for about three seconds, and then I just got sad. They're both important cultural battles, and I still don't think I'd have had the emotional fortitude to wade into either one.

Why's that? It is exhausting to fight every culture battle, especially when it seems that I can't ever win.

On Facebook, the thing is that, most of the people that want to argue (with me, at least) are the ones who already have their minds made up. Feeling like they've won an argument makes them feel important. And somehow, I can't seem to make myself believe that Facebook is the only place that's true.

Moreover, standing up for your right to practice your religion in every area of your life is somehow always seen as the big mean religious right trying to push its religion down everyone else's throats. Having to also fight this perception kind of eats at you a little bit. Or at least, it eats at me.

In some ways, we are in a similar position to the early Church. Did you know that people really in Rome really believed that early Christians ate babies as some kind of barbaric initiation rite? Some early apologetic treatises actually *dealt* with disproving this lie, because it was so widespread.

The difference between today and the early Church is in our approach. For the early Church, the battle was understood as a battle for *the* truth. Nowadays, we are arguing in an environment of moral relativism, where the truth is widely perceived to be “relative”.

In some ways, we've bought into this, insofar as the argument is concerned, and we're no longer trying to persuade people of *THE* truth, but only to accept ours as *A* possible truth.

This trouble and others have made some members of the religious right to ask the myopic question,

isn't it better to have a smaller, purer Church of people who actually want to be there, instead of people we have to [fight with all the time](#)?

I've found myself in a period of my life where I, too, have been asking this question. It doesn't sound too bad, right?

Jettisoning the part of my life where most of the culture battles were has made my life a lot easier, that's for sure. My life is waay nicer now that I don't have “Facebook drama” making things more complicated than they need to be.

But we can't “Benedict” our way out of this.

And there are a lot of reasons why not.

(1) An ostrich can't escape from a lion by burying its head in the sand.

That lion? Oh, he's still there, and if the ostrich buries its head, it's going to have a worse situation than an approaching lion on its hands very soon.

(2) We're missionaries. Hiding from the issues makes us “bad” missionaries.

We need to be in the world so that people can see the light of Christ in our daily witness of living. They need to see it, and it's our responsibility to put ourselves in a position to let them see it.

(3) Satan would love it if we gave up the culture to him.

It would be very convenient for him if he suddenly didn't have the Church standing in the way of his poisoning as many souls as possible against the Lord.

We cannot cede the culture. In his love for us, [God gave us the responsibility](#) of going out to

make disciples of all the nations. It's a big job, but if we don't do it, Satan will gladly take them for his own disciples.

So, the Benedict Option isn't really a good one for the Church, because we have a job to do. So, what should we do?

In some ways, this is a complicated question, because you have to first deal with people like me who are just getting to feel kind of downtrodden about the culture and everything in it, and that is not a simple thing.

About a month ago, when I was initially outlining this post, I had a lot of ideas come to me in the middle of the night (quite literally), and I will be sharing some of those ideas next week.

This contribution is available at <http://incarnitaschristiana.blogspot.com/2015/07/the-benedict-option-its-attractive-but-we-shouldnt-do-it.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Truth Has a Way of Dividing [at Brutally Honest]

I was having lunch recently with family when someone mentioned being friends with a Christian who had made the decision to never make waves, who refused to give opinions, who thought it best in these divisive times to not in any way engage so that they could avoid controversy. The person relaying this to the rest of us clearly was seeing this friend's non-engagement as something virtuous.

I don't particularly remember my response but do remember making the conscious, and in hindsight cowardly, decision to not say what I was actually thinking.

***There is a false, unbiblical notion of Jesus** that emphasizes and isolates some of his teachings and traits, while excluding others. Hence there are many who reduce Jesus' moral teaching to a vague notion that we should be nice and try to get along. This not only simplifies Jesus — it trivializes him.*

Jesus, in describing his own ministry and why he was hated so irrationally that even Pontius Pilate had to marvel, said to Pilate: The reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to



the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me (Jn 18:37). Pilate scoffed, of course, and like a 21st century secular or libertine, said, "Truth! What is that?"

***But there is something funny about the truth.** The opposite of the truth is not just less meaningful, or just another opinion. The opposite of true, is false. Truth has a way of dividing. It will not abide competitors. That Jesus is Lord, is true. Anything different from this is not just less meaningful or someone else's view — it is false.*

Jesus says, "I am the truth" (Jn 14:6). As such he cannot be reduced to a harmless hippie going about speaking of love and inclusion. Did he speak of these things? Surely. But he also summoned us to a choice for him or against him. To choose for him was to be saved; to choose against him was to be condemned. The same Jesus who said, "Love one another" (Jn 13:34) also said, Unless you come to believe that I AM, you will die in your sins (Jn 8:24).

In times like these we are going to have to recover a healthy sense that Jesus not only unites many in his truth, but he also divides and distinguishes by that same truth. Myopic and wistful notions that Jesus want us to be nice and get along cannot supersede his command that we love him and put faith in his truth, even if it means our own family disowns us or is "offended" by us.

In this sense Jesus did not come to “unite” in some merely sociological sense. He came to distinguish his true followers from those who actually follow the world or Satan.

...

Once the Truth comes into the world, what is false must be rejected. *Once the Light has come into the world, the darkness must be called by its proper names: confusion and obscurity. Once the Way has come into this world all other paths are excluded and lead only to Hell. Fr. Robert Barron says well and artfully: “Jesus compels a choice.” We are free to choose, but we must choose. Tertium non datur (no third way is given)!*

Yes, in times like these we are going to have to recover notions that Jesus will divide, even as he seeks to unite us in the truth. We cannot go on clinging to a “Hallmark card theology” of pleasantries about getting along and being “nice.” Jesus did not end up before Pilate and nailed to cross by soft-pedaling the truth.

The Truth divides. And some of the divisions are very uncomfortable, reaching right into our families. There are going to be “weddings” we should not attend, gatherings we must refuse, affiliations that must end, affirmations we should not give, confrontations we must make, and silence that is no longer tolerable (if it ever was tolerable).

Indeed, we have gone on too long remaining silent — *even approving — while sons and daughters, nieces, nephews, cousins and friends cohabitated, stopped attending Mass, got divorced and remarried and engaged in any number of other immoral and questionable practices.*

We thought being quiet would bring peace. It did not. Compromises with the world and the devil do not bring peace but only demands for further concessions and compromises. At the end of the process we are silent, dead in our sins, and the world and the devil just have more victims. This mess we are in today happened on our watch. We who should be prophets are left shaking our heads and wondering how it got so bad. No real mystery here: silent pulpits, silent dinner tables, and suing for a false “peace in our times.”

Somewhere we bought into a notion of a fake Jesus, *a harmless hippie who just wanted us to be nice and get along. But that Jesus would never have ended up before the Sanhedrin, or Pilate, or on a cross. The fake Jesus would not have had enemies at all. The fake Jesus would never have many who left him and would no longer follow him because of his teaching on the Eucharist (John 6) or marriage (Matthew 19), or his own divinity (John 8). The fake Jesus is loved by the world because the fake Jesus’ is of this world.*

But the true Jesus stood accused before Pilate, and was condemned to die by a world that hated him because he was not of the world.

Boom.

Seriously. Boom.

I should have the courage of taking Msgr. Pope's piece and passing it along to the person with the silent Christian friend.

I really should. God grant me the opportunity... and the courage.

Carry on.

This contribution is available at http://www.brutallyhonest.org/brutally_honest/2015/07/truth-has-a-way-of-dividing.html

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Am I Embarrassed To Be Pro-Life? [at The Heart's Overflow]

Did you see this video going around the interwebz last week?

I did.

Did you re-share it on your preferred social media site?

I didn't.

I realized that the reason I didn't share it was because I was afraid I would come across looking like this:



I was embarrassed to be

pro-life on social media.

But the truth is that I am very pro-life. And abortion so blatantly defies so many of my core beliefs: life begins at conception, all life has value, sex is important, holy, belongs within marriages, and should be life giving. True, it's not always convenient to be pro-life, just like it's not always convenient not using contraception, and it's not always convenient to have kids. The right thing is not always (and often isn't) going to be convenient. Our actions have consequences, being able to do whatever you want isn't being free, it's being a slave to selfishness.

Those are my pro-life beliefs, and while I don't want to condemn anybody to hell, I am tired of feeling like I need to apologize to the greater public for them. Abortion is so disgusting to me, I'm done worrying about who might I offend by saying so.

As someone who has suffered miscarriage and infertility, who has painstakingly charted and timed, ahem, *marital intimacy*

to try to achieve pregnancy, and who has endured a total of 10 months of shots twice a week in my posterior to keep babies alive inside of me, this culture of disposable pregnancies is insulting to me, and a mockery of everything I have been through over the last 4 years.

I'm not much of a news junkie, or a fact-finder. I can't tell you what is or what isn't a federal crime. All I know is that this doesn't compute. How can I rejoice at the sight of a heartbeat at a 7 week ultrasound appointment while someone else says there's no baby there? How can I grieve the loss of my baby at 11 weeks, who had fingers and toes and ears and eyelids, and someone else can abort a blob of cells?

How can a baby that has fully functioning organs not have value as a person, but those fully functioning organs are valuable and can be harvested? As I feel my own baby twisting and turning inside me, and can even see her fists and feet bulging against the skin of my belly, it's truly nauseating to think about a baby with fully functioning, fully alive organs being crushed to death.

Planned Parenthood has responded to the release of this video, saying that their actions are legal, involve the consent of the pregnant woman, and that they are not profiting from the sale, only covering costs associated with tissue transportation. But instead arguing over the fine line of what is legal and what isn't illegal, can't we just pause for a minute and think about how disgusting the conversation is?

I think we need to allow ourselves to be disgusted and nauseated more often. I think we need to allow ourselves to be repulsed and fed up. I think especially that people of my generation need to stop apologizing for being pro-life. If we're trying to fit, well, I think that ship has sailed. If we're trying to not ruffle any feathers, well, that's not what we're called to do. We're called speak the truth, in love of course. But we need to speak it.



Some speak it more eloquently than others. Like

[Bonnie](#)

, or

[Jenny](#)

.

Or one of my very faves, Blessed Mother Teresa:

The greatest destroyer of love and peace is abortion, which is war against the child. The mother doesn't learn to love, but kills to solve her own problems. Any country that accepts abortion is not teaching its people to love, but to use any violence to get what they want.

//

This contribution is available at <http://www.theheartoverflow.com/2015/07/am-i-embarrassed-to-be-pro-life.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

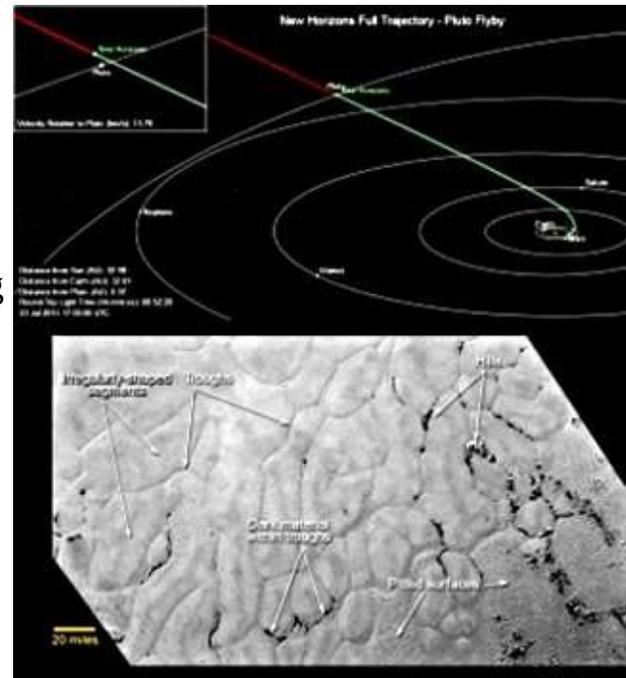
| [Contents](#) |

Pluto's Unexpected Terrain [at A Catholic Citizen in America]

Pluto's still in the news, as New Horizons starts sending data from its July 14 flyby. That will take more than a year, but there have already been surprises: including "not easy to explain terrain" near Pluto's equator.

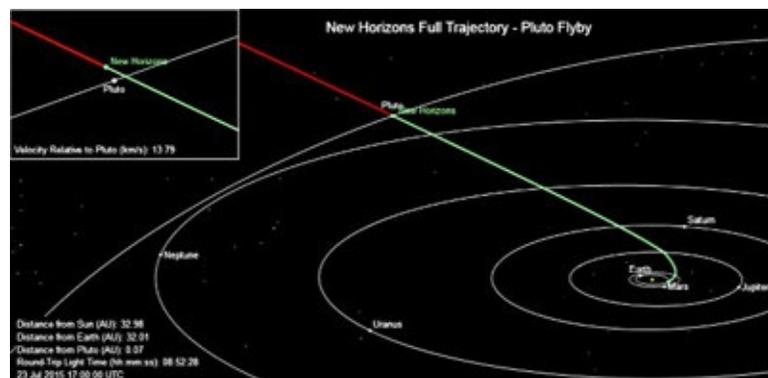
Meanwhile, the DSCOVR Solar weather monitor sent back a snapshot of Earth; and Professor Stephen Hawking is supporting a new search for intelligent life in the universe.

I think the Royal Society in London's Breakthrough Initiatives group will collect interesting facts while listening for extraterrestrial radio broadcasts. But I also think that our neighbors, if any, could easily have been using wireless telegraphy when Oldowan tools were our high tech.



1. [Pluto: More Mountains](#)
2. [DSCOVR's Blue Marble Picture: I Can See the Clouds Over My House](#)
3. [Intelligent Life in the Universe: Still Searching](#)
4. ["Not Easy to Explain Terrain"](#)
5. [Like Drying Mud, a Lava Lamp: or Something Completely Different](#)

Current Status



(From NASA/APL/Southwest Research Institute, used

w/o permission.)

(New Horizons position at 1700 UTC/1200 Central Daylight Time. (CDT) (July 23, 2015))

NASA's

[New Horizons](#)

home page announced that they'll have a news conference/science update at 2 p.m. EDT (6:00 p.m. UTC) Friday, July 24 — five hours after this post shows up. As I said

[last week](#)

, this is a blog, not a news service. These folks have been updating fairly often, if you're looking for current information:

- [New Horizons](#)
Wikipedia
- [New Horizons](#)
NASA
- [New Horizons](#)
The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory
- "[Overview of the New Horizons Science Payload](#)"
H. A. Weaver, W. C. Gibson, M. B. Tapley, L. A. Young, S. A. Stern; Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, Laurel, Maryland; Southwest Research Institute, San Antonio, Texas; Southwest Research Institute, Boulder, Colorado
(From ppi.pds.nasa.gov/data/NH-X-SWAP-2-LAUNCH-V2.0/DOCUMENT/payload_ssr.pdf (July 16, 2015))

If you already know why I'm sure thinking isn't a sin, feel free to skip to

[Pluto: More Mountains](#)

, or

[Intelligent Life in the Universe: Still Searching](#)

— or get a cup of coffee, take a walk, whatever.

Earth Isn't Flat, Poetry isn't Science, and Curiosity isn't a Sin

I think the universe is

[billions](#)

, not thousands, of years old; Earth

[isn't flat](#)

; Adam and Eve

[weren't German](#)

;

[poetry isn't science](#)

; and thinking is

[not a sin](#)

. I say that a lot.

1

Then there's the notion that Dante stuck Ulysses in Hell because Christians think curiosity is bad.

Sure enough, an English translation of Dante's "Inferno" has Ulysses saying that he passed "the bound'ries not to be o'erstepp'd by man." (

[Canto 26](#)

)

But Dante didn't add 'thou shalt not inquire' to the Decalog.

Ulysses is in

[Malebolge](#)

, Dante's eighth circle of Hell. It's where the narrator runs into panderers and seducers, then folks guilty of excessive flattery. Next come

[simonists](#)

, followed by those guilty of divination, grafters, hypocrites, and thieves.

Ulysses and Diomedes are in the category after that: deceivers, those who gave false or corrupted advice for personal gain. They apparently wound up in the eighth circle's subdivision for fraudulent counselors because of their

[Trojan horse](#)

strategy. (

[August 1, 2014](#)

)

The last two parts of Dante's Malebolge is for scandalmongers and forgers. Curiosity isn't punished anywhere, or Dante would never have made it out of the pit: he kept asking questions. Anyway, although Dante's epic poem is great literature: that's all it is. It's not a "Church" document. (

[January 23, 2015](#)

;

[August 1, 2014](#)



)

Mapping Pluto

The Whale, that dark feature on Pluto's equator, has a new name:

[Cthulhu](#)

. It's anyone's guess what it'll be called, a few years from now.

I'm not even sure whether the "Cthulhu" label got submitted to the

[IAU](#)

: the International Astronomical Union, today's internationally recognized authority for the names of stars, planets, and anything else we find off-Earth. It's UAI, Union astronomique internationale, in French.

I talked about how TUC and CUT morphed into UTC, and that's another topic. (

[July 10, 2015](#)

)

I think the basic idea — cooperation across national borders — makes sense. But I wouldn't mind if the folks who are analyzing data from New Horizons, or their supervisors, had the final say.

I think

[The Donut](#)

and

[The Brass Knuckles](#)

will almost certainly get re-named.

Even if folks having

[conniptions](#)

over the unhealthy lifestyle implied by The Donut, or the frightfully violent Brass Knuckles, don't put the

[kibosh](#)

on those names — the IAU brass might not think they're stodgy enough. I don't know if they were even submitted to the IAU

Folks pick place names for quite a few reasons.

Dublin, for example, is what happened to dubh linn ("black pool") when the English tried pronouncing it. The city's name is

[Baile Átha Cliath](#)

("town of the hurdled ford").

It's a fine, descriptive name; like Rockford, Grünwald (green forest),

[Death Valley](#)

,

[Round Prairie](#)

, and various

[Elbow Lakes](#)

.

[Comstock](#)

, Minnesota, is named after

[Solomon Comstock](#)

, a big name in real estate, politics, and farm implement manufacturing about a century back now. Bolivia gets its name from

[Simón Bolívar](#)

, and

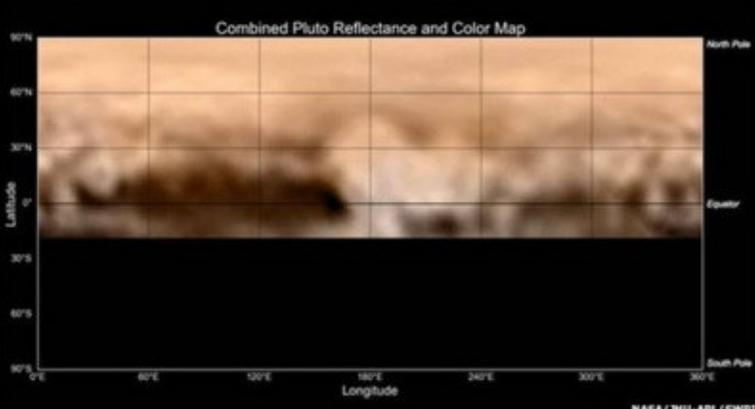
[San Francisco](#)

is named after

[St. Francis of Assisi](#)

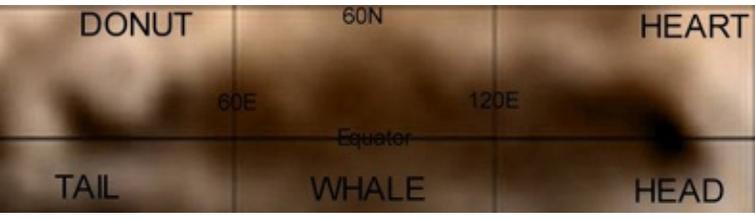
. And I'm drifting off-topic.

For now, though, we've got unofficial names for an increasing number of features on Pluto. These maps, and links, may help you keep track of what's where. Then again, maybe they won't.



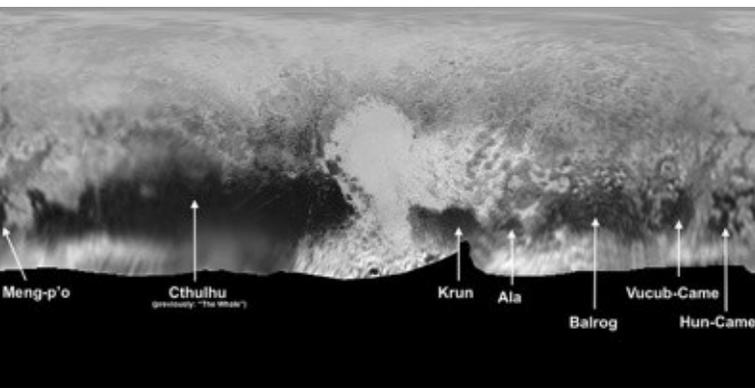
(From NASA/JHU-APL/Southwest Research Institute, via BBC News, used w/o permission.)

(Pluto's surface visible from New Horizons, June 27 to July 3. Tombaugh Regio is the bright spot near the equator, 180 degrees East. The Whale/Cthulhu is the big dark patch on the equator, left/west of Tombaugh Regio.)



(From NASA/Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory/Southwest Research Institute, used w/o permission.)

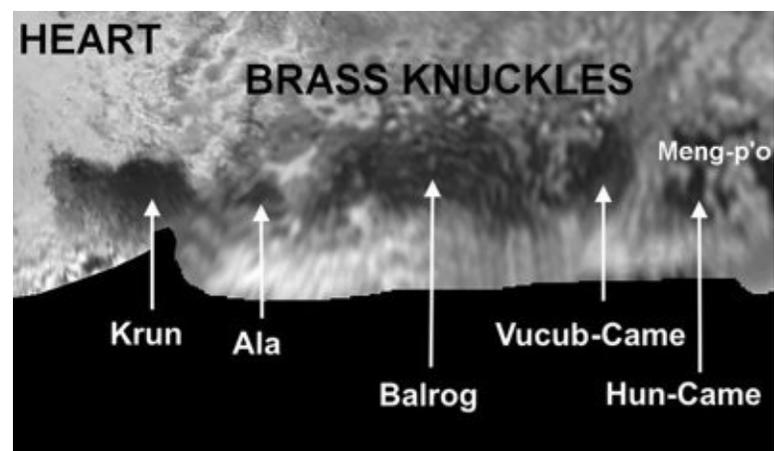
(A closer look at The Whale/Cthulhu, that dark patch on Pluto's equator.)



(From Mika McKinnon, NASA/JHUAPL; via Wikimedia Commons; used w/o permission.)

"
Map of Pluto, with (informal) names for some of the largest surface features
 "

(Mika McKinnon, New Horizons Scientist, NASA/JHUAPL)



(From Mika McKinnon, NASA/JHUAPL; via

Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.)

(A closer look at The Brass Knuckles.)

More about places on Pluto:

Space Aliens, H. P. Lovecraft, and All That

Lovecraft's aliens, like the

[Great Race of Yith](#)

we meet in "

[The Shadow Out of Time](#)

," aren't at all like the cute little fellow in "

[E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial](#)

."

Lovecraft seemed to understand that non-human people might be quite unlike us. He also had a much firmer grasp than many writers of speculative fiction, on how big and old the universe is. (

[June 27, 2014](#)

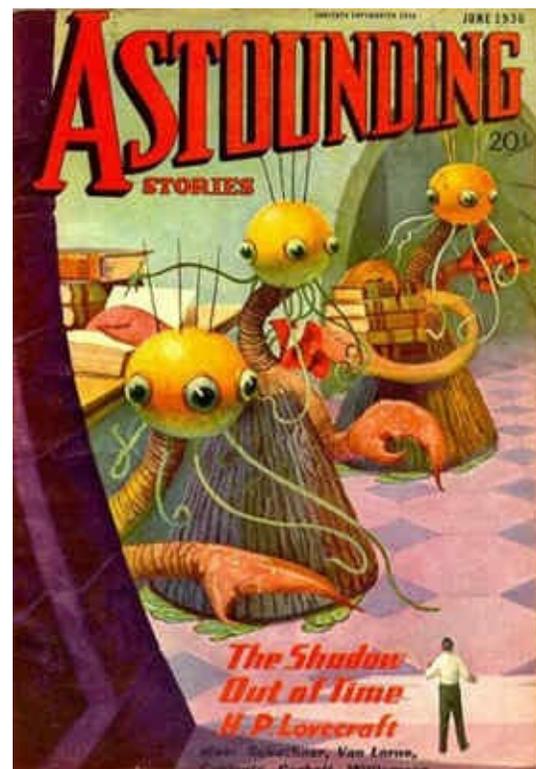
)

I'd be astounded if we find solid evidence of extraterrestrial intelligence in the next few years: but I won't insist that we can't have neighbors, or that we must.

God's God, I'm not, and I'll take reality 'as is.' (

[June 27, 2014](#)

;



)

As a Catholic, I believe that God creates a good, ordered, and beautiful world. (Catechism of the Catholic Church,

[32](#)

)

Not that

[spider crabs](#)

and

[goblin sharks](#)

are pretty.

Studying this world and thinking about what we find is part of being human. We can, using reason, see God's work in the universe: or not. We've got free will, and can decide what we do or don't believe. (Catechism,

[35](#)

-

[36](#)

,

[301](#)

,

[303](#)

-

[306](#)

,

[311](#)

,

[1704](#)

,
[1706](#)

,
[1731](#)

)

I've been over that before. (

[November 21, 2014](#)

)

Bottom line: scientific discoveries are opportunities for

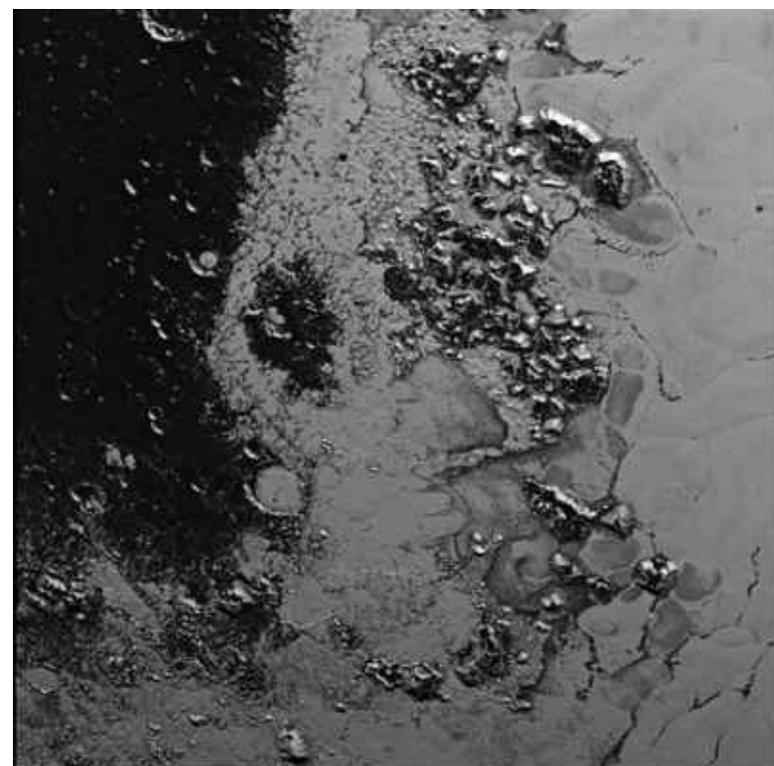
[greater admiration](#)

of God's greatness. (Catechism,

[283](#)

)

1. Pluto: More Mountains



(From NASA/JHUAPL/SWRI, used w/o permission.)

("

A newly discovered mountain range lies near the southwestern margin of Pluto's Tombaugh Regio (Tombaugh Region), situated between bright, icy plains and dark, heavily-cratered terrain. This image was acquired ... July 14, 2015 from a distance of 48,000 miles (77,000 kilometers) and sent back to Earth on July 20. Features as small as a half-mile (1 kilometer) across are visible.

"

(NASA))

["NASA's New Horizons Finds Second Mountain Range in Pluto's 'Heart' "](#)

Tricia Talbert, NASA (July 21, 2015)

"Pluto's icy mountains have company. NASA's New Horizons mission has discovered a new, apparently less lofty mountain range on the lower-left edge of Pluto's best known feature, the bright, heart-shaped region named Tombaugh Regio (Tombaugh Region).

"These newly-discovered frozen peaks are estimated to be one-half mile to one mile (1-1.5 kilometers) high, about the same height as the United States' Appalachian Mountains. The Norgay Montes (Norgay Mountains) discovered by New Horizons on July 15 more closely approximate the height of the taller Rocky Mountains.

"The new range is just west of the region within Pluto's heart called Sputnik Planum (Sputnik Plain). The peaks lie some 68 miles (110 kilometers) northwest of Norgay Montes.

"This newest image further illustrates the remarkably well-defined topography along the western edge of Tombaugh Regio...."

[Rebecca Morelle](#)

, BBC News, wrote about this on Wednesday: combing NASA's article with "

[New Horizons probe zooms into Pluto's plains](#)

." (Jonathan Amos, BBC News (July 17, 2015))

I'll get back to Pluto's plains.

There's something going on where

[Sputnik Planum](#)

, the left/west part of

[Tombaugh Regio](#)

, on that picture's right, and the dark Whale/

[Cthulhu](#)

meet. Scientists aren't sure what's going on: no surprise, since we didn't know about these features a month ago.

They're pretty sure that the bright stuff is filling in old craters: like that circular feature, down and to the left of center.

Scientists think the bright area is new, geologically speaking: maybe under 100,000 years old. That's because it's got so few craters.

[Crater counting](#)

gives scientists a rough idea of how old a surface is.

Samples from Earth's moon tell us how old different spots on the surface are there: and assuming that cratering happened at about the same rate everywhere in the Solar System is reasonable. We'll know more about Pluto, when we've got physical samples from its surface. That could take a while.

2. DSCOVR's Blue Marble Picture: I Can See the Clouds Over My House



(From NASA, via BBC News, used w/o permission.)

["New 'blue marble' picture delights"](#)

BBC News (July 21, 2015)

"A new, full snapshot of our planet has been captured by a Nasa satellite.

"Such images, which show the Earth in its entirety, are known as 'Blue Marbles'...."

This image is from

[Deep Space Climate Observatory](#)

(DSCOVR), at the the Sun-Earth

[L₁ Lagrangian point](#)

, 930,000 miles/1,500,000 kilometers from Earth. Lagrangian points are a special solution to the

[three-body problem](#)

, and that's yet another topic.

DSCOVR's job is monitoring solar wind conditions, giving early warning of approaching coronal mass ejections, and observing Earth's atmosphere and surface. Plus, we get the occasional spectacular picture, like this one, taken July 6, 2015.



The Apollo 17 crew took the first "

[Blue Marble](#)

" photo December 7, 1972, on their way to Earth's moon. That's it, to the right: "among the most widely distributed images in human history." (

[Wikipedia](#)

)

More about DSCOVR, and pictures of Earth:



(From NASA, used w/o permission.)

(A closer look at part of the DSCOVR image. My house is under clouds, above the picture's center. July 6, 2015.)

3. Intelligent Life in the Universe: Still Searching



(From BBC News, used w/o permission.)

("

Prof Hawking says intelligent life elsewhere in the cosmos could already be aware of us

"

(BBC News))

["Prof Stephen Hawking backs venture to listen for aliens"](#)

Pallab Ghosh, BBC News (July 20, 2015)

"Prof Stephen Hawking has launched a new effort to answer the question of whether there is life elsewhere in space.

"The venture is said to be the biggest yet in support of the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence.

"The 10-year effort will listen for broadcast signals from a million of the stars closest to Earth.

"The £64m (\$100m) initiative was launched by the Breakthrough Initiatives group at the Royal Society in London.

"Speaking at the launch, Prof Hawking said: 'Somewhere in the cosmos, perhaps, intelligent life may be watching these lights of ours, aware of what they mean.

" 'Or do our lights wander a lifeless cosmos - unseen beacons, announcing that here, on one rock, the Universe discovered its existence. Either way, there is no bigger question. It's time to commit to finding the answer - to search for life beyond Earth.

" 'We are alive. We are intelligent. We must know.'..."

Professor Hawking is a very smart man, but I think "we must know" is overstating it. The universe is a big place, and we may not have time to thoroughly explore every part of it.

For one thing, it

[looks like](#)

there's only enough stuff left to keep star formation going for about 1,000,000,000,000 to 100,000,000,000,000 years. After the last stars burn through their fuel supply, we'll likely have a very serious energy crisis.

If this isn't the only habitable space-time continuum — and we can move between continua — the deadline might be extended, but we'd have a

whole

lot more territory to cover.

Some phenomena make more sense if we assume that there's more than one "

[universe](#)

," and I've been over that before. (

[September 26, 2014](#)

)

On the other hand, I think looking for life on other worlds makes sense.

Studying this universe is part of being human: so in that sense, we must keep looking around. (Catechism,

[159](#)

,

[283](#)

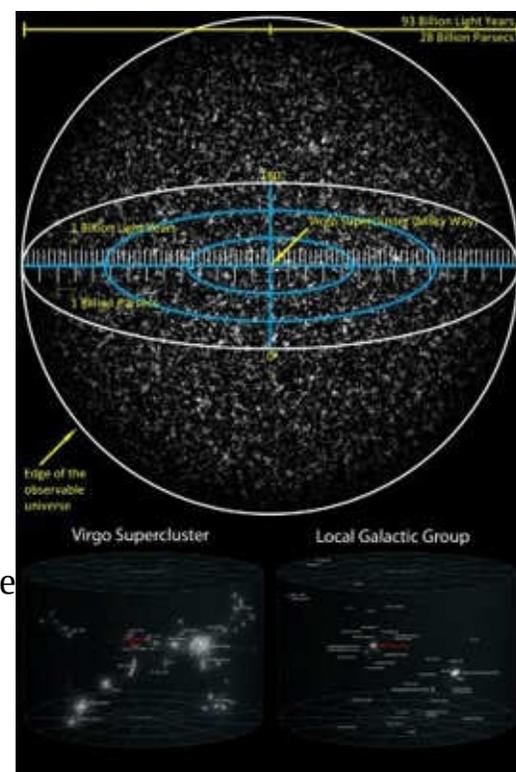
,

[286](#)

-

[287](#)

,



)

Broadcast Signals: Slit Gongs, AM Radio, and Whatever is Next

Earth's moon and planets in the Solar system were as unreachable in the 19th century as planets circling other stars are today. Scientists were learning more about these other worlds, though, and thought they might be inhabited.

Humans are chatty creatures, so pretty soon folks were thinking up ways to

[communicate](#)

with Martians.

[Carl Friedrich Gauss](#)

, or maybe someone else, suggested planting enormous square fields of rye or wheat, outlined in pine forests, forming a

[giant triangle in Siberia](#)

: visual proof that we knew about the

[Pythagorean theorem](#)

.

[Joseph Johann von Littrow](#)

had pretty much the same idea, except he figured the Sahara would be a better 'blackboard.' von Littrow's proposal was to dig giant trenches, drawing 20-mile-wide shapes. Filled with water, topped off with kerosene, and ignited, these trenches could send a different signal each night. (

[Wikipedia](#)

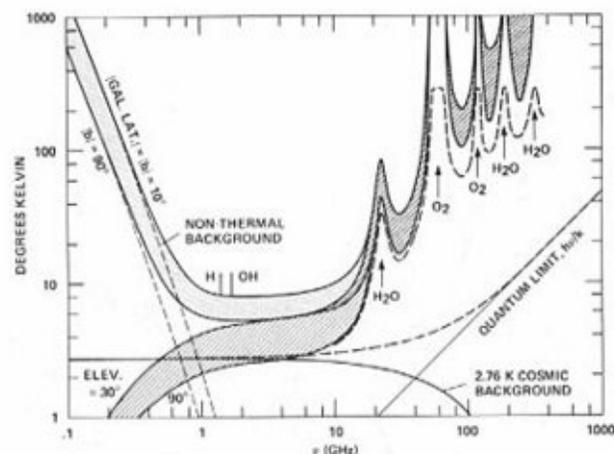
)

Remember: radio and

[environmental impact statements](#)

hadn't been invented yet.

I think the Breakthrough Initiatives group's Breakthrough Listen project, scanning a fraction of the sky for "broadcast signals," will collect interesting data.



The assumption that our neighbors, if they exist, use modulated radio signals for long-distance communications — is an assumption. A big one.

As I said last month, Earth has been around for about 4,540,000,000 years, and the universe is about three times older. On that scale, a million years isn't much: $1/13,798$

th

the age of the universe, or $1/4,540$

th

Earth's age.

I'm in my mid-60s, so that fraction of my life is roughly one and three quarters to five days. Someone who had been born within a week of me would be almost exactly my age.

Even if our neighbors only a million years 'older' or 'younger' than we are, their cutting-edge tech might be almond-shaped stone

[hand axes](#)

— or whatever we'll be developing a million years from now. (

[June 19, 2015](#)

)

I seriously doubt that

[talking drums](#)

,

[slit gongs](#)

, and the

[Inmarsat](#)

network are the ultimate communication technologies.

Earth's atmosphere is transparent at radio, and 'visible light,' frequencies, so it's a convenient part of the spectrum for ground-based astronomers. We might pick up radio signals from other folks.

Klemperer Rosettes?

However, I think we'd be better-advised to

not

assume that our neighbors are almost exactly our age. My guess, given how old the universe is, and the tiny fraction of that age we've been around, is that if we do have neighbors: they'll have been around for a very long time.

I know about the

[Fermi paradox](#)

, by the way, and don't think that civilizations self-destruct as soon as they develop steam power and credit cards. (

[April 24, 2015](#)

)

Folks with a somewhat less conventionally-pessimistic view of humanity's survivability have been thinking about what advanced civilizations might be like.

Really

advanced civilizations: not beginners like us,

[puttering](#)

along with fusion research and

[neurosynaptic cores](#)

.

The

[Kardashev scale](#)

, developed by astronomer

[Nikolai Kardashev](#)

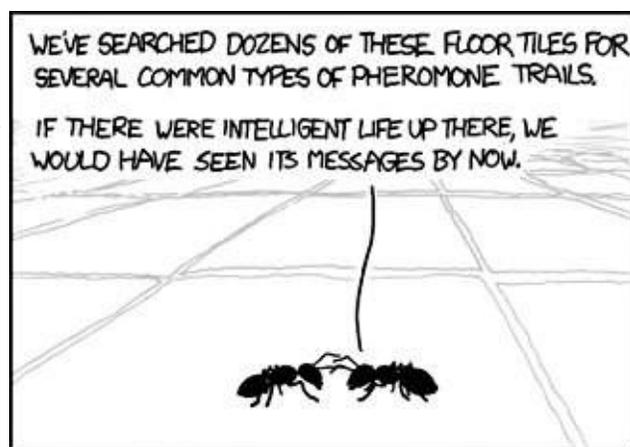
, defines civilizations by how much energy they use. We're not quite in Kardashev's

[Type I](#)

, using all available energy on Earth.

[Type II](#)

civilizations use all energy emitted by their home world's star, a



THE WORLD'S FIRST ANT COLONY TO ACHIEVE SENTIENCE CALLS OFF THE SEARCH FOR US.

[Type III](#)

civilization uses all energy emitted by its galaxy.

That sounds grandiose: but we've come a long way since Oldowan tools and wireless telegraphy were the latest thing in high tech; and I don't think we've reached the end of what's possible. (

[June 19, 2015](#)

;

[January 30, 2015](#)

)

[Freeman Dyson](#)

gets credit for thinking of the "Dyson sphere:" a shell that surrounds a star, collecting all its energy. His "Search for Artificial Stellar Sources of Infra-Red Radiation," published in 1960, deserves mention, but the idea is older:

"...Not only was every solar system now surrounded by a gauze of light traps, which focused the escaping solar energy for intelligent use, so that the whole galaxy was dimmed, but many stars that were not suited to be suns were disintegrated, and rifled of their prodigious stores of sub-atomic energy..."

("Star Maker," Chapter X A Vision of the Galaxy, Olaf Stapledon (1937), via gutenberg.net.au)

I think a serious search for intelligent life elsewhere in the universe should include listening for radio signals. But I think we could also look for evidence of civilizations that are a tad further along than we are.

An obvious "WE'RE HERE" beacon would be a stellar

[Klemperer rosette](#)

: "a gravitational system of heavier and lighter bodies orbiting in a regular repeating pattern around a common barycenter." (

[Wikipedia](#)

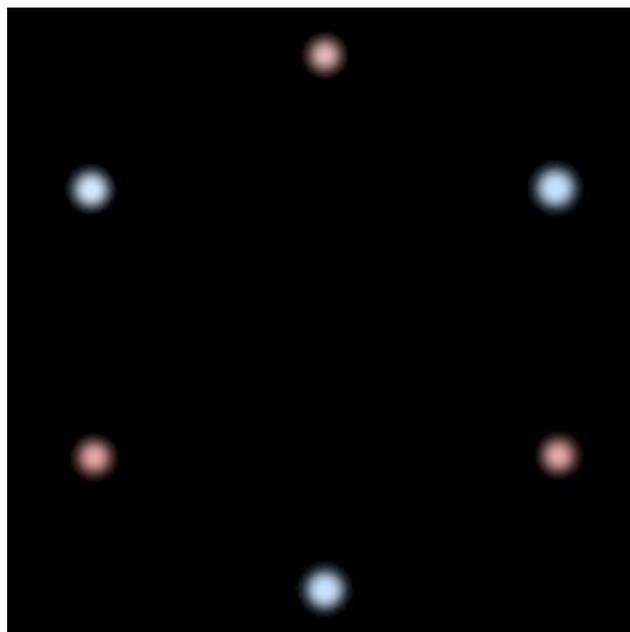
)

A system of three

[class O](#)

and three

[class M](#)



stars, orbiting in a neat circle,

couldn't

be a natural phenomenon. Klemperer rosettes

[aren't stable](#)

. The slightest nudge will break their balance.

We can't move stars around, and keep them flying in formation: but someone out there might know how, and be willing to make it happen.

"Dyson spheres" wouldn't be particularly visible: but they'd be 'bright' in longer wavelengths, radiating energy that's been used on its way out from the central star.

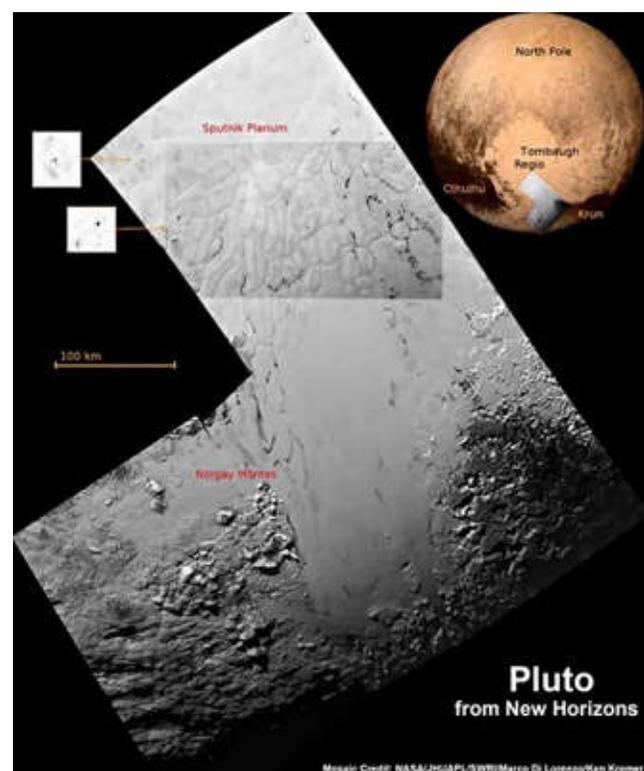
Looking for anything that's fairly small, and not acting like a natural phenomenon, might be our best bet for finding neighbors.

There'll be false alarms, too, like the discovery of pulsars. (

[September 26, 2014](#)

)

4. "Not Easy to Explain Terrain"



(From NASA/JHU-APL/SWRI, via BBC News, used w/o permission.)

("

The mission team has so far released three close-up views, tied together in this mosaic for context by Ken Kremer and Marco Di Lorenzo

"

((BBC News))

["New Horizons probe zooms into Pluto's plains"](#)

Jonathan Amos, BBC News (July 17, 2015)

"The American space agency's New Horizons probe has returned further images of Pluto that include a view of the dwarf planet's strange icy plains"

"A region, which has been named after the Soviet Sputnik satellite, displays a flat terrain broken up into polygons.

"At the edges of these 20-30km-wide features are troughs filled with dark material and even small mounds.

"Scientists say it could be evidence of the surface bulging due to gentle heating coming from below.

"But it could just as easily be the result of some contraction process as materials vaporise into the atmosphere - not unlike how mud cracks form on Earth.

"Science team members say they are trying not to jump to early conclusions in their interpretations - certainly, not until they get more data down from the spacecraft.

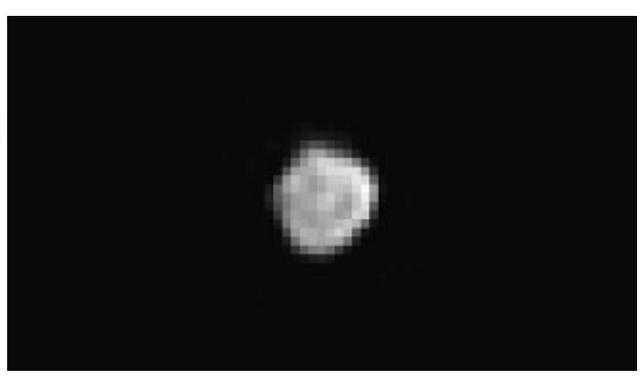
" 'When I first saw the image of Sputnik plain I decided I was going to call it "not easy to explain terrain", ' said Jeff Moore, who leads the geology, geophysics and imaging team on New Horizons...."

We could call the "not easy to explain terrain" NEET, but it'll probably have another name when scientists figure out what we're looking at.

A picture of Nix, one of Pluto's smaller moons, isn't as spectacular. Nix is about 15 pixels across. That picture, and a few others, gave scientists enough data to estimate its shape and size: about 40 kilometers.

Besides, before

[May 15, 2005](#)



, we didn't know Nix was there — and only recently got this good a look at Pluto.

As for Pluto's unexpected geography: I enjoy living in a universe where we keep finding new facets of reality. It's as if God created a world loaded with puzzle games for us to solve. (

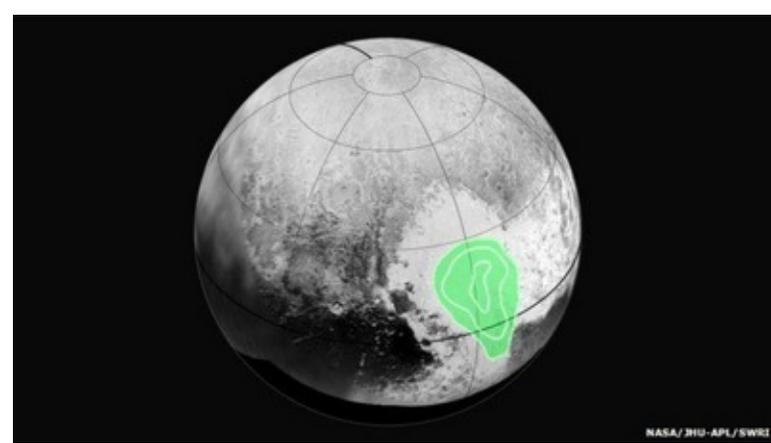
[May 8, 2015](#)

;

[July 4, 2014](#)

)

A Carbon Monoxide Equatorial Ice Patch



("

New Horizons detects a strong carbon monoxide signal in Pluto's 'heart' region

"

(BBC News))

"...Other measurements by the probe concern its observations of Pluto's nitrogen-rich atmosphere, which models suggest it is probably losing at a rate of about 500 tonnes per hour. It is being stripped away by the stream of energetic, charged particles coming off the Sun.

"Pluto's diminutive size (2,370km diameter) means it does not have the gravity to hang on to the atmosphere - in the same way that a bigger world like Earth or even Mars can - and it flows into space, forming a long ionised tail going in the same direction as all those solar wind particles. New Horizons has sent back some early data on this process...."

"...Other fascinating observations include a concentration of carbon monoxide ice in the western sector of the light-coloured region on Pluto that looks like a heart; and also some surface streaks that appear similar to the kind of erosion or deposition marks you get behind an obstacle when it sits in the path of a persistent wind...."

([BBC News](#))

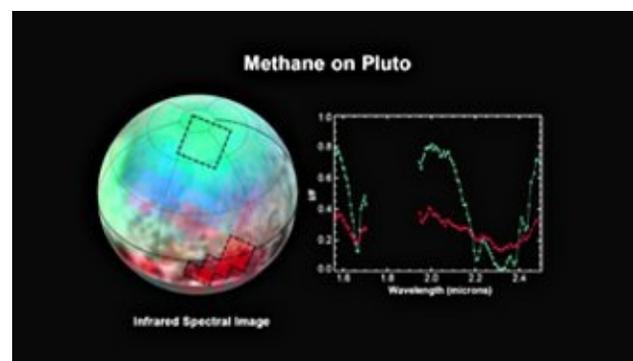
That big patch of carbon monoxide ice isn't the only oddity on Pluto:

["Pluto: The Ice Plot Thickens"](#)

NASA (July 15, 2015)

"The latest spectra from New Horizons Ralph instrument reveal an abundance of methane ice, but with striking differences from place to place across the frozen surface of Pluto.

" 'We just learned that in the north polar cap, methane ice is diluted in a thick, transparent slab of nitrogen ice resulting in strong absorption of infrared light,' said New Horizons co-investigator Will Grundy, Lowell Observatory, Flagstaff, Arizona. In one of the visually dark equatorial patches, the methane ice has shallower infrared absorptions indicative of a very different texture. 'The spectrum appears as if the ice is less diluted in nitrogen,' Grundy speculated 'or that it has a different texture in that area.'..."



[Tomabaugh Regio](#)

was identified six decades back, as a bright spot on Pluto. It's not as bright now. That could be a seasonal change: about a quarter of Pluto's 'year' has elapsed since the first observation. Or maybe the fading is permanent: or part of a longer cycle.

Pluto's

[surface](#)

ranges in color from charcoal to white: as much contrast as Saturn's moon

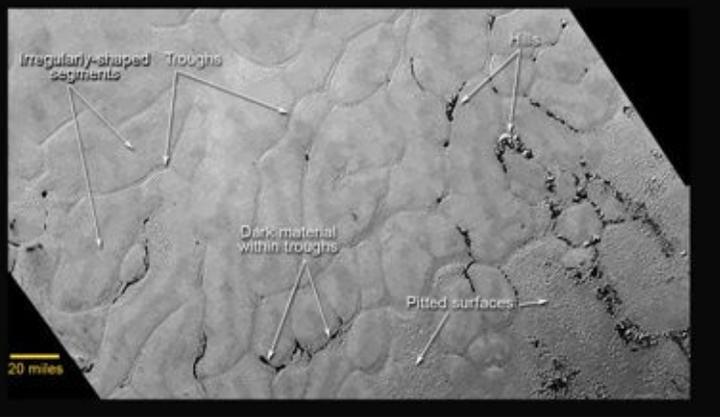
[Iapetus](#)

Iapetus is an oddball moon in other ways, too. It's more than two dozen kilometers thicker across the equator, than pole-to pole: almost five percent of its average diameter. There's a 13-kilometer-high

[ridge](#)

running along part of its, too. And that's another yet again topic.

5. Like Drying Mud, a Lava Lamp: or Something Completely Different



(From NASA/Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory/Southwest Research Institute, used w/o permission.)

(Pluto's Sputnik Planum (Sputnik Plain). This image was taken July 14 at a distance of 48,000 miles (77,000 kilometers), showing features as small as a half-mile (1 kilometer) across. "The blocky appearance of some features is due to compression of the image."

(NASA/Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory/Southwest Research Institute))

["NASA's New Horizons Discovers Frozen Plains in the Heart of Pluto's 'Heart'"](#)

Dwayne Brown, Laurie Cantillo, NASA; Mike Buckley, Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, Laurel, Maryland; Maria Stothoff, Southwest Research Institute, San Antonio (July 17, 2015)

"...In the latest data from NASA's New Horizons spacecraft, a new close-up image of Pluto reveals a vast, craterless plain that appears to be no more than 100 million years old, and is possibly still being shaped by geologic processes. This frozen region is north of Pluto's icy mountains, in the center-left of the heart feature, informally named 'Tombaugh Regio' (Tombaugh Region) after Clyde Tombaugh, who discovered Pluto in 1930.

" 'This terrain is not easy to explain,' said Jeff Moore, leader of the New Horizons Geology, Geophysics and Imaging Team (GGI) at NASA's Ames Research Center in Moffett Field, California. 'The discovery of vast, craterless, very young plains on Pluto exceeds all pre-flyby expectations.'

"This fascinating icy plains region — resembling frozen mud cracks on Earth — has been informally named 'Sputnik Planum' (Sputnik Plain) after the Earth's first artificial satellite. It has a broken surface of irregularly-shaped segments, roughly 12 miles (20 kilometers) across, bordered by what appear to be shallow troughs. Some of these troughs have darker material within them, while others are traced by clumps of hills that appear to rise above the surrounding terrain. Elsewhere, the surface appears to be etched by fields of small pits that may have formed by a process called sublimation, in which ice turns directly from solid to gas, just as dry ice does on Earth...."

([BBC News](#))

"The blocky appearance of some features ... due to compression of the image..." mentioned in NASA's caption is a sort of thing you'll occasionally see in a digital television image. It's not in the original image, stored in New Horizons' memory.

Since the "blocky appearance" makes Sputnik Planum look like farmland, and will disappear when/if we get the uncompressed image — we may see claims of a "NASA coverup."

Remember the Face on Mars thing?

There really is a feature on

[Cydonia](#)

, between

[Arandas Crater](#)

and

[Bamberg Crater](#)

. From above, at a particular time of day, it looks a little like a face.

Much as I'd like to be around when — or if — we learn that we have, or had, neighbors: the Cydonian Face on Mars disappears in higher-quality pictures, and other times of day.

I'm quite sure it's no more artificial than the now-collapsed

[Great Stone Face](#)

on New Hampshire's

[Cannon Mountain](#)

: or

[Galle Crater](#)

's happy face. We're starting to trace some of the

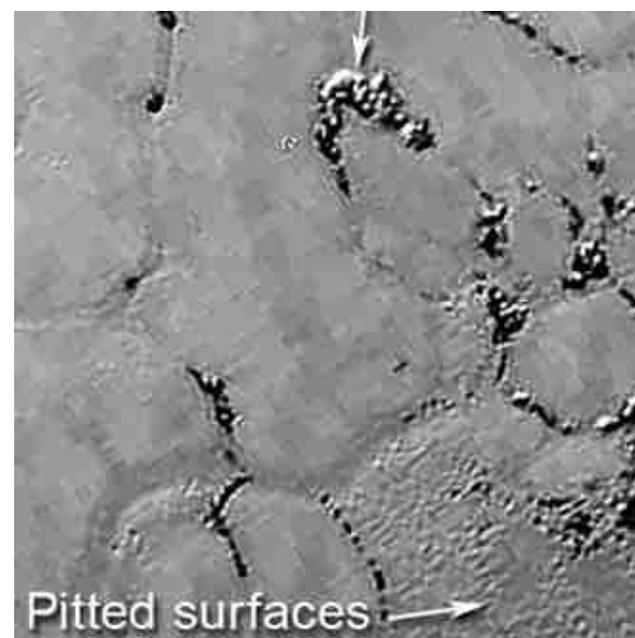
[neural circuitry](#)

humans use for pattern recognition, and that's still another topic.

Getting back to Pluto's Sputnik Planum, scientists aren't sure how those irregular shapes formed. They've got two working theories, so far.

We may be looking at what happened when surface material shrank, leaving a pattern like the cracks in drying mud.

Or convection currents in a mix of frozen carbon monoxide, methane and nitrogen could form those patterns: like a very slow-motion lava lamp. The convection would be driven by comparative warmth deep inside Pluto.



We'll know more, as New Horizons sends in more data. This image was taken when New Horizons was still 48,000 miles, 77,000 kilometers, from Pluto. It got within 7,800 miles, 12,500 kilometers, during the

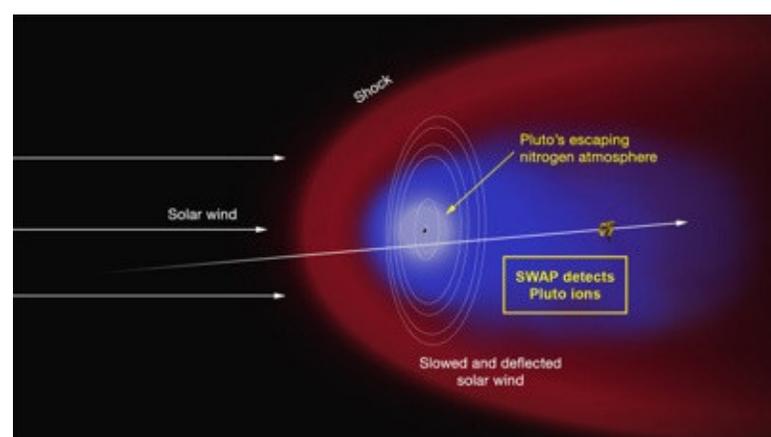
[flyby](#)

: so there's much more to be seen.

Scientists spotted what look like dark streaks on Pluto's plains. They're a few miles long, and apparently point in the same direction. An obvious explanation is that they're made by wind.

Again, we'll know more as more data comes in.

New Horizons: Headed Toward the Stars



(From NASA, via Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.)

(Diagram showing solar wind interacting with Pluto's atmosphere.)

"...The New Horizons Atmospheres team observed Pluto's atmosphere as far as 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers) above the surface, demonstrating that Pluto's nitrogen-rich atmosphere is quite extended. This is the first observation of Pluto's atmosphere at altitudes higher than 170 miles above the surface (270 kilometers).

"The New Horizons Particles and Plasma team has discovered a region of cold, dense ionized gas tens of thousands of miles beyond Pluto — the planet's atmosphere being stripped away by the solar wind and lost to space.

"This is just a first tantalizing look at Pluto's plasma environment," said New Horizons co-investigator Fran Bagenal, University of Colorado, Boulder..."

([NASA/APL/SWRI](#))

Pluto's orbit takes it from 4,400,000,000 to more than 7,300,000,000 kilometers — 2,700,000,000 to 4,500,000,000 miles — from the Sun.

[Sunlight](#)

on Pluto isn't particularly bright — only about 150 to 450 times the light of the full Moon seen from Earth, under 1/800

as much as Earth's

Although Pluto is receding from our sun now, its atmosphere is getting thicker. That's because Pluto's north polar regions are seeing sunlight for the the first time in 120 years.

A frozen nitrogen 'ice cap' is sublimating, turning to gas. It'll take decades to blow across Pluto and refreeze on Pluto's south pole. Not all the nitrogen atoms will get to the south pole. Some will escape Pluto's weak gravity, get ionized by sunlight, and blow away in the Solar wind.

We should keep getting data from New Horizons for years, as it passes through the Kuiper Belt, headed toward the stars.

There's much more left to learn:

1

As a Catholic, I must take Sacred Scripture seriously. (Catechism of the Catholic Church,

[101](#)

-

[133](#)

)

That emphatically does not mean I must believe that a long-dead Calvinist was right, about the moment of creation being nightfall before October 23,

[4004 BC](#)

:

- "[Humility, Science, and Accepting Reality](#)"
(March 29, 2015)
Particularly
- "[New Maps for Earth and Moon, and India's Mars Mission](#)"
(October 10, 2014)
Particularly
- "[Sagittarius B2, Water, and Asteroid Mining](#)"
(October 3, 2014)
Particularly
- "[Kapteyn b, Habitable Zones, and Using Our Brains](#)"
(July 18, 2014)
Particularly
- "[2 + 2 = 4, Therefore ... : Getting a Grip about Faith and Science](#)"

(February 5, 2014)

Particularly

- "[Eden - and - Adam and Eve Weren't German?!](#)"

(May 16, 2012)

This contribution is available at <http://catholiccitizenamerica.blogspot.com/2015/07/plutos-unexpected-terrain-seti-radio.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Inside Someone's Mind is a War You Cannot See [at Tactical Catholic]

Lance was a production supervisor of a manufacturing plant. Before I even got to the E line, I could hear him. He was usually loud, but I could hear him over the equipment, which is saying something. The guy yelling back at Lance was one of the maintenance guys, Carl or Russ, I don't remember. I'm not even sure what they were arguing about. I knew that it must have had something to do with one of the machines because the line was down. The profanities exchanged between the two men was enough to make a sailor blush. It was bad. That's when I saw the maintenance guy change his stance. One of the first things you remember from defense classes is that a changed posture or hand position is an indicator of potential action, and I could tell that he had just cocked his hips to throw a punch. His hands were still down so I figured he was making a threat. Once I got to the line my suspicions were confirmed. He was challenging Lance to fight him right there. Can you believe that? On the clock. On the line. He was about to burst. Lance was still arguing, but he hadn't shifted to match postures. If the other guy had swung, Lance would be a half step behind and possibly struck. All I remember was Lance saying something like, "Just get it up. Get some help if you need it, but we've got to get this line back up. We're too far behind as it is." He turned and started to walk off. He hadn't gotten more than a couple of steps away when the other guy said it.

"That's right, Keep walking, you little sh**. I knew you would back down. I knew you were a little p-"

And that's when Lance knocked him out cold on the plant floor.

Lance got officially reprimanded and suspended for 4 weeks. The only reason he didn't get canned on the spot is because we explained to the boss the whole story. The maintenance guy got a reprimand but didn't miss a day of work. A month with no pay. Good grief. Lance told me he had just lost it, and that it was a stupid decision.

I'm reminded of the poems I had to read in high school and college that talked about suffering and hidden pain. There are apparently lots of those. Lately I've been thinking about all the things I struggle with on my own time and in my own mind. Nobody knows, much less understands, the war that rages in my mind. Few people know me well enough to know the struggles and circumstances that led to where I am now in 2015. What most people know is what they see me do and hear me say. That's usually not enough to really know me or my struggles. It's usually just enough for someone to ridicule me or point out a flaw or just write me off.

That's not fair.

But that is how we usually operate isn't it?

A car cuts you off on your way to work and you barely avoid getting rear ended when you force your brakes. The car that cut you is long gone but you're still fuming at the idiot driver who nearly caused a wreck. You don't take a second to consider that maybe he isn't just a bad driver. Perhaps he is late for something, or in a panic, or just lost his job, or just learned his wife was cheating on him. Could be anything or he could just be an idiot driver. At any rate, we make assumptions based on 3 seconds of

driving reaction.

For Lance, no one knew he was abused by his parents as a child. No one knew he had anger issues. No one knew that he had been going to counseling and had made lots of efforts to catch himself before giving in to violence. All anyone saw was the battle as it was lost, when he gave in and punched that guy. I'm not saying he shouldn't have been punished, but we have got to do a better job of knowing people. That takes time and patience and a willingness to ask as well as listen.

We make so many snap judgements and assumptions. I personally believe it leads to a dehumanization of everyone in our minds. We just relegate them to an action, usually a failure, and then lower their worth as a result. It will forever affect the way we look at that person. How are they to ever get back in our good graces? Do we have some arbitrary goal they have to reach to "earn" our respect or get their dignity back?

Every day we encounter people who are filled with pain and struggle. We do not know what's going on inside their minds. We might know that a person is recovering from an addiction or had a traumatic event in their past, but we don't know what struggles they have had or even the mental steps they take each day (or moment) to behave "normally". Maybe they drive a longer way to the office so they don't pass certain places or encounter certain things. Maybe they are having an argument inside their mind to keep them from doing something they now know they shouldn't. Maybe they are getting counseling after work. Maybe they are abused now. Maybe they feel worthless. Maybe they are lonely. Maybe they are considering ending their own life. We just don't always know. Nobody wears a sign around their neck (though you might want them to) to tell you what is going on inside. And if they did, without you taking the time to know them and show them love and respect, wouldn't you just be more likely to pass them by? No? Let's put a sign on the guy in your office and you tell yourself how you would really treat him.

Recovering pornography addict who was exposed to pornography when he was 10 years old. Has struggled with lust and associated sins for 20 years. Lost his wife and children. Is not allowed to see his kids. Sees a counselor 2-3 times a month. Hasn't given in for nearly a year, but is constantly reminded of his failures. Has difficulty looking people in the eye because of shame of his past. Mind filled with thoughts of shame, regret, and pain. Believes he is a failure. Feels completely alone in the world.

Want to ask him to lunch? Want to sit with him in the break room and talk about 50 Shades of Grey? Or is your first inclination to be disgusted? We don't know the pain or the stress he is under. Without that sign we probably would never know. One day he might not come to work because the stress became too much and he stopped fighting that battle in his mind and ended his life.

Satan wants you dead. To get you dead, he has to first isolate you from the people and places that can help you. We do him all kinds of favors when we ostracize and label and ignore people. Guys, we've got to be willing to look past someone's past and show them some honest to goodness respect and love. Take time to listen to people. Take time before you run your mouth or plaster your label on somebody's face. Please please please do everything you can to show that you really do care. Remember this: love is a choice. It an act of the will to choose good for the sake of the other. Love is selfless. Love is sacrifice. Love is often uncomfortable. But love is what we are called to.

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was

made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

– 1 John 4:7-11

God loves us, regardless of where we've been or the struggles we now face. He loves us now. He loves us so much that He is willing to give himself for the sake of drawing us nearer to Him. He does not want us dead. He wants us alive. He wants us to love as He loves. He loves us too much to leave us where we are. We, then, have to get off of our collective arses and show others the same love He extends to us. It takes effort, but it's possible. My prayer is that we'll all choose each day to live in love, and by that love we may hope to save the men and women around us from the isolation and despair they are facing each day.

This contribution is available at <http://www.tacticalcatholic.com/inside-someones-mind-is-a-war-you-cannot-see/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

How are you fed? [at Fr. Ben's Biblical Blog]

and the like. And the salad—if you're into that sort of thing—plus all the fruits and vegetables. Finally, the dessert! All you can eat for every course. Where would you begin? You could eat all you could and there would still be leftovers.

This is like our Catholic faith at the spiritual level—an all-you-can-eat buffet.

We begin a five-week walk through John 6—one of the most important chapters in the Bible that every Catholic should know. This is the chapter in which Jesus promises to feed us with his very flesh and blood—the Eucharist.

In the first fifteen verses of John 6 we had a remarkable pairing with Elisha in 2 Kings. In both cases there was a hungry crowd. Both featured a gift of bread—but a gift that could not have fed everyone. Elisha the prophet, and Jesus, both took these gifts, multiplied them and fed all in attendance. And both narratives state there were leftovers. *“The hand of the Lord feeds us; he answers all our needs.”*

In light of these accounts, I want to speak about how we are fed within our Catholic faith. Part of the reason for this is that the most common reason for brothers and sisters leaving the Church is, “I’m not being fed.” This should motivate our Catholic parishes to be welcoming and hospitable, provide good homilies, reverent music and the best worship possible. At the same time, we have ample opportunities to be fed—but like the crowds we have to show up.

The main course of our Catholic buffet is the Eucharist—which is what John 6 is all about. Jesus feeds us with his body and blood. While we may not always feel like we are fed, if we receive Jesus’ body and blood we are. This is an objective reality. No matter how bad the homily may be, no matter how unwelcoming the congregation—even if the music is bad—Jesus feeds us in the Eucharist. I would argue that no Catholic who believes in the Eucharist could ever leave our faith—because this is what feeds us.

And another sacrament we can receive any day—Confession. At any moment we can be fed with God’s infinite mercy, be forgiven of our sins and nourished by his forgiveness.

Now let’s look around at some of the other ways we can be fed each day. First is the way I seek nourishment every day—the Bible. Any moment you would like to hear God’s voice—simply open up the Scriptures and read...and pray. If you aren’t feeling fed—read the Bible.

Or another resource—and this is one of the most underrated books in our Church—The Catechism of the Catholic Church. Now you may think, “That looks like a thick book with no pictures and nothing more than a list of rules.” Well, it is thick and has no pictures, but it *isn’t* a sterile rulebook. This isn’t a manual of no, bigotry or rules. It is a study from the Scriptures and inspiring teachings of the saints. It guides us deeper into love of God and neighbor and can be taken to prayer.

Eventually I want to get a bookshelf in the back of our Church with nothing but Bibles and Catechisms for your use...keep your eyes peeled!

Next, please check out our parish library. Over the past couple of months we have sorted through books and updated what we offer. I want our library to be a place with the fullness of Catholic teaching that inspires us to grow. We also focused on evangelization. Our library is at the head of the donut line—check out a book and learn!

Since moving to International Falls, I have discovered another way to be fed intellectually—through *Lighthouse Media* cds. They feature inspiring talks by some of the best speakers, youth ministers and priests around our country. With the long drives we have, why not put in a cd to help you learn?

These are a few of the many options in our buffet. I could go on and on about Catholic social teaching, morality, service to the poor, sacred art and music and the like. The point I want to make—show up and be fed! Sample the all-you-can-eat buffet and come back for seconds with what you really enjoy.

Check out John 6 this week. Reflect about how you are fed. If you aren't feeling satisfied, make an effort to be fed with the abundance of our faith. And enjoy being fed today through Jesus' body and blood in the Eucharist.

This contribution is available at <http://frbensbible.blogspot.com/2015/07/how-are-you-fed-17th-sunday-of-ordinary.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Resisting the modern palantir [at Mere Observations]

The Lord knows I try my best to stay positive. It is a difficult thing to do these days and the best antidote I've found is the reading of good books and much prayer. It's all too easy to fall into despair as Denethor, [as pointed out in this wonderful piece](#) by T.M. Doran. As a commenter beneath the article wrote: *I often find myself falling dreadfully near to Denethor's despair (until now never having made that comparison!!). But how could it be otherwise, as I'm getting most of my information from our own day's Palantir — an information source under the complete control of the enemy.*



Image source: art-brainstorm.com

A brilliant analysis of our modern use of media. Any media. There are days when I swear it can't get any worse on Twitter and then I'm proven wrong the next day.

So I've thrown a cover over the seeing stone and limit my peeks as best I can.

An immediate benefit I attribute to my reading is coming across nuggets, phrases or whole paragraphs that bring you to pause, reread it again slowly, and either highlight the words or write them down in a journal. (Or at times in my case, talk-to-text them into your iPhone's Notes program or snap a picture of the page and email it to myself for later use.)

The old *Baltimore Catechism* stated that "To gain the happiness of heaven we must know, love, and serve God in this world."

It is with that thought in mind that made me write the following passage down and place it in my Sunday Missal so that I might add it to my prayers before Mass, because I succinctly and directly mean every single word:

O Holy Mother, stand by me now at Mass time, when Christ comes to me, as thou didst minister to Thy infant Lord—as Thou didst hang upon His words when He grew up, as Thou wast found under His cross. Stand by me, Holy Mother, that I may gain somewhat of thy purity, thy innocence, thy faith, and He may be the one object of my love and my adoration, as He was of thine.

—[Meditations And Devotions](#), by Cardinal John Henry Newman. Part III: Meditations On The Christian Doctrine (Hope In God – Redeemer, paragraph 13).

There is no palantír with its fleeting images to peek into when at Mass. There is only the eternal fabric of time during which I pray for a small portion of the purity, innocence and faith held by Mary, so that I may love and adore (serve) Christ.

And while Thomas à Kempis wrote in *The Imitation of Christ* that “At the Day of Judgement, we shall not be asked what we have read, but what we have done; not how eloquently we have spoken, but how holily we have lived” I must echo that I do not believe I will read my way into heaven. But by reading good books I’ve found that I am able to bring order to my knowledge (wisdom) and when combined with prayer I find the strength to “do” and to “live” in a manner I pray is worthy of the Kingdom.

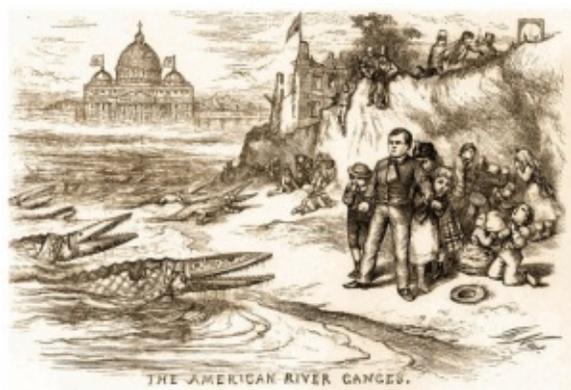
This contribution is available at <http://jeffwalker.wordpress.com/2015/07/28/resisting-the-modern-palantir/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

10 Reasons I Love Being American & Catholic [at The Jesuit Post]

Those readers with a pulse have noticed much media focus on what it means to be both American and Christian. Is America ‘still’ a Christian nation? Will Christians become a new persecuted minority? There has been much ink spilt on issues of the environment, sexuality, health care, etc., and how they rankle religious groups in the United States. Some of the commentary is balanced and thoughtful; much of it puts off more heat than light.

“May you live in interesting times.” We are told this is an old Chinese curse. It turns out that “may you live in interesting times” is not actually a thing in Chinese; but saying so gives it a hint of *Eastern mystique*, no? The past few months have indeed been an **interesting** time to be American. Whether it has been a curse or blessing depends on several factors, one of which — we are told by social media — is our religious belief.



Beware Children, Catholics Have Brought Their Insidious Ideas!

As an American and a Catholic, I actually *love* living in these interesting times. The issues today invite us to live our faith, and citizenship, in an integrated way. A century ago, Harper’s political cartoonist Thomas Nast mongered fear about Irish Catholics’ increasing influence in American culture, politics, and education. One wonders if he had any idea of the interesting times that American Catholics would inherit, inhabit, and influence in 2015.

What follows is not about politics, or platforms, but about what *unites* a people — as Catholic and American. Whether you are Catholic or American (or both, or neither), we hope you enjoy considering *The Jesuit Post*’s...

10 Reasons to Love Being American and Catholic



Fr. Pat Conroy, SJ, natty chaplain to the US House of Representatives.

1) ***We care deeply about our country, and so we get involved.*** As Pope Francis writes in *Joy of the Gospel*, an active faith community “gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life...Evangelizers thus take on the ‘smell of the sheep’ and the sheep are willing to hear their voice.” Notice how often Catholic politicians are asked whether their faith influences their politics? People wondered 50 years ago whether President Kennedy was a secret puppet of the pope, trying to overthrow the US. Today, the chaplain to the House of Representatives is a Catholic priest, Fr. Pat Conroy. (*Notate bene*, internet conspiracy theorists!)

In our current (114th) Congress, Catholics make up the largest single group (164 of 535, or 30.7%). But being Catholic does not imply uniformity of thought. And that’s because...

2) ***Like a family, we love each other – and we often disagree.*** You need a lot of shared history and values to achieve *actual*, productive disagreement. Jesuit John Courtney Murray wrote that “disagreement is a rare achievement, and most of what is called disagreement is simply confusion.” Recent debates about health care, the environment, and same-sex marriage are heated topics for us Catholics, and rightly so. They force us to consider and weigh our shared values.



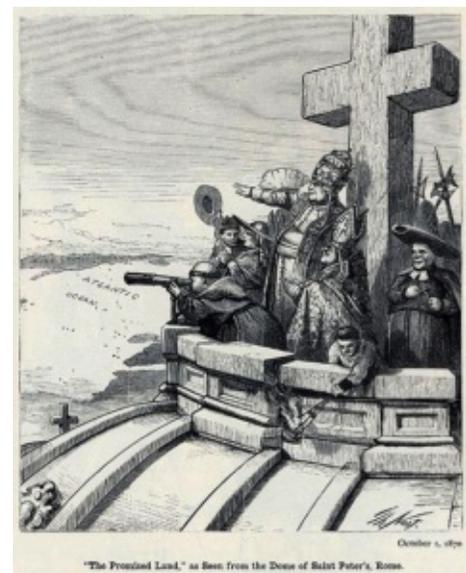
John Boehner and Nancy Pelosi honor Father Daniel P. Coughlin for his service as the 59th Chaplain of the House of Representatives. Available on Flickr at www.flickr.com/photos/speakerboehner/

We Catholics believe in the dignity of each person, the centrality of the family, the care for the poor, the

inviolability of conscience, and the goodness of creation. Unsurprisingly, *how* we apply these values to controversies in America leads Catholics of good will to disagree. Which reminds me: of the 164 Catholics in the current Congress, 83 are Democrats, and 81 are Republican.[1] There are six Catholics on the Supreme Court, and they rarely all agree with one another. (For the record, there are six Catholics in my own family, and we rarely all agree, either.)

Sadly, we don't always publicly disagree well, and it can get messy. But at our best, we do not just talk past one another, we *legitimately and reasonably* disagree. (Consider this spirited exchange between Catholic-turn-Orthodox writer [Rod Dreher](#) and Catholic writer [Kaya Oakes](#).) A faith tradition that admits diversity of thought is attractive, as long the dialogue to which it gives birth is rooted in truth and love.

But the Catholic family is bigger than the US alone, and...



“Promised Land” by Thomas Nast

3) ***Increasingly, Catholics in America reflect the wider world and its concerns.*** In 2007, 2 out of 3 Catholics in the US were white. Only seven years later, 41% of Catholics in the US are not of European ancestry – Latinos, Africans, African-Americans, Indians, Asians, etc.[2] Newer Catholic immigrants bring to the US issues and concerns that face the wider world — and we should be grateful for that broader vision. We American Catholics sometimes get upset when our issues do not seem to be as pressing for the rest of the Catholic world. But when we recall that the US Catholic Church accounts for only 6% of the entire Church, it puts our pressing issues in perspective. The Catholic Church is not a good place if you are afraid of encountering others, especially others in need. It is, however, a good bellwether of the makeup of the United States in the near future.

Just as important as the future, is where we have come from. That is because...



MY TWO GREATEST WORKS

Summa Theologica and this birdhouse

What Does the Ox Say?

4) ***Our history is important to us – because it has recorded and shaped much of our culture.*** Through the centuries, the Catholic Church has preserved and developed ancient authors' texts and ideas.

Augustine of Hippo wrote the first tell-all autobiography, and he wrestled with age-old questions of good and evil. Remote Catholic monasteries served as a beacon of intellectual life as the 'dark ages' and plagues ravaged much of Europe.

Thomas Aquinas, a thunder-thinker of the thirteenth century, was dialoguing with Jewish and Muslim scholars about Aristotle long before interreligious dialogue was hip. Bartolomé de las Casas, a Dominican friar, wrote passionately about the evils of slavery and colonialism in the 1500s, long before post-colonial theory hit the scene. Jesuit missionaries studied the stars, recorded languages throughout South America and Asia, and adapted to the cultures of local peoples. Jesuits also defended the indigenous Guarani against European colonial powers in South American communities.

But what about the darker side of the Church's history? This leads us to number five:

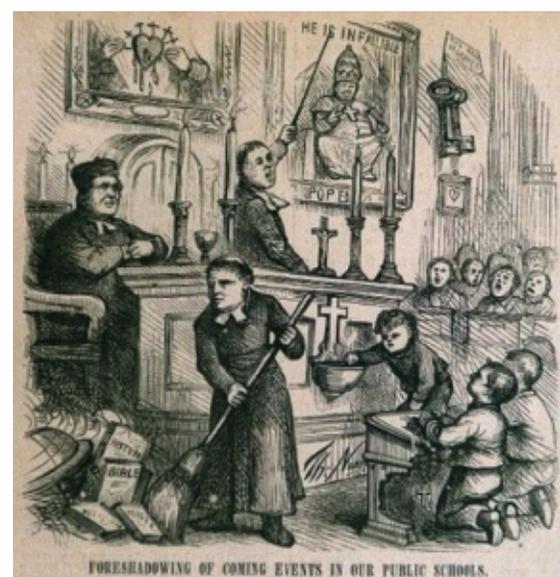
5) ***Yes, we know about the Crusades...and Galileo...and the Inquisition.*** We're not proud of them, and we can't take them back – but we can apologize for them. At a solemn penance service in Rome on March 12, 2000, Pope John Paul II begged forgiveness for the sins committed by members of the Catholic Church over the past 2,000 years, especially those which caused division among Christians.[3] Pope Francis recently did the same to indigenous peoples of the Americas: "I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offenses of the church herself, but also for crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America." [4] We cannot rewrite history, but we can take ownership of our mistakes, seek forgiveness, and hope to live on.

We also know that probing the past opens a Pandora's box, full of many other sad tales. If we really want to comb through history, we should consider the bloody French Revolution, Stalin's mass-extermination of Christians, Hitler's Third Reich, and Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge. Each of these are instances where non-religious leaders perpetrated violence against their own (often religious) people, in the vaunted pursuit of humanism and freedom. To be clear: these examples do not excuse the *Church's* sins — but they do remind us that an honest assessment of history leaves few innocent parties. [Just sayin'.] All that to say...



6) **American Catholics are not perfect – and we know it.** Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ said of his own Jesuits in 1981, “we are not as bad as people say we are, nor are we as good as people think we are.” The same could be said for us Catholics. The sexual abuse crisis, and issues of exclusion, merit earnest soul searching for us. We can be sinners — petty and prideful, hypocritical and selfish, garrulous and quarrelsome — *just like everyone else in the human family*. And our faith happily admits this fault, and challenges us all to be truer to God, to ourselves, and to our neighbor. After he decried broad-ranging social issues in his visit to Paraguay, [Pope Francis challenged each person](#) in the audience to *personal* soul-searching: “The worst thing that can happen to each one of you is that when you leave this place you think, ‘The pope was talking to this or that guy.’ If anyone of you thinks like that, stop it! Who was the pope talking to? To me!”

In other words, our faith recognizes us as sinners, but calls us each to be saints. And there are many shining examples of these saints. Consider the fact that...



Thomas Nast’s Astute Prediction of the Public School Classroom in 2015

7) **The Catholic Church is the largest single provider of education and health care in the world.** In the United States alone, 1 in 6 patients is treated in a Catholic hospital. The cost of running these 645 non-profit hospitals is \$108 billion per year.[5] Catholic Charities provides housing, hunger, and health services to hundreds of thousands of people annually. Catholic Relief Services and Jesuit Refugee

Services offer disaster relief across the globe; they work to resettle, care for, and educate refugees all over the world, regardless of their religion. US Catholic grade schools provide affordable, quality education in every major US urban area — long after Catholic immigrant populations have moved out to the suburbs. Catholics educate those in greatest need not because *the students* are Catholic, *but because we are*. And have you [read about Cristo Rey schools](#)?

Focusing and coordinating all this good work means that...



Cathedral of Christ Our Light, photo by author

8) ***We have rules, yes. But at our core, Catholicism is about following Jesus.*** Anything worth belonging to – a family, a club, a church – has legitimate expectations that flow from its mission. But even we might miss the forest for the trees. As Pope Francis says, “The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you.”[6] From that relationship with Jesus flows an important belief: God yearns to be present in this world. The sacraments of the Church — especially the Eucharist — remind us that Jesus took on our humanity and promised to be with us until the end. We are spiritual beings, yet we live in physical time and space. It’s no surprise, then, that we believe that God is laboring — *laboring!* — through different cultures and rituals, which are earthy, sensory, and beautiful. Our sacraments, our lives, and our relationships strive to make Jesus present in the world. And to do that, we do well to recall that...



9) ***Without exception, we are loved and lovable in*** God's eyes. Pope Francis again: "A person once asked me, in a provocative manner, if I approved of homosexuality. I replied with another question: 'Tell me: when God looks at a gay person, does he endorse the existence of this person with love, or reject and condemn this person?' We must always consider the person." Catholic thinking begins with the relationship of God's love for us. And that relationship teaches us how *we belong to one another*, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexuality, or social status. Catholics are called to care for those whom our culture easily overlooks: the unborn, the elderly, the poor, the immigrant, the outcast, and the prisoner. Catholic Social Teaching, a great guidebook of how we should live justly in a complex world, speaks thoughtfully about all of these issues. Better still, Catholic Social Teaching is like Jesus — it upsets our too-easy American political categories. Our faith afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted. If it doesn't make us comfortable Americans re-consider how we fit into the larger world, it's not doing its job. And finally,



Flannery O'Connor with Muse.

10) ***Catholics are walking paradoxes — and we love it.*** We recognize sacred whispers in the profane, and that makes for good storytellers. (Think of [Flannery O'Connor](#), [Cormac McCarthy](#), [Tobias Wolff](#), or [Gerard Manley Hopkins](#).) We pursue truth and avoid easy answers; yet at our best we welcome questions of seekers. We have [remote mystics](#) who avoid city life, and those who throw themselves into [caring for the urban poor](#). We have saints who write scholarly books, and those who write emotional [tell-all autobiographies](#). We are complex or simple; cheerful or dour. We love beer and wine, and know how to celebrate life's great feasts; yet when the time comes, we know the value of mourning and fasting from the world. We speak of sin, but we also speak of grace. We find God alive in beautiful music and art; but also in the wizened face of a homeless addict. We call others to repentance, when we ourselves stand in constant need of forgiveness. We teach the rich and the poor alike, and pray they encounter one another. We write listicles patting ourselves on the back, both to encourage ourselves and to call us to greater authenticity.



“Kids chillin’ in School Van” by Vipez on Flickr Creative Commons

We aim for eternal life with God in the next world, without losing hope for this one. Because though these are *interesting* times for American Catholics...they are anything but a curse.

This contribution is available at <http://thejesuitpost.org/2015/07/10-reasons-i-love-being-american-catholic/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Dolls from Heaven: Introduce Your Child to Jesus' Little Flower [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

by Susan Fox



One day in 1961, little eight-year-old me sat on the floor happily reading my Treasure Chest Catholic Comic Magazine about the life of St. Theresa of Lisieux.

I was looking at the scene where her father came home, and asked her for a hug. She was about four years old, and she told her father to come to her for the hug. Then she ignored him, and continued to swing on her swing. When her father started to return to the house, she was deeply saddened by her own actions and ran to him in tears.

She became my big sister until I turned 24, the age she died. I'm 62 years old now. So I tell her she is my little sister and my favorite saint. (St. Anthony, you didn't hear that.) I can still remember the image in that "comic" book of Theresa on the swing ignoring her father. Her regretted actions pierced me deeply as they did her. "What matters in life," she wrote, "is **not** great deeds, but great love."



In 1888, Theresa entered the Discalced Carmelites at the age of 15. She held various offices in the cloistered convent, but died at the age of 24 of tuberculosis. At her death, one of her fellow sisters wondered what they would say about her because she hadn't really accomplished anything.

However, the accomplishments of the hidden flower of Carmel are no longer unknown because of the publication of her autobiography. In fact, she is deeply revered -- even among Eskimos, and Pope Pius X called her the "greatest saint of modern times."

Theresa taught us to do our ordinary actions with great love. It was in her *Little Way* of love that she discovered a swift and sure elevator to Jesus. If you find climbing stairs burdensome, her *Little Way* is the way for you too. The Church declared her a doctor of the Church because she



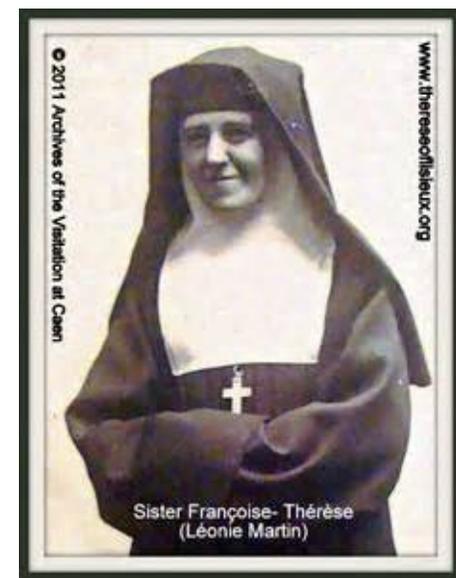
showed us how to be saints by practicing a very simple form of spiritual childhood with complete trust in God who Himself became a little Child. Unlike many living in the Fantasyland of our current culture, Theresa was firmly rooted in the reality of the present moment.

Such a great gift to me was the story of this girl's life, offered when I was so young through the Treasure Chest Comic Books. Her mother died when she was four years old. My father died when I was four years old. She was extremely sensitive as a child. I was the same way until the age of 39. In my 20s, I was a White House News correspondent. I can remember sitting in the U.S. Treasury Secretary's office waiting for a one-on-one interview feeling like crushed eggshells inside. LOL. I still gave them hell. Through deep prayer when I was a young mother, I received the grace to firmly step off the eggshells. Theresa

overcame her sensitivity at the age of 10 while suffering a terrible illness after her older sister Pauline entered the convent. Theresa felt like she lost her mother for the second time since Pauline raised her after her mother's death. She matured rapidly through that trial so that she was ready to enter Carmel when she was 15, considered a very early age to enter the convent -- even then.

That's where the similarities end. Theresa and I both wanted to be nuns. She did it. But I had career, motherhood and marriage. Theresa is a canonized saint. Her parents, Louis and Zellie Martin, are due for canonization in October 2015 in connection with the Synod on the Family.

The cause for the canonization of St. Theresa's sister,



Servant of God Leonie Martin, was opened this year. An only child, my only sister is St. Theresa herself and my only Brother is Jesus.

But now every child can have a real St. Theresa doll for his or her own big sister. Every child now has the opportunity to embark upon the *Little Way*.

Dr. Brian and Esmeralda Kiczek, founder of the [End of Abortion Movement](#), are rolling out [Dolls from Heaven](#). And the first offering is St. Theresa of Lisieux. The Kiczeks remind us that "Saints are important for our time. They teach us to be a witness for Christ."



St. Theresa is 18 inches tall, has a cloth body, and a movable, vinyl head and limbs. She comes with a child's version of her classic autobiography, "*The Story of a Soul.*" It's a paperback version called, "*I am Therese.*"

She comes with a floor-length Carmelite habit, a brown scapular, a black veil, a two-pieced white wimple and brown sandals. She also has an optional blue outfit – her Sunday best, available for purchase.

It's really rather amazing what you can accomplish with a gift like this for a child. I didn't realize the impact that the Treasure Chest Comic books had on me until I went to Lisieux, France in 2000 in my late '40s. I didn't plan it. I was on a 9-day silent retreat in Lourdes, and I signed up for the four-day trip afterwards not realizing I would go to St. Theresa's own home in Lisieux.

In fact, in my typical oblivion I was busy talking in the bus from Paris, and then suddenly I found I was in Lisieux. I can't explain adequately what happened when I reached St. Theresa's home. I actually knew every inch of the building and all the events that had occurred in each room. The house was entirely familiar – like I had been there before.



But I was not prepared for the experience. I only had one Kleenex, and I was in the little tour group with the priest leading us. How embarrassing. I spoke to no one, only wept into my horribly inadequate Kleenex. There was the fireplace where Theresa had left her shoes on Christmas Eve in 1886 in anticipation of receiving gifts from the Child Jesus, as was the custom for French children. As she went up the stairs, she overheard her father say regarding the shoes, "Well, fortunately this will be the last year (she would receive gifts)!"

Theresa had begun to cry, and then suddenly she pulled herself together and ran back downstairs, knelt by the fireplace and then unwrapped her packages as jubilantly as ever.

Later she said this was the instant that Jesus healed her of her nine-year struggle to overcome her mother's death. "In an instant Jesus, content with my good will, accomplished the work I had not been able to do in ten years," she wrote. She re-discovered the joy of self-forgetfulness: "I felt, in a word, charity enter my heart, the need to forget myself to make others happy -- since this blessed night I was not defeated in any battle, but instead I went from victory to victory and began, so to speak, 'to run a giant's course.'"

Then I went to the museum in Lisieux, and I discovered an amazing secret. They had shaved off all her hair when she entered the convent at the age of 15, and they saved it! It's in the museum. I had always assumed that St. Theresa was a brunette like me. But she had the most glorious long blond curly hair I've ever seen. With hair like that, she could have been an actress! I had always wanted to be a blond.

So naturally, I found myself standing outside her house near the statue of 13-year-old Theresa sitting on the bench with her father as she told him that she wanted to enter Carmel.



Her father tenderly picked up a little white flower, root intact, and gave it to her, explaining how carefully God brought it into being and preserved it to that day.

Theresa believed she was hearing her own story, the story of the Little Flower of Jesus. The flower seemed to be a symbol of herself destined soon to be transplanted into the soil of Carmel. I stood across from the statue, and looked at the priest leading the tour, a tall man from Goa, India. He stood behind the statue.

"Father, Father!" I yelled excitedly, "St. Theresa was a blond!" Suddenly I noticed that there were several women in our group standing around Father, and all of them were stunning blonds! He muttered quietly

something about not knowing why people think blonds are dumb... That, of course, was not why I was excited since I believed that blonds were beautiful and greatly to be envied.

Now if you order a St. Theresa doll for your daughter, niece, godchild, please do not expect her to have blond hair. The Kiczeks carefully considered the hair color and decided to go with a lovely chestnut brown because that is how she looks in most black and white pictures. But consider the wonderful surprise your grown niece, daughter or godchild will experience when they arrive in Lisieux and see the museum for the first time, suddenly learning St. Theresa was really a blond!

If you want to help the St. Theresa doll get into production this year, you need to act quickly. The Kiczeks must receive pre-orders for 120 dolls within the next 39 days in order to



meet initial production costs of \$12,000. Dolls will be delivered by Christmas if production goals are met. But if the doll is not produced, everyone's money will be returned. So far, only seven days into the campaign, the Kiczeks have raised \$1,718 from doll orders and contributions.

You can contribute or order [here](#). But be sure and watch the video about the dolls. If this year's doll campaign is successful, they hope to roll out a new saint doll each year. They have proposed drawings of St. Bernadette, Saint Pope John Paul II and St. Francis of Assisi.

But please Esmeralda and Brian, consider a St. Anthony doll at some point soon? He would look so cute holding an even smaller Child Jesus doll. For you know, St. Anthony held the Christ Child in his arms.



Did you enjoy this story? Susan Fox, the author, is a Catholic Memoirist. She uses her memories to explain the Catholic faith. Here's another one full of memories used to explain where atheism originates: [**Cradle For Atheism: Life Without Father**](#)

This contribution is available at <http://christsfaithfulwitness.blogspot.com/2015/07/dolls-from-heaven-introduce-your-child.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

"Gay Parenting:" Children Raised by Unchaste Adults Lead Difficult Lives [at Christ's Faithful Witness]

by Susan Fox



There were two innocent-looking ceramic turtles sitting on the coffee table.

The five-year-old girl studied them. Her cousins were friends with a number of artists in the 1960s. One of their friends had sculpted the turtles.

A little child is curious. So she picked up the turtles and turned them over. To her shock, underneath, they were human with male and female genitalia and breasts. They were almost pornographic in their detail.

This happened about 57 years ago. The image intrigued and bothered the little girl for a long time.

When she was six, she went into the towel closet and dug underneath the towels. She came upon a picture of her father (who had died) and her mother. They had stuck their heads into a wooden cartoon frame for the photo. It depicted an attractive lady sitting in a bathtub and a man looking at her through a window. These images had her parents' heads.

Perhaps the 1950s images were innocent and harmless, but the girl's mother had correctly understood that they were too adult for her child. That's why she hid it in under the towels, thinking the daughter would never find it.

What was the little girl doing, digging under the towels in the closet? She was hiding her Barbie doll from herself. She had correctly discerned the almost anatomically correct doll was a near occasion of sin. How funny that both mother and daughter thought to hide lustful images in the same place!

These childhood peccadillos were nothing compared to those of Dawn Stefanowicz, who was raised by a father who self-identified as gay, her sickly mother, and her father's various live-in boyfriends.

Stefanowicz, author of *Out From Under* and one of the writers for *Jephthah's Daughters: Innocent casualties in the war for family "equality,"* was raised by a weak mother and an unchaste father.

Her personal visit to the towel closet included a trip to the nudist beach at Hamlin's Point, Toronto Island, Canada. "We were the only kids there amongst all these gay males. But there would be a few females that were topless who were female models, but they were surrounded by 14-16 gay males," she said, also telling stories of vacations in Florida where she was left alone in the hotel pool while her father cruised the local "gay" hot spots.



"My father would find out about another gay cruising area, and we'd actually switch hotels 50 miles down the road," she said. Left alone with her two brothers while her father was cruising, Dawn said, "I loved that pool looking up at the starry night sky. (But) I didn't realize how lonely I felt inside, how rejected and abandoned."

Her comments in *Jephthah's Daughter's* appeared in the midst of a discussion with other adults who had been raised by same sex partners. The book covers over 70 cases of same sex parenting.

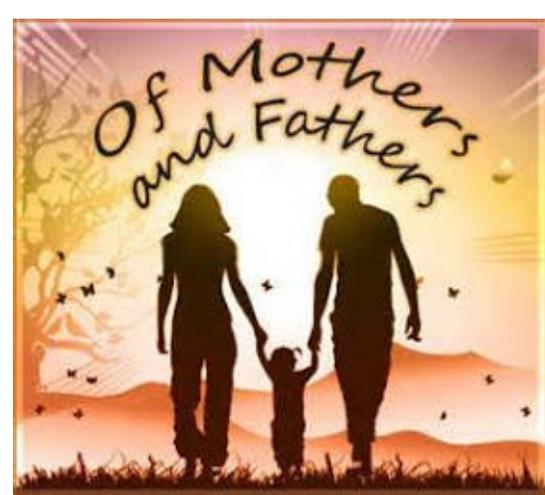
When she turned 12, Dawn had all kinds of boyfriends but in these relationships she was looking for the kind of male-affirmation that she should have gotten from her father. Self-identified "bi-sexual" Robert

Oscar Lopez, raised by two same-sex attracted females, desperately wanted a father's attention, so much so that at the age of 13 he began to prostitute himself to older men.

Lopez was fascinated by the fact that Dawn had a father, but felt fatherless. "His attention was always centered on the males in his life," she responded. "There were three key males (2 brothers, one father) in my life growing up, but there were also multiple partners that my father had, and his partners had, that they were involved with sexually. So in some ways it wasn't like a couple, it almost seemed polygamous at times because my father and his partners could be involved with 12 other men at the gay bars downtown." (*Jephthah* p. 54)

Dawn currently is a wife and mother, but she had to undergo counseling in order to learn what it means to be female. Lopez – husband and father -- also felt confused about his sexual identity growing up with two "Moms." He had a lisp, and only knew the mannerisms of women, so as a teenager he never fit in.

"What was it like when your father exposed you to gay culture?" Lopez asked Stefanowicz. "It's something where as a little girl growing up I didn't feel that my own femininity and womanhood was being affirmed, and valued, and loved. In fact, I felt it was better to be a gay male, or even a transgender male, than it was to be a little girl. I always felt that I wasn't lovable because I did not see the men in my life loving women." (*Jephthah*, p. 51)



That is the crux of the problem. Besides creating a highly sexualized environment, same sex parents are completely unable to model normal male/female roles and respect for the opposite sex. Everyone understands their identify as a child of a mother and a father, so if you treat one or the other as contemptible, the child loses his own self-respect.

About 30 percent of kids raised by same-sex parents self identify as bi-sexual or homosexual, while the number is only 2 percent in the general population. (*Jephthah*, p. 53) In fact, persons who self identify as homosexual are generally understood to be a small percentage of our population, but on June 26, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court legalized same sex "marriage," giving same sex couples de facto rights to raise

children. Therefore, the number of people, who self-identify as homosexual, is bound to grow in the future as a percentage of our population.

Stefanowicz, having interviewed and emailed numerous other kids raised by unchaste adults, believes that all of them experience some gender confusion growing up. “Almost all of us have had some level of sexual confusion. Not that we came out and labeled ourselves. But we struggled. A number of us ... there was sexual abuse. It’s a very sexualized environment (growing up with same sex parents) – not just within the home, but within the subculture that I was exposed to.” (*Jephthah* p. 53)

Raised by a single parent, who clearly understood her sexual identity as a woman, and exposed to the Catholic culture which esteems chastity, I personally have never suffered any gender confusion or insecurity in my entire life, but individuals like Dawn and Robert had the normal problems of growing up compounded by a sexual identity crisis. They had to face the question: “Who am I sexually?”

A Canadian economist Douglas Allen used Canada’s 2006 census to discover that young adult children of same-sex couples are 35 percent less likely to graduate from high school than young adult children of traditionally married opposite-sex couples. Daughters of same-sex couples do considerably worse than sons. They were 85 percent less likely to graduate than their counterparts raised in a traditional household. [Canada Study: Kids in Gay Families Hampered in School](#)

“What is known from decades of research on family structure, studying literally thousands of children, is that every departure from the traditional, stable mother-father family has severe detrimental effects upon children; and these effects persist not only into adulthood but also into the next generation,” Dr. Jeffrey Satinover was quoted in the book *Making Gay Okay: How Rationalizing Homosexual Behavior is Changing Everything* by Robert R. Reilly. “In short, the central problem with mother-mother or father-father families is that they deliberately institute, and intend to keep in place indefinitely, a family structure known to be deficient in being obligatorily and permanently either fatherless or motherless.”

The American College of Pediatricians in 2012 echoed Satinover’s findings: “Clearly apart from rare situations, depriving a child of one or both biological parents -- as same-sex parenting requires -- in every case is unhealthy.”

Some years ago, Robert Lopez had a column in his Children’s Rights blog, the English Manif, where he linked to two Disney movies that he felt clearly depicted the behavior of controlling same-sex parents. One was the suffocating “lesbian” mother in *Tangled* (think Rapunzel – literally taken



from her rightful parents and raised alone by a witch in a tower) and the other is the foster father of the hunchback Quasimodo, *Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Quasimodo's "foster father" attempts to keep him hidden and controlled by saying he would frighten people by his appearance.

When I watched those cartoons that Lopez identified as modeling gay parenthood, I realized that the characters were acting like they had stolen the children -- like they really had no right to the kids they were raising. That's why I titled this piece: "Children Raised by Unchaste *Adults*" instead of "Children Raised by Unchaste *Parents*." On a very deep level, even same sex couples understand they are not the rightful parents of the children they are raising. This makes sense since they had nothing to do with conceiving them. They used illicit means to get them: a sperm donor, an incubator or they got some idiot adoption agency to hand over a helpless child. The children in same-sex households have literally been stolen.

Understanding who is and who is not your father can bring great healing. My mother re-married when I was 18. She dated my stepfather two years before that. It probably sounds whiney -- in light of the horrors Lopez and Stefanowicz suffered -- to say my stepfather never fathered me, but my mother and I tried to shoehorn him into that relationship anyway. "Daddy" treated me like the dirt under the carpet. I no longer felt welcome in my own home despite the fact that my mother was my best friend. But by the grace of God I came to understand that my stepfather was NOT my father. He was actually my brother in Christ; I was healed of the pain caused by that relationship. God is my Father. He is the only Father, who ever welcomed me into His home. He promised to kill the fatted calf, put a ring on my finger and throw a party for my friends. Such an approach could help others saddled with "step-parents."

The American Psychological Association -- in contrast with the viewpoint of Jephthah's Daughters -- has a number of studies which finds same sex households are equally nurturing as traditional married households. The organization was taken over by the LGBT movement in the late '70s. Because the courts have largely adopted the APA propaganda, it is not unusual to find people who self-identify as homosexual naively believing that others within their same sexual lifestyle can be good parents. But Professor Loren Marks of Louisiana State University debunked the APA myths when he pointed out that "not one of the 59 studies referenced in the 2005 APA Brief compares a large, random representative sample of lesbian or gay parents and their children, with a large random, representative sample of married parents and their children."

Robert Lerner and Althea K Nagai in reviewing the same homosexual parenting studies for the Ethics and Public Policy Center reached the same conclusion: “The methods used in these studies are so flawed that these studies prove nothing. Therefore they should not be used in legal cases to make any argument about ‘homosexual vs. heterosexual’ parenting. Their claims have no basis.”

Professor Mark Regnerus, University of Texas, in his New Family Structures Study, managed to completely blow the APA studies out of the water for he used a large study sample that met the standards for research in social science. He found that children are more apt to succeed as adults “on multiple counts across a variety of domains” when they spend their entire childhood with their married mother and father, especially when the couple remains married to the present day. Unfortunately, this is becoming increasingly rare.

Children raised in same-sex households therefore are more likely to suffer outcomes similar to those from heterosexual stepfamilies and single parents. Specifically, they are more likely to be sexually abused, to be unemployed, less healthy, more depressed, more likely to have cheated on a spouse or partner, smoke more pot, have trouble with the law, have more male and female sex partners, and are more likely to reflect negatively on their childhood. (

Regnerus)

Rivka Edelman also discusses some of the creepiness of her upbringing in a same-sex household in *Jephthah's Daughters*. What most bothered her the most was her mother's obsession with her own daughter's sexuality.

“A boy would be over and she'd be like, ‘you know, I think he wants to kiss you.’ And I'd be like, ‘Yeah, so what? He can go kiss a doorknob,’” she said, “I literally just completely closed down that way. I was just completely androgynous. I never flirted with a boy ever, in my life.”

Edelman really brings the point home that children of same sex relationships are trophies in a same-sex union. They have as their primary purpose making their parents look good and normal. For the kids, there is no freedom to regret the lack of a relationship with a father or a mother.

“Children learn to role play the part of living dolls,” said Edelman, “Our parents used us as little display objects. We existed only to make our parents look good, to feed the insatiable egos that were our parents. Does that sound like a happy childhood?”

“Looking back over the past 65 years of my life, I have come to understand that child abuse is not about parents who consciously want to do irreparable damage to their children,” said Lee Taylor, who was raised by a “gay” man. His comments appeared in *Jephthah’s Daughters*, p. 73. “It’s not as if they plan ahead to turn their children’s world into a living hell. That comes quite naturally as they do their best to give what is truly theirs to give, all of the unconscious toxins which motivate their blinded lives.”

“There is not even the slightest doubt in my mind that my parents consciously wanted the very best in life for me and my brothers and sisters. There is also not the slightest doubt in my mind that they were among the most dangerous and destructive parents that any child could survive. Their lack of conscious awareness of their own psychic demons did nothing to assuage the pain and suffering of my physical, emotional, spiritual and sexual abuse. It would’ve been no less painful if they’d planned it,” Taylor concluded.

Pope Francis weighed in on the issue in a weekly papal audience: “Children also pay the price for immature unions and irresponsible separations: they are the first victims; they suffer the outcome of a culture of exaggerated individual rights, and then the children become prematurely precocious. They often absorb the violence they are not able to ‘ward off’ and before the very eyes of adults are forced to grow accustomed to degradation.” He has spoken out repeatedly against genderless “marriage” and the rights of children to have both a mother and a father wherever possible.

The American College of Pediatricians summarized the risks to children raised in same-sex households:

- Violence between same-sex partners is two to three times more common than among married heterosexual couples.
- Same-sex partnerships are more prone to dissolution than heterosexual marriages with the average homosexual relationship lasting only two to three years.
- Homosexual partners are promiscuous with serial partners even in loosely termed “committed” relationships.
- Individuals who practice the homosexual lifestyle are more likely to suffer from mental illness, substance abuse, suicide and have shorter lifespans.

In short the ACP believes that it is very hazardous for children to be raised by same-sex couples whether by adoption, foster care or artificial reproduction. (*Making Gay Okay*)

I met a self-identified homosexual man on Twitter, who thought I was very naïve to raise questions about the success of “gay” parenting. “We don’t have sex in front of our kids,” he said. But one divorced mother, whose husband dragged their kids into a homosexual household, said it was a shock to her son to see his father go into his bedroom with another man. This example alone is much more serious than a five-year-old turning over an obscene ceramic turtle lying on the coffee table.

But that's not the worst that the children suffer when they end up under the thumb of an unchaste parent in a divorce. "Their father moved into his new (male) partner's condo, which is in a complex inhabited by 16 gay men. One of the men has a 19-year-old male prostitute who comes to service him. Another man, who functions as the father figure of this community, is in his late '60s and has a boyfriend in his '20s," the man's ex-wife reported. She says her kids are taken to transgender baseball games, gay rights fundraisers and LGBT film festivals, while on Halloween their father wears make-up and sex bondage straps. For her daughter it's a very bad environment as the walls of the condo are adorned with large framed pictures of women in provocative poses. "Her father should be protecting her sexuality. Instead he is warping it," the children's mother said. It is no better for her son, who is interested in girls, but all the men around him seek sexual gratification with other men. (*Jephthah*, p. 92)

Hidden in the heart of this story is the issue of the dangers of pornography for little children. Like the mother hiding the mature image in the towels, some same sex adults do try to hide their porn. But others just leave it carelessly lying around. Robert Lopez spent a lot of time reading his mother's porn when he was growing up. Edelman and Stefanowicz discovered the same thing in their homes. Stefanowicz's father moonlighted as an underground male model for underwear in a community magazine. Of course, for her that was a drop in the bucket given that her father and his male partner tried to solicit her 14-year-old boyfriend into a three-way relationship, and then dressed her up and used her as "gay bait" in public places.

Many researchers wondered why the outcomes for kids raised in same sex households were so much worse than for children raised in traditional homes. They theorized that it was the instability and volatility of the same sex relationships. That undoubtedly had an effect.

Her mother and a succession of lovers raised Edelman. She remembers standing in the driveway when one of the more stable lovers was leaving her Mom: "She put plates on a table, with a glass, with food on the plate," Edelman recalls. "She was leaving, and I was like in the driveway, saying, 'Don't go.' And she said, 'In a few years you'll be able to get out of here.' I was in sixth grade. It was a long few years." Edelman was grateful when someone called Child Protective Services, and she and her siblings were removed from their home.

But something that is not often alluded to by the researchers is the sexualized atmosphere children endure in "homosexual" homes. No one seems to see that adult chastity is a necessary component of a healthy childhood.

I began writing this post on the Feast of St. Maria Goretti, the 11-year-old Italian girl, who was stabbed

14 times by



Allesandro Serenelli. He had become obsessed with reading pornography, and Maria refused to have carnal relations with him. That ended in her murder July 6, 1902, the Feast of the Most Precious Blood. She forgave Allesandro before she died.

Serenelli testified in relation to her canonization that Maria's concern during her stabbing was for **his own** salvation. "No, no it is a sin. God does not want this. If you do this, you will go to hell," she repeated.

One hundred and thirteen years later, young children are exposed carelessly to pornography in the home, and at school their innocence is violated by "education" -- sex education. They are growing up in highly sexualized environments, exposed to lustful images and activities long before they are able to cope. Fr. John F. Harvey, O.S.F.S., who researched homosexuality and its causes, found early porn exposure in children as young as eight contributes to homosexual lifestyle choices later in life.

Ex-gay porn star Joseph Sciambra confirmed this in his book *Swallowed by Satan*. As a practicing homosexual, he thought he was "born" that way. But he came to understand that early porn viewing contributed to his choice to self-identify as a homosexual later in life.

This evil infiltrated our children's lives in the 1950s. My uncle had a Playboy calendar in his workspace in the garage. My innocent cousin was a little girl when she walked into the garage and looked at her father's calendar. "Dad," she said, "That lady doesn't have any clothes on." As an afterthought, she added, "Daddy, she ain't got no pants either."

In the 1990s, I had my son in a parent-run pre-school. In connection with this, my husband and I had to take a class once month in childcare. Well, one month -- when my husband couldn't attend -- the topic was self-abuse. The teacher was trying to tell us not to disturb our children if they began to play with themselves.

Everyone appeared to be accepting what she was saying so I raised my hand, and asked the elderly

teacher, “If we don’t tell them to stop now, when do we tell them to stop?” She said, “Why never! It’s an excellent practice for relieving stress even for married couples when one is away for a business trip.”

I looked at the shocked faces of the 40 couples in the room with me, and said, “Do you understand what she is recommending you do?” Then I turned to the woman and said, “Madam, I am not an animal.”

Now those kids are adults. They have been taught to indulge their sexual whims without restraint. Sadly, the next generation faces further onslaughts of filth in their young lives because the U.S. Supreme Court has introduced them to same-sex households. The manure is hitting the fan. The consequences for the human race are catastrophic.

“Our culture no longer corners us into virtue,” said author Robert R. Reilly (*Making Gay Okay*) “but impels us into vice. Almost every contemporary cultural signal militates against chastity, which is why the fabric of society is falling apart.”



Did you enjoy this post? We have more!

To Hell With You? Not If We Can Help It! [at Arnobius of Sicca]

The doctrine of Hell is one that is easily distorted into portraying Christians as gleefully awaiting non-Christians to be sent there, while thinking that we have a free pass where what we do doesn't matter. While it is true that some Christians have so missed the point about what they are called to be that they *do* think this way, it is an aberration which perverts what Christianity really believes.

Far from being a cruel belief invented by a vindictive people in a way that contradicts the concept of a loving God, the concept of Hell recognizes that:

- God created us with an immortal soul
- God created us with free will to choose Him or to reject Him
- If we misuse free will in a way which rejects God, our immortal soul has to exist somewhere that is the logical result of that rejection

So, Hell is not an issue of “don't steal that cookie or you're going to burn forever!” It's a reality of, “If you choose to reject God, that decision has eternal consequences if you do not change your ways.” Peter Kreeft describes four major errors which leads people to think Hell shows that Christians are judgmental:

Those who have been hurt by the misuse of this doctrine often seem to think that those who believe in hell:

1. want hell to exist (as if doctrines were not facts but desires);
2. want humans to go there (as if Christians could want what the Devil wants!);
3. self-righteously exclude themselves from its dangers (as if Christians were Pharisees instead of saved sinners); and
4. coolly and detachedly discuss this ultimate holocaust and horror (as if missionaries were making maps of the ocean instead of throwing out the life boat).

All four assumptions are false, of course—in fact, hellish distortions. If Christians follow Christ, they will give anything to save humanity from hell, because that is what Christ did.

The third cavil above is the most devastating, if true—but it is not. Christian teachers have repeatedly made the point C. S. Lewis makes to conclude his chapter on hell in *The Problem of Pain*: “In all our discussions of hell we should keep steadily before our eyes the possible damnation, not of our enemies nor our friends ... but of ourselves. This chapter is not about your wife or son, nor about Nero or Judas Iscariot; it is about you and me.” That is the proper use of the doctrine of hell.

[Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to*

So, when we stand up and say something is morally wrong, we're not acting out of hatred of sinners any more than the person who puts a "Danger! Bridge Out Ahead!" acts out of hatred for motorists. Indeed, if the distortions Kreeft listed were true, we wouldn't be *warning* people against sin. We'd be watching with smug satisfaction and take bets on how each individual was going to crash and burn. But such behavior is actually monstrous in the eyes of Christians who understand their faith.

The fact is, the Church did not invent Hell. Jesus is the one who warns us about Hell and warns us to turn back to Him. If we're faithful to Him, we will carry out that mission on informing people of the danger and trying to turn them to the one who *can* save them—even if it makes us unpopular in the process. So when you call Christians "hateful," ask yourself this: If we *really* hated you, would we go through all the discomfort of being hated by letting you know what we believe would benefit you? Does that make any sense? Something to keep in mind.

This contribution is available at <http://arnobius-of-sicca.blogspot.com/2015/07/to-hell-with-you-not-if-we-can-help-it.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Reconnecting with a Friend is an Unexpected Gift [at Catholic Review]

A free hour appeared magically at the end of my day, and I was more than a little giddy about how I could fill it. I finally decided to be both practical and indulgent and go to Wegman's.



After picking up two sunflower plants—those were on the list, right?—I found myself strolling, footloose and child-free, through the bakery.

Suddenly I heard a voice say, “That can’t be Rita Beyer.”

Beyer hasn’t been my name for almost 11 years. Standing behind the bakery counter was John, a former coworker I hadn’t seen since before my wedding day.

I was so happy to see him.



“I was just talking about you!” I said. Earlier that day while enjoying lunch with my coworkers, I had started talking about the workload John and I had shared all those years ago. I couldn’t believe my colleague from 13 years ago was standing in front of me.

From about 1999 to 2002, John and I were the entire Hanover/Adams County Bureau for the *York (Pa.) Dispatch and Sunday News*.



A boy I interviewed for a story made that balloon duck for me.

We had a tiny office with two desks, a kind elderly landlord, high expectations from our editors who

managed us from afar, a vast geographic area to cover, and a bathroom with wallpaper so wonderful I photographed it—back at a time when people didn't take pictures of everything.



I can't believe I can find this photo and not the one of us standing outside the building.

I was in my early 20s, so thrilled to be a real newspaper reporter that I hardly cared whether I was paid, and I was working alongside a reporter who was more than twice my age.

John was hoping to buy a Harley and I was covering my apartment walls with my flyswatter collection—but we shared a space, a sense of humor, and a passion for reporting and storytelling.



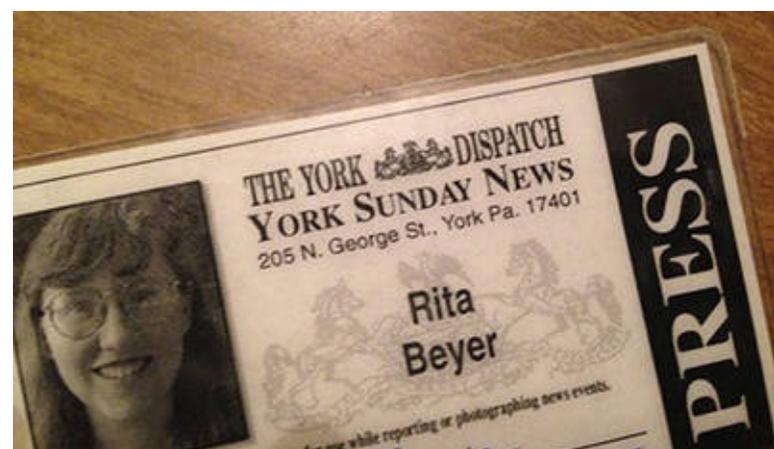
See how beautiful my flyswatters were hanging on the walls of my apartment way back then?

John and I hadn't talked in more than a decade, and many times I have wondered how he was doing—and even looked for him on social media. It took a trip to the grocery store to find him. Here we were swapping updates on our families, our homes, our jobs, and our lives.

We reminisced about the Ice Cream Museum—a storefront full of empty ice cream containers—and our landlord, Mr. Murphy, who has since passed on. Then we talked about our newspaper work, which was rewarding and fun but also grueling and challenging.

“I’ll always remember what you said,” he said—and I was completely puzzled, wondering what insight I could ever have had that he would recall 13 years later. “You said, ‘This job is hard enough without them making it even harder.’”

Huh. I have no memory of saying that about our editors, but it was true. Isn't it surprising how well your words and actions can be remembered by those you encounter?



My old press pass

As I drove home, I thought of how easily we connect and reconnect with former and new friends on social media. Yet, there was something so truly remarkable about meeting a friend again, after so many years, in person.

Even though John has been working at Wegman's for years, and I shop there every six weeks or so, our paths have never crossed. And they shouldn't have crossed that day.

John wasn't supposed to be working that shift, and I never shop there at that time of day. Yet there we were, standing among the baked goods laughing and exchanging memories, as customers shopping for bread smiled and paused to chat.



It was just like old times. Still, as I was sharing pictures of our boys and we were talking about all that has happened in the past 13 years, I realized no, no, it's not. It's actually better.

7/28/2015 11:16:39 PM

By

This contribution is available at <http://catholicreview.org/blogs/open-window/2015/07/28/reconnecting-with-a-friend-is-an-unexpected-gift>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Method of Praying the Rosary of the Mater Dolorosa

Over this past weekend, I experienced for my first time a silent retreat focused on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola led by [Miles Christi](#). The retreat came at the perfect time, which has renewed and reformed my prayer life. It also gave me some rather excellent insights and resolutions on how to minister to the parish.

As I viewed the retreat schedule on Saturday morning, I noticed that there was a Rosary set for a particular time, but it was something I had never heard of before – the Rosary of the Mater Dolorosa. I knew that Mater Dolorosa meant Sorrowful Mother, but I never heard of this rosary nor had I prayed it before. I should note that Miles Christi has a particular devotion to Mary under this title and considers her one of their [Heavenly Guardians](#).

The devotion to the [Mother of Sorrows](#) has its origins in the beginning of the Church. At the foot of the cross, we see St. John the Apostle with Mary in Sorrow as she weeps for the death of her Son on the cross.

It was always part of the traditions of the Church, however, it was on Good Friday 1239 where Our Lady appeared to the founder of the Order of Servites and requested that a religious community be founded upon this devotion. Their lives should be of prayer and penance. The first seven men all had dynamic devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary. On request of Our Lady, the seven men of the Servites began to meditate on the seven sorrowful accounts of Our Lady's life in relation to Jesus Christ's Passion and Death. It is here where the Chaplet (or Little Rosary) of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary developed.

Countless saints and Doctors of the Church have praised this Rosary, among them St. Albert the Great, St. Bridget, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and St. Alphonsus Ligouri. In 1724, Pope Benedict XIII, promulgated and fortified the practice of this devotion when he conferred many indulgences when this rosary is recited by the faithful.



The Seven Sorrows of Our Lady are the following:

1. [The Prophecy of Holy Simeon](#)
2. [The Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt](#)
3. [The Loss of the Child Jesus in the Temple](#)
4. The Encounter of Jesus with His Blessed Mother as He Carries the Cross
5. The Crucifixion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ and Mary at the Foot of the Cross
6. The Descent from the Cross, and Jesus in the Arms of His Most Blessed Mother.
7. The Burial of Our Lord, and the Loneliness of the Blessed Virgin.

The Method of Praying the Rosary of the Mater Dolorosa –

V. In the name of the Father...I believe in God... R. I believe in the Holy Spirit...

V. Our Father... R. Give us this day...

V. Hail Mary... R. Holy Mary... (Recited 3 times)

V. Glory be to the Father... R. As it was...

Today we will meditate on the Sorrows of our Lady.

In the *first* sorrow let us contemplate *The Prophecy of Holy Simeon*.

V. Our Father... R. Give us this day...

V. Hail Mary... R. Holy Mary... (Recited 7 times)

V. Glory be to the Father... R. As it was...

Fatima Prayer: O my Jesus, forgive us our sins. Save us from the fires of hell. Lead all souls to heaven, especially those in most need of Thy mercy!

In the *second* sorrow let us contemplate...

At the end of the seventh sorrow say:

Let us pray for the intentions of the Holy Father, in order to obtain the holy indulgences (*Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be*)

V. Hail Holy Queen... R. Mother of Mercy...

The Holy See has granted to the members and to all the faithful in some way linked to Miles Christi, the same indulgences granted to the standard Rosary (Loreto).

The [Litany of the Mater Dolorosa](#) may be recited at the end of the Rosary.

This Rosary may be prayed on Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays.

There are rosary beads that accompany this prayer, but at this time I can't locate any online. If you know where we can purchase them, let me know in the comment box and I will update this blog post.

Update: Here are a two sites you can purchase the Mater Dolorosa Rosary. Thank you to my readers who suggested these sites. [Immaculee's Website](#) and [Gifts Catholic Inc.](#)

Update #2: One of our awesome parishioners, and also a friend of mine, dropped off a Seven Sorrows Rosary to me at the parish office. Thank you Maggie!

Our Mother of Sorrows...Pray For Us.

Sources:

Prayers. Miles Christi, 2013. Third Edition.

The Devotion of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Fatima.org.

This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2015/06/29/mondays-with-mary-the-method-of-praying-the-rosary-of-the-mater-dolorosa/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

We all have a place at the Lord's table [at A Moment From De Sales]



“Sit down with us. There’s plenty of room.” My Mother often greeted visitors with these words as she pointed to the supper table. My Mother always made certain that she had enough food to share with friends, and any others who may join us at our table. She had a gift for *making all feel welcome*, but most of all she made *everyone also feel that it was “not a bother.”*

My Mom’s attitude modeled Jesus for me. As we know through Scripture, Jesus “found” food for the five thousand who came to hear Him preach. Or when simply inviting sinners to join him for dinner, *Jesus always made room*. But most of all, Jesus showed it “*was not a bother.*” In fact, Jesus’s mission was to make room for everyone at His Father’s table, and to show every guest it was not a bother for His Father either.

As my Mother loved to see people around her table, she made them truly feel that it was her honor to serve them. Jesus came for these same reasons. He wanted all to be reconciled with His Father and have them smile as they dined on the food of God’s mercy. This seems to be the most delightful part of His ministry. Jesus loved it and it was never “a bother,” even when He died for us.

In this way, Jesus is showing us how He found room, even for those who arrived unexpectedly or empty-handed, and He wants us also to find places in our homes and hearts to feed the hungers of those we meet along our way. This is the hospitality God sent Jesus to share, because truly it is God’s hospitality in the first place.

When Jesus shows up unexpectedly and asks us to do something for Him, will we be willing and ready? When Jesus sends someone to sit at our table, because they are thirsty for love or hungry for direction, do we ask them to sit down and share in the abundance of our time and space? Or when celebrating an achievement or personal accomplishment, do we make room for Jesus to sit down and share in our success and good fortune? We know it is because Jesus feeds us first, we can share in our everyday joys!

There are many ways, we can make room for Jesus in our lives. As my Mom demonstrated, we can do it by sharing our table and the goodness of our hearts to those in need or in the countless other ways Jesus desires. ***So why not turn to Jesus today and say warmly “Sit down. There’s plenty of room!”***

Strawberry Pigtails Forever [at Raising Angels]

Last night during mass, the deacon reminded us what a gift it is to come to church. Before mass starts, we are asked to turn off all electronic devices. “For one whole hour, you

get

to turn the world off,” he explained. “For one hour, we get to leave it all behind and concentrate on Jesus. Let’s do that now for just a moment. Close your eyes and just take it all in.” The church was silent for one glorious moment. I breathed deeply and sucked it in – the quiet, the peace, the contentment.

After mass, we met some family members at a restaurant Aiden requested for his birthday dinner. It was 6:30 on a Saturday night and the wait was over an hour. Although it was hot, no one was bothered. I took the kids to peruse the gift shop and then met everyone at the outdoor bar. Felicity had been sitting in the lap of Nelson’s aunt, but by the time I reached her, she was done. It had been a long car ride followed by mass and she was ready to move.

I excused myself from the group to take her for a walk and noticed that the music we had been listening to was live. We meandered through the tables and found a nice open spot right in front of the musician. Felicity is my music lover. She starts dancing when she hears anything with a beat, and at her age, being in front of a multitude of strangers didn’t hinder her at all.

He was singing “Strawberry Fields Forever” and she was dipping, swaying, and rocking to the beat with total abandon. She threw both arms up in the air and spun around. She took a few steps forward, and then back, and repeated in time with the music. She ran from one end of the boardwalk to the other trying out new moves grinning from ear to ear. She was the only one dancing and instantly the center of attention. Before long she was standing at the foot of the stage staring up into the singer's eyes, smiling and bobbing up and down. Honestly, he had a hard time singing though his own giggles. She made such an impression that the next time the chorus came around, he was singing, “Strawberry pigtails forever.”

It was precious to watch. I wanted to take out my phone and record the whole thing. Really, it was so stinking cute; if you got to see her, you would have seen why he chose his next song and dedicated it to her. I thought about taking out that phone and then the deacon’s words came back to me. “You

get

to leave the world behind.”

I knew that if I got my phone out, I would miss the moment while trying to record it. Don't get me wrong, I am the record keeper for the family. I record most every moment. But watching the moment through the tiny screen doesn't allow you to experience the moment.

I made a simple decision standing next to a palm tree growing through the boardwalk in front of that tiny stage. I decided to enjoy the moment instead of recording it. I watched my baby revel in the rhythm of the music. I watched the unadulterated joy exude from her entire being. At one point she bent in half and placed both hands on the ground while extending one leg in the air behind her. On the next beat, she stood and kicked that same leg up in the air. It was an amazing move for a 20 month old and I was in awe. She didn't care what anyone thought, she found the beat and let it move her. When people were walking past or trying to get around her, it didn't encumber her moves at all. “Let them walk around,” she must have been thinking. “I'm dancing!”

There wasn't one person who encountered this little redheaded, pig-tailed beauty with a knockout smile, gigantic dimples, and squeezable chubbiness, who didn't smile right back at her. Her joy was contagious. And I stood there with a smile bigger than hers and took it all in. So many times in the drudgery of daily life, I forget how much fun it is to have this unexpected toddler in my life. But last night, I drank it in and thanked God that this child is mine. There were no other kids around for me to keep an eye on. I didn't get distracted trying to video or post something. It was just me, watching her, enjoying the pure happiness of the moment.

It was a good decision I plan on making more often.

This contribution is available at <http://raisingangels.blogspot.com/2015/07/strawberry-pigtails-forever.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Secret That Sister Assumpta Never Told Me! [at Association of Pauline Cooperators]



I

first met Sr. Assumpta Catalucci, FSP, at a “Birthday Party for Jesus” that she and the other Daughters of St. Paul had organized for their book and media center here in St. Louis. She had never met my five children before, but she ushered them in from the blowing snow and warmed them instantly with her welcoming smile. In what I would soon learn is her joyful, Energizer-Bunny-level energy, she led them to a life-size manger scene, where she helped Jeff Jr. dress as Joseph, Elizabeth as a Christmas Angel, John and Tom as shepherds, and Anne Marie as Mary. All five gathered around Baby Jesus in the manger and had their picture taken. Sr. Denise Cecilia brought out a huge sheet cake covered in thick, blue icing with the words, “Happy Birthday, Jesus” proclaimed boldly across the top. The children all sat around Sr. Carmen Christi singing Christmas carols. Finally, Sr. Assumpta pulled up a chair and read the Nativity story from Luke’s Gospel to us all. The children were each given an individually wrapped present as they put their coats on to leave the warmth of the Pauline Books & Media Center.

I began to frequent the center more often to visit the chapel, talk with the awesome Sisters, and look for books for my wife and me and movies for the family. Sr. Assumpta and the other Daughters of St. Paul seemed to know me well enough that they could always recommend a book that I needed at the time. I talked about my family so often, that the Sisters frequently asked about each by name. As my sons and daughters grew into adolescence and young adulthood, my paternal worries grew and multiplied. I needed many more books from the psychology, self-help, spirituality, and I’m-so-confused-I-don’t-know-what-I-need sections of the bookstore.



I recall Sr. Assumpta one afternoon explaining to me that when she is not really sure where to find answers, she turns to Jesus in the Gospel and in the tabernacle. She even shared with me a quote by Blessed Father James Alberione, the founder of the Pauline Family, which includes the Daughters of St. Paul and the Pauline Cooperators. He advised, “When you are sad, open the Scriptures and you will find the passage that will console you. Do the same in times of doubt and fear. During every uncertainty or anxiety, the saints went to this font.” My only serious voyages into the Gospel, other than hearing the readings at Mass, came from doing just that. I was embarrassed to admit that I would just randomly pick a spot in the Bible, but if it was good enough for a beatified founder of a religious order, I was not as far off track as I thought.

After making longer visits to the chapel, praying more regularly, and becoming good friends with the blue nuns, I developed a true desire to not just know my Catholic faith better, but more specifically to know Jesus better. The Sisters taught me that Pauline spirituality is not just knowing about Jesus, it’s simply knowing Jesus. And when we know Jesus, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, we cannot help but want to share him with the world.

One Advent, I discussed with Sr. Assumpta how I really wanted to read more to prepare for Christmas. I asked her for recommendations about books, CDs, DVDs, or online Pauline blogs or podcasts that would help me to really know Christ better. She recommended that instead of studying so much, I should set aside time during that Advent to sit quietly, in front of the Blessed Sacrament when possible, or even at home, and just listen to what the Divine Master has to teach me. I was trying too hard to teach myself, when I simply needed to listen. That was my best Advent ever. And when Christmas arrived, Sr. Assumpta gave me the best Christmas present I have ever received – a beautiful black leather Bible to which she painstakingly and perfectly attached 73 index tabs, making it easy for me to find every book of the Bible.

We have several Bibles in our house, but Sr. Assumpta’s Bible sits on the table next to my chair in the family room. The black leather cover is becoming well worn, as are many of the pages. I read at least a little of it every day. Sometimes I try to read an entire book through (from which I learned that St. Paul’s letter to the Romans is my favorite). Sometimes I simply open to a random page and find myself amazed at how the words speak to my needs at the time.

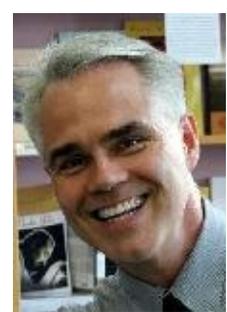


Last Monday morning I sat in my chair, set my coffee on the coaster, and opened my Bible to begin reading John’s Gospel. I was surprised not by the familiar words, “In the beginning was the Word: the Word was with God and the Word was God” (John 1:1), but rather by the realization of just how much I have come to love Sacred Scripture. The Bible excites me and makes me want to share it with everyone. I smiled as I wondered how Sr. Assumpta instilled in me such a love for the Gospel, and I immediately knew the answer.

Sr. Assumpta's secret is that she never told me that I should read the Gospel. Instead, she showed my family and me what it means to live the Gospel. From sharing the Gospel message with preschoolers at a Birthday Party for Jesus to leading book studies and discussions for the octogenarians in the Senior Lecture Series, she loves the Word of God infectiously. Her non-stop crazy-busy days, her inspirational advice, and her love of every neighbor are all ways she exemplifies a Gospel centered life to the world. So do all the Daughters of St. Paul. They bring Jesus to each of us by living the Gospel every day of their lives and inviting us to share in their Gospel joy.

So in my prayer, I ask myself and Christ how I can do the same. That's my secret. What's yours?

Photos: Jeffrey E. Mathews



Jeffrey E. Mathews, MD, has been a Pauline Cooperator since October 11, 2009. He and his wife, Carolyn, live in St. Louis, MO, and consider themselves blessed to have three sons and two daughters, two of whom still live at home. Dr. Mathews, a gastroenterologist, has a love for languages. He has studied French and Chinese in the past and he is currently studying to become more fluent in Spanish.

This contribution is available at <http://paulinelait.com/2015/07/the-secret-that-sister-assumpta-never.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Tyranny of Radical Secularism [at Justin's Corner]

by Justin Soutar

A Dangerous Cultural Shift

Unfortunately, the United States—a Christian country and the traditional leader of the free world—is now being gradually transformed into a radically secular nation, partly through the increasing moral relativism and religious indifference of its own people, and partly through the aggressive efforts of radically secularist activists in the fields of government and politics, education, and culture. President Barack Obama is the most obvious symbol of this dangerous cultural shift. Prior to becoming president and throughout his years in office, President Obama has consistently exhibited contempt for the Christian faith and its adherents unlike any other president in American history. During his 2008 presidential election campaign, then-Senator Barack Obama derisively referred to Middle Americans as those “who cling to their guns and their Bibles.” He couldn’t have summed up better his contemptuous disregard for our First and Second Amendment rights.

Obama is the first president in

U.S.

history to invite members of the radically secularist Freedom from Religion Foundation and American Atheists to dinner at the White House. When he went to speak at

Georgetown University

(a Catholic institution) in 2009, he had the “IHS” symbol behind the podium covered with a cloth. At Christmas of 2009, President Obama considered removing the traditional manger scenes from the White House and offered tree ornaments depicting mass murderer Mao Zedong. When he held a memorial service for the victims of the shooting of Representative Gabrielle Giffords in

Arizona

in January of 2011, the service was held in a basketball gym instead of in a church. His administration has effectively gutted faith from faith-based initiatives and turned a blind eye to increasing attacks on religious liberty around the world. Worst of all, President Obama’s healthcare reform law enacted in 2010, the Affordable Care Act, authorizes the Department of Health and Human Services to force most businesses and charitable organizations—including nearly all religious institutions—to provide health insurance plans that cover contraception, sterilization, and abortion-inducing drugs, even if this violates their moral consciences or religious beliefs, under penalty of heavy fines. In 2012, President Obama publicly declared his support for the legal recognition of homosexual “marriage” alongside traditional marriage. On at least five occasions, when quoting the Declaration of Independence, Obama has said that “we are endowed with certain unalienable rights,” deliberately omitting the phrase “by our Creator.” He has repeatedly failed to mention God in his official Thanksgiving messages. Once he even mocked Congress for reaffirming

America

's trust in God through a Congressional resolution, arguing that it was a waste of time. And he has done nothing whatsoever to defend and assist the persecuted Christians of the

Middle East

, who are now well on the way to extinction.

President Obama's fanatical secularism is also clearly manifest in his administration's unprecedented promotion of abortion. Early in 2009, only a massive outcry from the American people prevented Congress from passing the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA), which Obama had promised Planned Parenthood that he would sign; had this bill become law, it would have demolished all state restrictions on abortion, created an unlimited "right to abortion" supported by government entitlement, and forced all physicians to perform abortions. Although FOCA was defeated, a substantial chunk of Obama's abortion agenda has found its way into ObamaCare and the unconstitutional HHS mandate, both of which have yet to be completely overturned.

No president in history has ever exhibited such utter contempt for the Christian religion and its followers, much less while claiming to be a Christian himself. President Obama has clearly shown himself to be a genuine radical secularist—an enemy of God and religion, an enemy of the American people, and a traitor to our country.

The Battle for America's Future

So where are we at in

America

today? The answer is that we, the people of the United States, are at war with our radically secularist enemies for the preservation of our traditional national culture and heritage. On the one hand, we have a small but powerful elite group of militant secularists determined to foist their evil agenda on our country through the news and entertainment media, educational institutions, the courts, and the federal government. This agenda includes removing all references to God from official government texts, from our currency, from our public schools, and from public property. It includes government mandated, taxpayer-funded "health insurance coverage" of abortifacients, contraception, and sterilization in violation of the moral law, our religious liberties, and our moral conscience rights. It includes the redefinition of marriage by the courts to place same-sex "marriage" on a legal par with traditional marriage. And it includes the legalization of euthanasia as a basic "human right" to lighten the growing burden of the elderly and the terminally ill on society. Along with this radically secularist agenda being forced on our country from the top down, there is a gradual weakening of Christian faith and culture among the general population; a proliferation of materialistic and hedonistic attitudes along with widespread moral relativism and religious indifference; and growing percentages of nonreligious people and minority faiths and sects such as Islam and the occult.

On the other hand, however, in our nation today there are also many pockets of devout Christian individuals and families who understand and appreciate America's Christian heritage and who are working hard to restore, preserve, inculcate and hand on the traditional religious and moral values that

made our country great. The Catholic Church in America and the more traditional Christian denominations are growing. The massive pro-life movement, which now includes a majority of the American people, is shutting down more abortion clinics and saving more innocent lives each year through prayer and fasting, public outreach, charitable assistance, and political activism. Public opposition to the Obama administration's anti-life mandate has been vigorous and sustained. Many Americans, aghast at the radical secularists' push to eliminate God and Christianity from public life, are joining various Catholic and Christian activist organizations such as Fidelis, Patriot Voices, and the Faith and Freedom Coalition to make their voices heard. A large minority of Americans still believe that marriage is exclusively the union of a man and a woman, and more than thirty states have enacted voter-approved laws preserving this traditional legal definition of marriage. And the spectacular Republican landslide victories in the 2014 Congressional and gubernatorial elections were a clear signal of widespread public disapproval with the direction in which President Obama and his secular fundamentalist allies are leading this country.

Secular fundamentalism is continuing to gain ground in America today at least in part due to bad Catholics. Take, for instance, "Catholic" politicians such as Vice President Joe Biden and Representative Nancy Pelosi who abuse their authority to sanction the mass murder of the innocent unborn and legal same-sex "marriage." But then there are also the millions of "Catholic" voters who keep putting these radically secularist politicians in office—so-called "Catholics" who for decades have been having abortions, using artificial contraception and sterilization, and getting divorces at rates similar to those of the general public. If it wasn't for his dissident Catholic allies such as Biden, Pelosi and Kathleen Sebelius, former head of the HHS, as well as the millions of Catholics who tolerate legalized abortion and have no problem with birth control, President Obama's anti-life agenda would never have gotten as far as it has. If American Catholics faithfully practiced their Church's teachings in both public and private life, we would have a very different country today—a place where militant secularism wouldn't stand a chance. Benedict XVI put it this way: "There can be no doubt that a more consistent witness on the part of

America

's Catholics to their deepest convictions would make a major contribution to the renewal of society as a whole."

[2]

The Challenge of Radical Secularism

On January 19, 2012, addressing a group of Catholic bishops from the United States during their *ad limina*

visit to Rome, Pope Benedict XVI made the following remarks about the threat to American culture and society posed by radical secularism:

One of the most memorable aspects of my Pastoral Visit to the United States was the opportunity it afforded me to reflect on America's historical experience of religious freedom, and specifically the relationship between religion and culture. At the heart of every culture, whether perceived or not, is a consensus about the nature of reality and the moral good, and thus about the conditions for human flourishing. In America, that consensus, as enshrined in your nation's founding documents, was grounded in a worldview shaped not only by faith but a commitment to certain ethical principles deriving from

nature and nature's God. Today that consensus has eroded significantly in the face of powerful new cultural currents which are not only directly opposed to core moral teachings of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but increasingly hostile to Christianity as such.

For her part, the Church in the United States is called, in season and out of season, to proclaim a Gospel which not only proposes unchanging moral truths but proposes them precisely as the key to human happiness and social prospering. To the extent that some current cultural trends contain elements that would curtail the proclamation of these truths, whether constricting it within the limits of a merely scientific rationality, or suppressing it in the name of political power or majority rule, they represent a threat not just to Christian faith, but also to humanity itself and to the deepest truth about our being and ultimate vocation, our relationship to God. When a culture attempts to suppress the dimension of ultimate mystery, and to close the doors to transcendent truth, it inevitably becomes impoverished and falls prey, as the late Pope John Paul II so clearly saw, to reductionist and totalitarian readings of the human person and the nature of society.

The pontiff then issued a prophetic warning:

In the light of these considerations, it is imperative that the entire Catholic community in the United States

come to realize the grave threats to the Church's public moral witness presented by a radical secularism which finds increasing expression in the political and cultural spheres. The seriousness of these threats needs to be clearly appreciated at every level of ecclesial life. Of particular concern are certain attempts being made to limit that most cherished of American freedoms, the freedom of religion. Many of you have pointed out that concerted efforts have been made to deny the right of conscientious objection on the part of Catholic individuals and institutions with regard to cooperation in intrinsically evil practices. Others have spoken to me of a worrying tendency to reduce religious freedom to mere freedom of worship without guarantees of respect for freedom of conscience.

On the following day,

January 20, 2012

, the radical secularism of which the pope had spoken reared its ugly head in our land. Overturning more than two centuries of profound government respect for religious liberties and moral conscience rights in accord with the Constitution and natural law, against the expressed will of the people, and in a direct attack on the Judeo-Christian religious and moral values on which our country is built, the Obama administration announced that nearly all health insurance plans

must

include abortifacients, artificial contraceptives, and sterilization procedures, regardless of religious or moral objection to these anti-life items. This unprecedented edict, which is still on the books as of this writing despite a slew of court injunctions and exemptions, has nothing to do with the public health and everything to do with the sale of anti-life drugs and procedures for the benefit of large abortion, pharmaceutical, and insurance companies that back the Obama administration. In its disastrous attempt to nationalize our healthcare system, the private interests of a few have trumped concern for the common

good, and as a result, the human rights and dignity of tens of millions of innocent Americans have been sacrificed to the false god of money. Corruption and radical secularism frequently go hand in hand.

The fact that the U.S. Supreme Court ruled both the Affordable Care Act and the HHS mandate constitutional in June of 2012 should serve as a painful warning that the Constitution itself, detached from the religious and moral framework in which it was written and meant to be interpreted, is utterly powerless to protect or guarantee our rights and freedoms. John Adams wrote: “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.”

[3]

In 1781, in his

Notes on that State of Virginia,

Thomas Jefferson asked: “Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the Gift of God?” If our leaders don’t believe that human rights—especially the rights to life and religious liberty—come from our Creator, then those rights will be perceived as coming from the state and the state will claim the authority to give or take them away as it sees fit. And if they don’t believe that it is wrong to legally deprive an innocent person of those rights, then no American’s rights will be guaranteed under the law and the door is wide open to atheistic totalitarian rule.

Benedict XVI identified what is needed to meet the challenge of radical secularism in

America

:

Here once more we see the need for an engaged, articulate and well-formed Catholic laity endowed with a strong critical sense vis-à-vis the dominant culture and with the courage to counter a reductive secularism which would delegitimize the Church’s participation in public debate about the issues which are determining the future of American society.

[4]

For too long now, we American Catholics have cowardly permitted our radically secularist foes to dictate the rules of engagement for the discussion of pressing religious and moral issues, and they are now exploiting our weakness in this regard to strengthen and expand their illegitimate occupation of the public square. We must take back what rightly belongs to us. Specifically, we must articulate a clear defense of the natural moral law written by God in all human hearts, revealed to Israel in the Ten Commandments of the Decalogue, and fully revealed in Jesus Christ and His Church. We must show how this divinely revealed moral compass guided the Founders in charting the course of our nation, and that it is adherence to the law of God that makes us a great nation. We must show how the Ten Commandments, together with the ancient Roman language and law, form the basis of our modern legal system. We must explain how former

U.S.

laws against abortion, obscenity and pornography were grounded in the objective moral law, and why our nation should enact such laws once again notwithstanding faulty judicial decisions to the contrary. We must demonstrate the universal and unchanging nature of this objective moral law by highlighting its ubiquitous presence in societies and cultures throughout human history. We must show how adherence to the moral law has enabled peoples and nations to flourish and become great (e.g. ancient

Rome

, medieval

Europe

, modern

America

)—and how conversely, abandonment of the moral law has led to the decline and destruction of once-great nations (e.g. ancient

Carthage

, modern Communist countries).

Freedom to act in accord with the natural moral law is the most basic, the most fundamental of all human rights—even more fundamental than freedom of religion and freedom of conscience, for religion and conscience can both be abused to justify grave violations of the moral law. The HHS mandate and legal recognition of same-sex “marriage” don’t just violate the religious and conscience rights of American believers; even more fundamentally, they violate the natural law and the right of all Americans as human beings to act in accordance with it. By moving beyond a somewhat shallow and subjective “religious liberties and moral conscience rights” approach to a deeper, more profound way of reasoning based on the objective truth of the natural law itself, our logic will resonate not only with fellow American Catholics but also with all people of goodwill in America and beyond, thus enabling us to recruit a broader coalition of allies and mount a more united and effective challenge to the militant secularists within our gates. While defending our specific religious liberties and moral conscience rights as Catholic Americans, we must also defend the timeless freedom of all Americans and all peoples to act in accord with “the laws of nature and nature’s God.”

Conclusion

Due to their

a priori

rejection of absolute religious and moral truth, radical secularists mistakenly view the Christian religion and the Judeo-Christian moral system as purely human inventions rather than as divinely revealed transcendent truths. They offer twenty-first-century America the same temptation to which Adam and Eve succumbed in the Garden of Eden at the dawn of human history—the temptation to reject God and decide

for ourselves what is good and what is evil. Militant secularists may present themselves as champions of secularism, freedom, tolerance, and pluralism, but history warns us that the implementation of their ideology would crush American secularism, freedom, tolerance, and pluralism under the boots of a dangerous tyranny. Where absolute religious and moral truth is rejected, nothing is left but a “dictatorship of relativism” and a ruthless Darwinian struggle for power. When man cuts himself off from God, he loses his way and becomes a monster. None are more keenly aware of this fact than those who have survived the terror and brutality of radically secularist regimes.

“When God is put aside, the world becomes an inhospitable place for man,” remarked Benedict XVI during his visit to Cuba in 2012.

"The Russian Church, which has paid in millions of lives for the godless Soviet experiment, can and must testify before the adherents of militant secularism to the fact that a society torn from its spiritual roots and faith has no future," solemnly declared

Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev,

a prominent leader of the Russian Orthodox Church who grew up in the Soviet Union, at a religious conference in London in 2014. "A world without God, without absolute moral values rooted in divine revelation, irrevocably turns into the realm of the rule of slavery and lawlessness."[\[5\]](#)

Ultimately, the religious identity of a nation is rooted in the religious character of its individual citizens. Government institutions alone, however well-intentioned and contrived, cannot protect and ensure that identity. As Pope Benedict XVI reminded us in his second encyclical

Spe Salvi (Saved by Hope),

“man's freedom is always new and he must always make his decisions anew...Freedom presupposes that in fundamental decisions, every person and every generation is a new beginning.” As an “eclipse of God” casts its shadow over our era and mankind finds itself lured once again by the temptation to assert its own self-sufficiency, the United States and the world need Christians—especially Catholics—who have the courage to let the light of Christ shine through them to every corner of society. Clearly, the outcome of the cultural war for America’s future will depend in large measure on the religious and moral character of its people, the vast majority of whom still profess the Christian faith.

It is a cornerstone of modern evolutionary thought that human societies tend to develop gradually over time from dictatorships into democracies. But in his classic historical work

The Everlasting Man,

G. K. Chesterton pointed out that the opposite is true:

If there is one fact we really can prove, from the history that we really do know, it is that despotism can be a development, often a late development and very often indeed the end of societies that have been highly democratic. A despotism may almost be defined as a tired democracy. As fatigue falls on a community, the citizens are less inclined for that eternal vigilance which has truly been called the price of

liberty; and they prefer to arm only one single sentinel to watch the city while they sleep. It is also true that they sometimes needed him for some sudden and militant act of reform; it is equally true that he often took advantage of being the strong man armed to be a tyrant like some of the Sultans of the East...But the spirit that endures the mere cruelties and caprices of an established despot is the spirit of an ancient and settled and probably stiffened society, not the spirit of a new one.

[6]

With the ideology of radical secularism being aggressively promoted by an elite few in government, academia, and the media and increasingly accepted in American culture, in the early twenty-first century the United States has begun the process of detaching itself from its Christian roots and sliding gradually into the shadow of totalitarianism. There is hope for the future survival of our country to the extent that we the people—individually and as a nation—place our trust in God and remain vigilant, united in our determination to fight this dangerous ideology until it is defeated. We must pray for the conversion of our radically secularist politicians, professors, media pundits, and cultural leaders. We must confront them in the public square, exposing the errors of their pernicious worldview and working to halt their evil agenda. We must rediscover the Founders’ vision of a secular, free, tolerant, and pluralistic

Christian

society in which church and state coexist harmoniously. We must unstintingly defend our inalienable human rights given to us by our Creator, especially the rights to life and liberty and the right to act in accord with the natural moral law. We must return to and explicitly reaffirm America’s profoundly Christian identity and her great tradition of religious freedom. And we must re-commit to living by the Judeo-Christian religious and moral principles that made

America

great. Only then will we once again rightly claim to be “one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

Copyright © 2014, 2015 Justin D. Soutar. All rights reserved.

ENDNOTES

[1] “Benedict XVI's Address to US Bishops on 'Ad Limina' Visit,” ZENIT, January 19, 2012.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Letter to the First Brigade of the Massachusetts Militia, 1798.

[4] “Benedict XVI's Address to US Bishops on 'Ad Limina' Visit,” ZENIT, January 19, 2012.

[5] Address at a conference in London, Feb. 21, 2014.

[6] G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*, 1925 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008, pp. 58-59).

This contribution is available at http://justins-corner.blogspot.com/2015/07/the-tyranny-of-radical-secularism-part_20.html
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Bouyer and Aristotle on the effects of the liturgy on the worshipper [at LMS Chairman]



A great bugbear of Fr Louis Bouyer, which emerges from the article by Dr John Pepino I referred to [the other day](#)

, was didacticism: the view that the liturgy ought to *teach*

people things. This is despite the fact that he agreed with the Liturgical Movement in general that it was important for people to

understand

the liturgy, and

participate

in it. Bouyer argued, furthermore, that it was a fundamental error to think of the liturgy as a tool for evangelisation. This latter is a popular idea today, so it is well to pay attention to what he has to say.

On the question of evangelisation, his point is simply that the liturgy is directed to the Church's members, not to the unconverted. He attacked the idea that

the liturgy that used to nourish the lives of Christians no longer interests us; what we need is liturgy that is pure and simply an instrument for Christianising modern pagans.

(Memoirs, p382)

Again:

'What shall we give others if we have nothing left ourselves?'

The context is his opposition to the transformation of the Catholic liturgy into something it has never been before, with each change justified by appeal to sensibilities of people without any familiarity with the liturgy, people who have no ear for its poetry or symbolism: 'modern pagans'. This is fair enough, but it is unnecessary to conclude from this that the traditional liturgy has and should have

nothing

to say to outsiders. Bl. Dominic Barberi's success as an evangelist among industrial workers in the North West of England was helped along, for example, by highly elaborate Corpus Christi processions, the like of which had not been seen in England since the Reformation, which non-Catholics watched with amazement in huge crowds. This, strictly speaking, was paraliturgical, but it chimes with the the experience of many converts of the pre-Conciliar era that the awe and reverence of the Catholic liturgy frequently drew them closer to the Faith.

That's not to say we should be looking to make the liturgy more didactic. I was intrigued to see a reference to Aristotle in Bouyer's discussion of this point. Looking more deeply, Aristotle was speaking specifically about the pagan liturgy of his own day. It is from a 'fragment': a reference to a lost work of Aristotle in another author's writings. Here are two: the first is what Bouyer referred to, the second appears to be about the same idea, and puts it into a slightly wider context.

Synesius, Dio. 10. 48 a. ...

as Aristotle claims that those who are being initiated into the mysteries are to be expected not to learn anything but to suffer some change, to be put into a certain condition, i.e. to be fitted for some purpose.

Michael Psellus, Schol. ad Joh. Climacum (Cat. des Man. Alch. Grecs, ed. Bidez, 1928), 6. 171.

I undertook to teach you what I have learned, not what I have experienced . . . the one is matter for teaching, the other for mystical experience. The first comes to men by hearing, the second comes when reason itself has experienced illumination — which Aristotle described as mysterious and akin to the Eleusinian rites (for in these he who was initiated into the mysteries was being moulded, not being taught).

Bouyer's own remark is this:

'the main business of the liturgy is not to teach us this or that lesson easily converted into pat formulas; it is to place the faithful, without them quite knowing how, into a certain state of mind which it would be perfectly fruitless to try to recreate by explaining it.'

(Memoirs, p67)

(This reminds me of Newman's distinction between training and education. Training is about acquiring a mechanical skill; education is about broadening the mind. The specific bits of information conveyed in education may be a necessary part of the process, but they aren't the object of the exercise. The educated man has been

changed

, he is able to approach the rest of his life in a different way, not because of 'transferable skills', but because his mind has been educated.)

What happens to us when we participate in Mass? We may pick up a point of theology or two but that is not what it is all about. It is an

experience

, and we enter into in

prayer.

The point of it is the transformation of the worshipper at a spiritual level; to fit us for heaven; and it is the action of

God

which does this. It doesn't happen all at once, of course, but by the constant action of the liturgy over years.

Perhaps we can compare this to the experience of family life, if the family is not too dysfunctional. It is not for show; the kind of communication going on will be to an important extent inaccessible to strangers. It is important that the life of the home is

for

the family, not adapted as a kind of play-acting for others, because it

nourishes

family members. Nevertheless, a stranger, even one who doesn't have a good experience of family life of his own, can, if he encounters this (as a guest), learn something profound and helpful from it. The very naturalness of it, the very fact that it is not

put on

for any spectator, its authenticity, conveys something about nature of a healthy family life in a deep way, a way which goes beyond words, for family members above all, but for the guest as well.

Looking at it in this way, it is easy to see what damage can be done by the liturgy by attempting to make it 'easy to understand'.

Related in the FIUV Position Paper on the

[Extraordinary Form and the West](#)

, on the New Evangelisation.



This contribution is available at <http://www.lmschairman.org/2015/07/bouyer-and-aristotle-on-effects-of.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Have you ever had to make a tough decision? The kind of dilemma that completely overwhelms all your thoughts for days on end. Well, I recently did.

That afternoon, I walked out of the conference room feeling bewildered. How could I leave? I couldn't understand why I felt that the Holy Spirit was saying, "Your work here is done. Go use your gifts elsewhere."

"But, I feel like I have so much more to give", I thought. It would only be later that I would realize that I do have more to give, just not where I was...but we'll get to that later.

This problem gnawed at me for days. I kept going back and forth on what to do. Sometimes it's hard discerning which way is "your will" versus "His Will".

It really stinks.

Given this recent experience I wanted to share the steps I took that helped me make my choice. My process is based on the [Ignatian Framework for Making a Decisions](#), which I highly recommend.

Note, that I already knew what my issue was (i.e. should I do X or Y?). If you are having a hard time deciding what the actual problem is, I suggest reading through the Ignation Decision Framework I linked to above. It will help you identify the decision to be made or the issue to be resolved.

Pray for Openness to God's Will and for Freedom From Prejudgment

Ask for that inner freedom and balance that allows you not to be inclined more toward one alternative or option than to the other. This means to ask to be free enough to be influenced only by this one value: *which alternative will give most glory to God and be expressive of my own deepest self, my authentic self?*

Scripture that is helpful to me to reflect on:

[John 12:24](#), "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit."

[Psalm 37:5](#), "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will act"

It's not natural for us to separate ourselves from judgment. I find it helpful to compartmentalize the issue so that I can try and focus on what the Lord is bringing to light. It's easier said than done, but that's the whole reason why you start with this step first.

Gather Info & Discuss

For me, this is probably the most critical. Gathering all the pieces in one place is an extremely clarifying exercise. This can be done mentally or actually written out. Then find someone who you trust and who is impartial. Then discuss the information with them. Usually, I hear the Lord speak to me through other people whom I respect and trust. In this particular decision, I spoke with multiple people including a

mentor, my men's small group and my most trusted confidant, my wife.

Once you've gathered all the data.

Weigh the Pros and Cons

List all the reasons you can think of. Do not prejudge their merit. Then once you are done, evaluate to see which advantages and disadvantages seem to be coming from the influence of the Holy Spirit and which ones do not.

Based on the pluses and minuses I also try to think through which route is pragmatic.

Fear Is NOT of the Lord

At this point, I think it is worth reminding you that **fear does NOT come from GOD.**

It is natural that you start to get anxious as all the details come together, especially if it seems that they are leaning toward a position that we may be uncomfortable with.

God does not bring fear into our lives. This only comes from the evil one.

[2 Timothy 1:7](#), "For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control."

Usually when I know I'm on the right path, I feel at peace.

What is peace?

To me, peace is knowing that I'm doing the right thing, for the right reasons and at the right time. God brings us peace. So if you are starting to feel at peace, this might be a sense from the Holy Spirit. Ask God to give you consolation about the best option. Here is some scripture to help:

[John 12:27](#), "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid."

[Philippians 4:6-7](#), "Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God. Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

[Psalm 34:15](#), Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

However, just because you feel at peace about something, doesn't make the decision any easier.

Visualize Your Decision and Confirm It

This last step helps you confirm that peaceful feeling, despite the potential bittersweetness that you may be experiencing

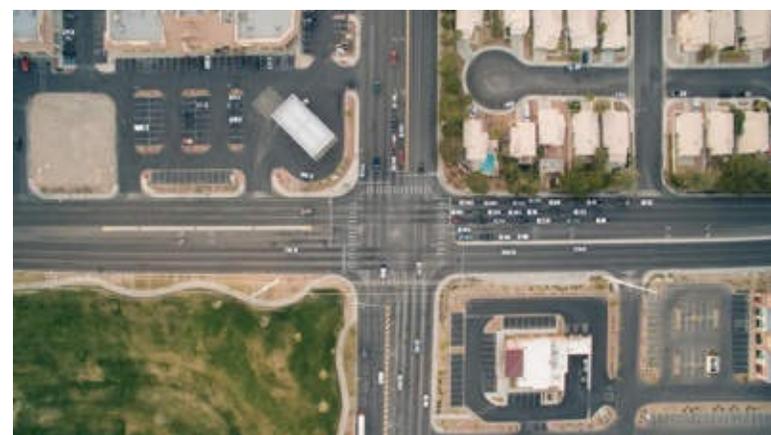
Trust in God and make your decision, even if you are not certain about it.

Take the time to imagine yourself for a little while going down the desired path. Do you feel good about it? Do your thoughts, desires, and feelings continue to support it? If not, you may need to get more information. You can also try imagining yourself going down the other path. If you get a feeling of discomfort or agitation, then the other option may be what God's will is for you.

I did my best to follow these steps with my most recent decision.

Now, back to that conference room.

I was at a crossroads.



As I got up, I thought to myself, “how could the Lord be asking me to let go of something that I love so dearly?” When I thought about leaving I felt an overwhelming sense of both peace and bittersweetness.

I Finally Made up My Mind

After going through much deliberation, prayer, and spending time in adoration I made my choice.

I decided to leave my position on the board of [SQPN](#) (the Star Quest Production Network).

Now, before some of you freak out, you should know that I'm not leaving the SQPN community, just tendering my resignation as a board member. You'll still see me in the [Catholic Weekend](#) chat room occasionally and I plan to continue [blogging about Catholic Media](#) and here, at A Couple of Catholics.

I've been a board member of SQPN for over four years and it's been a wild ride. In my tenure, we brought the Lord's plan to life through podcasts, blogs, videos, Google Hangouts, social media posts, tweetups and more.

In my opinion, one of the best things SQPN ever did was to create The Catholic New Media Celebration. It is an annual gathering of consumers and creators of digital media hosted by SQPN, that celebrates the people behind the content.

I've been to all of them and recently attended the 2015 [CNMC](#) in Atlanta on June 7th. During the weekend, we celebrated 10 years of Catholic new media. It was the perfect bookend to God gracing me with lifetime friends, an incredible Catholic community and relationships that have produced much fruit

both personally and professionally.

I'm incredibly thankful for many things in my life and the SQPN community is in the top five.

Why?

Because, I can honestly say my life wouldn't be the same without SQPN!

My Journey in Catholic New Media

I started podcasting in college with my dear friend Steve Nelson, who then as a campus minister started [On the U – College Catholic Podcast](#).

It was my experience with this podcast production and my film degree that helped me get my start in my career.

Then as the economy shifted, so did my job. I moved to advertising as a “Lead Social Media Specialist”.

Now as Sr. Social Media Strategist and Web Video Producer, I can see how the Lord was working through SQPN to help me grow professionally.

I grew closer to my brothers by producing the [In Between Sundays, a podcast for young adults](#).

My involvement with SQPN community also challenged me to stay a faithful Catholic in a time of flux when many of my closest friends fell away from the Church.

I became a board member of SQPN in 2012. With this I was able to help the organization with their communications and planning.

I will never know how much my actions as a board member of SQPN did for evangelization or the advancement the use of digital media within the Church. But, one thing's for sure. We made the world a better place because of how the Spirit used our talents in new media for spreading the Good News.

I am forever thankful and blessed by this organization. This is why it was so hard for me to come to realization that it was time for me to move on. (and why this blog post has nearly taken me a month to write)

You might be thinking, what now?

So What's the Future Hold?

Well, my friends, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few.” ([Luke 10:2](#))

I am shifting my focus to my personal projects including writing/blogging, [speaking](#), and a few media ideas I haven't had the time to work on since joining SQPN.

Lastly, I plan to spend lots of time with my wife and daughter. As many of you know my little girl is about

10 months. She just started crawling and now my life is filled with baby-proofing our apartment and chasing the little goober around.

Despite the deep bittersweet feeling I have about leaving my role at SQPN, I am at peace. After watching Fr. Roderick's final video address at the CNMC, it made me realize how much SQPN has accomplished in the last 10 years and how grateful I am that I was a part of it.

I have a great sense of hope for the future of Catholic media and will continue to pray for the New Evangelization. Here's to the next decade!

This post was originally published at PatrickPadley.com.

This contribution is available at <http://acoupleofcatholics.com/blog/2015/07/07/finding-peace-when-making-difficult-decisions/>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Tips for the Trip [at bukas palad]



Year B / Ordinary Time / Fifteenth Sunday

Readings: Amos 7.12-15 / Psalm 84.9-10, 11-12, 13-14 (R/v 8) / Ephesians 1.3-14/ Mark 6.7-13

Do you like to travel? Do you travel to discover new places and meet new people, to see new sights and hear new sounds, even to savour new tastes? Or, do you travel to visit relatives and friends, to catch up on old times and to share new beginnings? Perhaps, you travel for work and business, or even to escape.

A metaphor we often use to describe traveling is “journey.” A journey from A to B. An adventure from beginning to end. A route that meanders; a trek over mountains to scale and into valleys to forge. In all these journeys, the traveler is always moving forward towards his destination.

We use the Christian metaphor “pilgrimage” to express what more a journey, this travel, in life can mean: our way home to God. If Christian life is a pilgrimage to return to God, we should not be afraid to ask Jesus for what we need to make this journey well.

In today's gospel passage, Jesus gives us three teachings on traveling well: **travel to preach**; **listen to travel**; and **be empowered for travel**. “Tips for the trip” is how I would describe these lessons.

Lesson 1: Travel to preach

Jesus calls his disciples to travel not for themselves but to preach and serve others. He gathers them, and then missions them to proclaim the Good News. They extend Jesus' work of bringing God's kingdom to the frontiers. It is when these disciples say “yes” to this journey that they are transformed into apostles. The root word for apostles in Greek means “to send out.” A disciple's “yes” allows Jesus to send him out as God's messenger. With Jesus, he can then proclaim that God is love and God is with us.

Lesson 2: Listen to travel

Jesus instructs his disciples on how to carry out the mission on their travels. He does this because traveling in the world can be difficult. There are thieves and bandits who waylay travelers. There is poverty some struggle with to complete their journeys. And there are burdens, sometimes too many, that travelers carry. So Jesus sends his disciples out in pairs for safety. He tells them to travel light so that they can better complete the journey. And he instructs them to welcome the hospitality others will give them along the way.

Lesson 3: Be empowered for travel

Jesus also empowers his disciples to transform the world into God's kingdom as they travelled. He empowers them to proclaim repentance, to dispossess the possessed, and to heal the sick. His power helps them to uplift the people they encountered. These people learn that they are not unknown or unwanted. Rather, they are God's sons and daughters, loved by name. This is the Good News that the apostles proclaim.

To travel to preach; to listen to travel; and to be empowered for travel. What do these lessons have to do with you and me, you might ask?

I'd like to suggest something important because we are travelers in life and pilgrims to God. We might miss out on what Jesus is offering us if our attitude today is "well, it's another Sunday Eucharist, one in the repetition of many Sunday Eucharists in life. So, I come, I listen, I pray, I receive communion, I go back home, and tomorrow I go to study and to work. Just the same old same old."

What we'd miss out on if we have this outlook is the opportunity Jesus is offering us to travel purposefully as Christians. That is, **to travel through life with Christ-like significance.**

How many of us have had the opportunity to travel for the good of others? To heal broken relationships? To free and uplift those in need? To announce good news? This is the opportunity Jesus gives his disciples in today's gospel passage: that possibility to go out for people's ultimate good. This is what I mean by traveling through life with a Christ-like significance.

And Jesus is offering us this chance too. This chance to travel through life and to make God's love, God's life real for someone else in every community we inhabit, not just in St Ignatius parish and in our church

ministries.

And we can make our travel, our journey, our pilgrimage significant for others by acting in such Christ-like ways as these: by laying down our lives like Jesus did to save others; by giving more charitably to the poor as Jesus commanded us; by forgiving our enemy and healing the suffering like Jesus did; and by being thankful for the ordinary things in life, like food, friendship and sleep, as Jesus did by thanking God.

Amos heard the call to travel with significance in our first reading: though a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores, the Lord called him to prophesy to the people. Jesus' disciples responded to the call to mission. And saints, missionaries, and all those who have transformed our lives with God's word and action live out this call daily.

But what allowed them to respond to this call to travel with Christ-like significance? What do you and I need to do likewise?

I'd like to suggest that we can glimpse an answer in Pope Francis' motto: "By having mercy and by choosing him." Francis chose this line from a homily by Bede the Venerable who reflected on Jesus calling Matthew, the tax collector. At the heart of Jesus' call is the loving mystery of God's mercy that still values the sinner worthy for God's work.

And the right and only response such a person need make when he is called by God is to be totally dependent on God. Take nothing: no food; no sack; no money; just a walking stick, sandals, and a tunic. Jesus reminds his disciples and us that radical dependence on God is indeed the just and human attitude for traveling with Jesus and for Jesus. Like Jesus, **dependence is what keeps us truly open to serve in God's ways and through God's providence.**

Don't we know this truth deep down in our hearts in each confession and at every mass: that though we are sinners, Jesus tells us again and again how worthy we are to continue his work of making God alive and real for others?

It is precisely in our dependence on God, that we can let Jesus' Spirit -- not political, economic, or social power -- give us God's life to evangelize through lives of service. And it is this same Spirit that will lead us home to God in each other's good company.

At the end of this Eucharist, you and I will leave this holy space. We will travel to our homes and return to our everyday spaces. Some of us will go outward to the world. As we make the travels we must to wherever we go this week, the question I think we have to answer is this: how do you and I want to spread Jesus' message about God in our journeys of life and faith?

Hopefully, with a lot more Christ-like significance as Jesus teaches us today.

Preached at St Ignatius Church, Singapore

photo: tomales point, point reyes national park by adrian dankers, sj

This contribution is available at <http://bukas-palad.blogspot.sg/2015/07/homily-tips-for-trip.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Encouragement [at Bible Meditations]



But now don't be discouraged, any of you. Do the work, for I am with you. Haggai 2: 4

I started working on a new writing project the other day. I was excited and eager to begin. The morning I was supposed to start the project I woke up early-but thoroughly intimidated. I was afraid to start, afraid the end result wouldn't measure up to my expectations.

That very morning, the bookmark in my Bible opened to the very words I needed to hear from the prophet Haggai: *Don't be discouraged...Do the work, for I am with you.*

What a relief! I'm not on my own. God is with me to help me do whatever I'm called to do—and that includes what I write. God doesn't type the words for me, or load the printer, or edit the rough draft. I need to do the work, but it's reassuring to trust that I'm being given what I need to do the job at hand. I don't have to write the most perfect work ever written. All I have to do is produce the best work that I am capable of at this point in time.

Apart from God, we can do nothing (John 15:5). But with Him, we still have to do the legwork. He wants to be intimately involved with our lives, but He won't do for us what we can and should be doing ourselves.

Is some problem or job looming in front of you today? Don't be discouraged. You don't have to do what you *can't* do, only what you can. We don't have to expect the impossible of ourselves. We can give it our best shot and leave the results in God's hands.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for being with me today.

Reflection: How do you know what is yours to do and what you can let go of?

This contribution is available at <http://www.biblemeditations.net/archives/2670>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

9 Inspirational Contemporary Christian Songs to Brighten Your Day [at A Catholic Newbie]

9 Contemporary Christian Songs to Brighten Your Day

www.CatholicNewbie.com

I have found some of the greatest joy in listening to Contemporary Christian music. It is so uplifting and such a dramatic contrast to flipping on any other mainstream station where it seems within just a few songs you (and your kids) must listen to songs about sex, using curse words and worse. See my tips on [switching to Christian radio](#) if you're ready for a change!

But today, I wanted to focus on some of my favorite uplifting songs that not only are wonderful music, but whose lyrics will lift you right up out of a funk and help you praise God continuously (all while tapping your toes :)).

Here are my top 9:

1) **Do Something** by Matthew West

I love this song, but it's a great motivation that if we want the world to change, it starts with us! We are God's hands and feet in this world. Watch the video; it's awesome, too!

2) **Greater** by MercyMe

"Greater is the one living inside of me than he who is living in the world." "You are holy, righteous and redeemed." Enough said!

3) **Soul on Fire** by Third Day

Let this song inspire you to light the spark of faith and set you on fire for Christ. As St. Catherine of Siena said, "Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire."

4) **Fix my Eyes** by For King & Country

Also a toe tapper, this one always reminds me that no matter WHAT is going on in my life to keep my eyes literally fixed on Christ.

5) **Build Your Kingdom Here** by Rend Collective

This is particularly impactful right now with all we face in our country, as they sing "Heal our streets and

lands. Set your Church on fire. Win this nation back. Change the atmosphere. Build your kingdom here, we pray.”

6) **Speak Life by TobyMac**

A great reminder of how much of a difference speaking positively[^] can make in the lives of others: speak hope, speak love, speak life.

7) **Multiplied by NeedtoBreathe**

This is just flat out a BEAUTIFUL song! “Your love is like radiant diamonds bursting inside us. We cannot contain...”

8) **Good Fight by Unspoken**

Don’t feel like you have anything left to give anymore? This song will inspire you to keep on! “Keep fighting the good fight, keep letting your light shine...”

9) **You Are More by Tenth Avenue North**

Made some terrible mistakes in your life? This song reminds you that you are MORE than your past. “You are more than the choices that you’ve made. You are more than the sum of your past mistakes. You are more than the problems you create. You’ve been remade! This is not about what you’ve done, but what’s been done for you.”

Which contemporary Christian songs are your favorites? Please share!

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicnewbie.com/9-inspirational-christian-songs-to-brighten-your-day/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

Restoring the Sacred Silence {in Spite of the Internet} [at Blossoming Joy]

I sat in the dark room with my feverish toddler sleeping restlessly in my arms and my ipad resting on my knee. That piece of technology was dark and dumb... a useless brick. The battery depleted, it had shut down abruptly with a dead sort of blackness. It was done. And I? I was stuck in the silence and darkness with a growing sense of frustration. I tried to think of ways that I could transfer my sick child to the couch without waking her and felt a prick of irritation that she whimpered a bit when I started to move. I felt eager to get away and read... or something. That's what I told myself but I knew that what I really wanted to do was to reconnect with that device.

As I sat in the darkness and silence, I was alarmed by the state of my soul and consequent lack of compassion for my daughter; and I was alarmed by my urgent pull toward that ipad. Closing my eyes, I tried to pray but was met by a mind full of white noise and scattered ideas and images... and still that lingering desire to be reconnected to the buzzing world behind that mocking black screen. I was startled. *What have I become?*

There was a time in my motherhood when my days were full of silence and my nights were completely dark with the possible exception of a small lamp or nightlight. I didn't have a device or a laptop. We didn't have network or cable TV. There was no ipod in my pocket and earbuds attached to my head. Instead, it was hours and hours and *endless hours* of silence while I rocked and nursed, nurtured and comforted. My mind and soul were raw, unrefined versions of my more mature self and I often marvel that my husband (normally so prudent) chose to invite me, of all people, to walk with him forever. I like to believe that I've improved over time but... there was something very simple and beautiful about our first years together.

It has always been my guilty pleasure to read books while nursing my babies and putting them to sleep. I used to strain my pinky finger trying to hold open the larger hardcover books with one hand and then laugh about what I called my "reading injuries." I can't deny that I was delighted by the introduction of the kindle and the ease with which I could now hold an ebook with one hand! Then two years ago, I upgraded again to an even lighter device. My pinky finger healed well... but my soul was another story...

A light pierced my darkness and it wasn't the light of Christ. It was called an ipad mini. We've been slow to jump on the techno-bandwagon in our house and I never had an iphone or a tablet device before. I assumed I would easily handle the addition to my life and unfortunately, was mistaken. The first year was fine since my knowledge was limited and my apps were few. I slowly learned how to put the technology into service for my family. It has certainly allowed me a greater degree of productivity in areas of my life but on the whole, it has dismantled my peace of mind and brought more noise to my soul than I thought I would ever allow.

It frightens me somewhat to consider the younger moms out there who have *never known* what it is like to have silence and darkness without that small rectangular light shining. How can this be good for our world? Many precious things that have come into my life have come because of the *extended and unavoidable periods of stillness and quiet*. When I first got married, I could not read more than a chapter of a book on theology or philosophy without falling asleep; but over time, I developed that ability through

the long lonely hours. *I learned to think. I learned to connect with my children. I learned to pray. And I learned to be comfortably alone, quiet, and silent.* I grew in very important ways that I am doubtful I could have if tethered (as I am now) to the disquieting world of the internet.

It was for my 37th birthday that my husband purchased the refurbished iPad mini for me (at my request). And as I approach my 39th birthday, I am feeling the urgent call to reclaim my soul from the disruption I have allowed in. It's not going to be easy. I am addicted just like half the free world is. I justify and excuse and find that my will power is in a pitiable state. It doesn't matter that I'm a blogger and can explain my time online to some degree. It doesn't matter if I stay up-to-date with friends and family and the world on Facebook. It doesn't matter if my inbox is full. It doesn't matter if I have work to do for our homeschool or books waiting to read on my Kindle app...

None of these things justify the extent to which I have sold my mind and soul to that device.

I consciously embraced this desire for renewal as I recently sat in the quiet dark and rocked my sick girl. But as I tried to go back to the mental silence I had even a couple years ago, I found that I could not. My brain was different. My mind lazier. I seemed to have a bizarre form of acquired ADHD. It was like trying to get a 4-year old to recite Latin conjugations while holding a bowl of ice cream in front of his face and whacking a tambourine next to his ear. Impossible. My prayer life has changed. *My search for Christ Himself has changed.*

After my daughter finally fell into a deep sleep, I laid down in bed and tried to return, not to the rote prayer that I had recently become used to rattling off, but the prayer of the soul that knows the person of Christ. Several hours later, as the sunrise peeked over the trees, I finally fell asleep... overcome by the mental and emotional fatigue of that strain... and the sadness of soul that knows complete failure.

I was not looking for emotional consolation. I was looking for silence and connection. And the hard truth is that I could not shut off the noise. I could *not* shut off the noise that I had ushered into my mind and soul and nurtured for the last two years. And all I want now is to go back. *I want to be near to Jesus. I want to rest in His Sacred Heart, place my head on His holy chest, and hear nothing but the beating of His very life.*

Practically speaking, I can not realistically toss technology out the window. It is useful and necessary in our current culture. As the primary educator of my children, I need to be able to mentor them online as well as off. We use technology daily. But it is clear that I need a concrete plan for personal renewal and healing. The damage is deep and my will is weak. I know I must begin with baby steps or else I will fall back into bad habits. So I have outlined a general plan :

- 1. Reclaim Sunday**
- 2. Bedroom as Sanctuary**
- 3. Internet Fast on One Week Day**
- 4. Reboot My Intellect and Spiritual Life**
- 5. Be in the Presence of Christ**
- 6. Increase Accountability**

1. RECLAIM SUNDAY

This should *always* have been non-negotiable, but the internet has woven its way into every sacred space.

It is a holy day. A reserved day. So this is my plan to return sacred silence to Sunday...

No ipad unless I'm using it to take photos of a special event (birthday, sacrament, etc.). It is my primary camera so I need to make that allowance. But no ipad internet.

No work on the blog on Sundays. Period. I will never forget the story that Scott Hahn tells about his commitment to honoring the Lord's Day when he was in seminary. He resolved to do no academic work on Sunday even if he had a Monday test or paper due. He planned so that his work would be done during the week so that he could honor the Lord as he ought. The result was that his grades actually improved. My husband has always led our family according that principle by example and rule and we have flourished under it. Recently, I have strayed from that example and used the day to catch up on my obligations. No more.

No isolated internet leisure on Sundays. I have also used Sundays to justify "leisure" time on the computer in the evenings. Half of the family plays volleyball on Sunday evenings and I have been struggling with envy since I am no longer able to play. I justify "me time" while I watch the younger kids and what that often looks like is me on the computer and kids in front of videos. No more.

This contribution is available at <http://blossomingjoy.squarespace.com/blog/2015/7/15/restoring-silence>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

While You Were Freaking Out About the Gay Marriage Decision... [at The True Dignity of Women]



There isn't much to say about the gay marriage ruling that hasn't already been said. Here is my favorite post on the subject: [Time to Stop Defending Marriage and Time to Reintroduce It, Says Advocate](#)

The furor over the gay marriage decision has drowned out two anti-life decisions that I think you should know about.

Abortion in Texas

SCOTUS ruled 5-4 to block Texas from enforcing part of their new regulations of abortion clinics. These regulations would have closed over half of the state's 19 clinics. They included some really common sense measures like requiring abortion clinics to run like surgical centers and for their doctors to have admitting privileges at a local hospital. More than 400 women have died from legal abortions. **These kinds of regulations could save at least one of the two lives that walk into the clinic that day.**

The ruling blocks the enforcement of these regulations at least until they decide in Fall whether or not they will hear the case. Insiders think that it is very likely that they will hear the case as it gives them a chance to define a term used in their *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* decision back in 1992. There, the court ruled that states generally can regulate abortion unless doing so places "an undue burden" on a woman's right to get an abortion. This would give them an opportunity to define "undue burden." Apparently the death of the baby doesn't even come to the judges' minds.

Please add this court case to your prayers this summer.

Death Penalty Drugs

In yet another 5-4 decision, SCOTUS upheld the use of an extremely dangerous and painful drug in executions. Not only that, but they delivered a lethal blow to the anti-death penalty movement by effectively asking the activists to suggest a better way to do executions. As Judge Alito said in the opinion:

Our decisions in this area have been animated in part by the recognition that because it is

settled that capital punishment is constitutional, “[i]t necessarily follows that there must be a [constitutional] means of carrying it out.” And because some risk of pain is inherent in any method of execution, we have held that the Constitution does not require the avoidance of all risk of pain. After all, while most humans wish to die a painless death, many do not have that good fortune. [Emphasis mine]

The drug in question has a proven track record of making executions longer and apparently more painful. It was used in two [high-profile botched](#) executions last year.

This court clearly doesn’t care about life: that of the unborn, the convict, or any one in between. God help us all.

This contribution is available at <http://truedignityofwomen.wordpress.com/2015/07/01/while-you-were-freaking-out-about-the-gay-marriage-decision/>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Liguorian Series Posting 0: Introduction [at *Servimus unum Deum*]

Hello Everyone,

Throughout my faith journey, I have been blessed to have encountered the Order of the Redemptorists (C.Ss.R), via St. Patrick's Catholic Church in the downtown of my Archdiocese of Toronto.

[The Redemptorists](#)

are an order of priests in the Church who serve (arch)diocesan parishes. They were founded by St. Alphonsus Liguori on November 9, 1732 in Scala, Italy (near Amalfi). Today

[in Canada](#)

, their main parish here in Ontario is the downtown Toronto parish of

[St. Patrick's Catholic Church.](#)

Their order, to quote Archbishop Terrence Prendergast, S.J., who oversees the Archdiocese of Ottawa, "... whose spirituality focuses on the Crib, the Cross and the Sacrament. Redemptorists follow Christ in his incarnation, death and resurrection and believe that he is always with them. They hold the belief that there is always a graced encounter with Christ in the Blessed Sacrament" (

<http://archbishopterry.blogspot.ca/2015/07/installation-of-fr-peter-tuan-bui-cssr.html>

).

The parish of St. Patrick's serves as the North American Shrine for Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and carries on the charisms and missions of St. Alphonsus in numerous ways, some of which I have participated in directly (e.g. High School Gr. 10 Social Justice Retreats, which contain a prayer walk with some outreach to the poor. I've done my own things on my own volition as well outside of St. Pat's.)

This parish has, and continues, to administer to my spiritual needs via its Sacraments. Might I also add that in this way, via sacraments, that the order continues to serve out the charisms of its founder, St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori. When St. Alphonsus lived in this life, it was a bit of a merciless and brutal time, socially in the Church in Italy, especially in his native region of Italy. The heresy of Jansenism was widespread, with many a priest applying its wrong tenets to the sacraments. In a nutshell, to paraphrase the current pastor of St. Pat's from a youth Theology on Tap I went to a couple of years ago: "You gotta pray and beg for mercy ... but you aren't worthy of his mercy and grace you sinners. His sacraments only go to the worthy." So people were being deprived of the sacraments, such as Communion and worse, even Reconciliation/Penance!

Liguori thought to himself, SATIS! Enough! He emphasized reception of the sacraments, and not barring them from people (save of course those who were obvious excommunicates as Church law dictates,) and had a real devotion to the spiritual salvation of all souls. When it comes to Confession, many parishes and pastors and associates, fail in regards to supplying the Church's mercy via reconciliation, only giving

parishioners just a 1/2 hour before Saturday vigil Mass every weekend, and once that 1/2 hour is up, bolt out of the confessional. Not the Redemptorists!!! Even today, the Redemptorists do not deprive the Body of the Church from sacraments. At St. Patrick's, as an example of the Redemptorist charisms, they have confession before most Masses, even during the week! Oh how many times I have been in need of Christ's forgiveness in my struggles, and with my busy work schedule, the lunch hour confession has been my saving restoration of Sanctifying Grace!

I must also credit this parish and its order, in a different way, because it is here with this Church whereby St. Patrick's Gregorian Choir resides, whereby I was first introduced to the Latin Mass. In addition, I have found a good and receptive priest in the aforementioned pastor, as well as his associates, with the pastor even bearing a connection to my family via my Italian heritage in my family's hometown. This priest has also been a blessing to other members of my family on my Italian side.

With the combination of these influences, I began to love, and to delve deeper, into WHAT is the charism of the Redemptorists? Who is this phenom that is St. Alphonsus? What constitutes the central tenets and beliefs of the Redemptorists? While the website of the order has given me a starting place, and the New Catholic Encyclopedia provides quite a factual account of his time on Earth, I was hungering more for what spiritually constituted his works and charism. As I found out more information, I found out he had penned some prolific works in the Church, the most well known, deepest, and famous of his, being the Ascetical Works, books which covered a number of topics of the Faith.

Well ... I started to cough up some of my earnings to get these hard to find works. Yes, they are available online as pdf documents, but seriously, I feel these screens are burning out our brains and attention spans, even if the effect is reduced by special "gloss/glare" formatted e-readers. So I wanted actual books to read, and optimally stimulate my mind and my soul. However, these books aren't necessarily accessible by the general public! Perhaps if I was an alumnus of U of T, particularly aligned to St. Michael's College @ U of T (USMC, NOT my Alma mater, though the Basilians are somewhat connected to it ... even architecturally with those "yellow bricks" [inside nugget for those who went to my high school]), I'd have access to their Kelly library to read the works. But I didn't go to U of T. So what's a person like me to do who wants non-abridged, or botched (read: liberalized or modernized) translations of these works that are true to exactly what Liguori thought and said?

You buy the old school books or verified, faithful re-productions! For the most part I bought a number of the works from eBay, in the form of old paperbacks that was published by Liguori Publications(TM) in the 80's, that certain catholic bookstores and missions purchased and distributed to people who ordered them. Another book I just happened to have at home, and I used an Ontario rare Catholic book seller in Combrere to buy another other book.

Currently I have volumes 1 - 12 and 16 which are as follows:

Volume I: Preparation for Death

Volume II: The Way of Salvation and Perfection.

Volume III: Great Means of Salvation and of Perfection.

Volume IV: The Incarnation, Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ

Volume V: The Passion and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ (Great Lenten reading material, alongside Liguori's classic Way of the Cross!!!)

Volume VI: The Holy Eucharist.

Volumes VII and VIII: The Glories of Mary

Volume IX: Victories of the Martyrs

Volume X and XI : The True Spouse of Jesus Christ

Volume XII: Dignity and Duties of the Priest (Selva)

....

Volume XVI: Sermons for Sundays (TAN Reprint)

....

I have henceforth decided, as a long term project, to discuss what Liguori is all about via his Ascetic Works and his great teachings of the Faith for all of us, using the editions I have. In addition, does what he teach correlate with post-Vatican II documents and teachings of the Church? This little side project, is not only to express my admiration for this great theologian and Saint of the Church who brought me to the Redemptorists, but also to provide additional content of merit to my Servimus Blog outside of the usual Latin Mass/Church Traditionalist politic items. I will add a tab to the top of this blog that will serve as a home page for links to the various postings that I create, like my altar serving ones I've done over the years.

I hope you will enjoy what is to come but don't expect too much all at once. I get weird ebbs and flows of inspiration/lack of motivation in my life and approaching the sacrament of Marriage next year, really takes a lot out of you and doesn't give you oodles of time to your self to be glued in front of a computer screen. Not to mention ... I like to have a life away from this screen at times, and that does include *actually reading the books from front to back for the content for the posts*. Regardless ... there is a treasure trove of wisdom and beautiful Faith to be unraveled From St. Liguori's works, points I hope will illuminate our Church, and the beauty, even in modern times, of the saint's order of the Redemptorists.

Pax Tibi Christi, Julian Barkin.

This contribution is available at <http://torontotlmserving.blogspot.ca/2015/08/liguorian-series-posting-0-introduction.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Justin Welby of Canterbury, Pope Francis, N.T. Wright, Father Stephen Freeman, and Father Robert Barron: Evangelisation [at Monks and Mermaids]

The Archbishop of Canterbury's Lambeth Lecture

Lambeth Palace, 4th March 2015

I want to start by saying just two simple sentences about the church. First, the church exists to worship God in Jesus Christ.

Second, the Church exists to make new disciples of Jesus Christ. Everything else is decoration. Some of it may be very necessary, useful, or wonderful decoration – but it's decoration.

When I talk about making disciples as we go through, of course I'm not only talking about words; I'm also talking about actions, and we'll come back to that in a little while.

The best decision anyone can ever make, at any point in life, in any circumstances, whoever they are, wherever they are, whatever they are, is to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. There is no better decision for a human being in this life, any human being.

When I started this role a couple of years ago, after some prayer and thought and reflection, three priorities, in the period between the announcement and when I got going as it were, lodged themselves in my mind. These were the three. First of all, prayer and the renewal of the Religious life. And my guess is that there were nods of assent and interest but hardly surprise.

At the news that reconciliation was my second priority there was probably mild interest and murmurs of approval that this was a Good Thing, but that someone was going to have their work cut out.

When I introduced my third priority as evangelism and witness I imagine some, maybe a minority, were

high-fiving, while others stopped and stared into space with a look of horror, thinking, 'Oh golly, here we go again'. I won't ask you which group you fall into.

This evening it's that priority that I want to talk about. To make the case for it not just a priority for any old spare Archbishop with not enough to do; but as the priority of the church of Jesus Christ, something which is testified to in the first of the Five Marks of Mission of the Anglican Church: 'To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.'

I'll try to define my terms, then set this in the context of what the Church is called to, and from there I hope to approach the scope and motives of evangelism, before addressing some of practice.

I will then seek to root this in the life and witness of the local church and most specifically in the life and witness of every Christian – not only the professionals.

This is our particular passion, priority and focus. In fact all we endeavour to do is done with the intention that we serve and enable the lives of every follower of Jesus to be faithful witnesses to the transforming love of God.

I am under no illusion as to the seismic shift that needs to take place in order for this to happen. But a seismic shift is what we need. For this country will not know of the revolutionary love of Christ by church structures or clergy, but by the witness of every single Christian.

Of course there were others words available to avoid the dreaded 'e' word of evangelism. Why not talk of 'mission'? It's so much more inclusive and encompassing, and something we are all, me included, passionate about. That was my reason for steering away from it.

I have nothing against mission – quite the reverse: the recent renewal of the Church's appropriation of the term has been heartening. But such is the widespread use of the term that my sense of this talk being committed to mission would be to say that I was committed to everything.

No, I wanted the call to be focussed on the specific proclamation of the Good News. What does it look like for the Church in this country to find its voice in these days?

There is obviously a huge amount that has been written about the content of the Good News, the Gospel, and there's a good amount more that will be. We will never plumb the depths of the wonder of the Gospel; there will always be more to be said.

I am not going to enter that debate, apart from saying that the Gospel is the Good News of Jesus Christ. It's the announcement of a person in history, and what God has done in this one life for everyone who has ever lived and ever will live.

I wonder if I might use a painting to represent the Gospel. The painting is *The Calling of Saint Matthew* and was painted by Caravaggio in around 1599. Art historian Sir Kenneth Clark considered it the piece of art that changed the history of painting:

It's a representation of the scene in Matthew's Gospel (Chapter 9) when Jesus calls the tax collector Matthew to follow him. The painting shows Matthew in the middle surrounded by four colleagues.

Notice the finery of those around the table in contrast to Jesus and Peter's clothing and bare feet on the right. Two of the tax collectors, at the far left of the picture, do not even look up, so intent are they on counting their money.

Between these five men and Jesus you will notice a barrier of darkness. All the light has come in with Jesus – the figure on the far right of the picture – as you will notice that from him, and not the window in which we see the cross, the light is coming.

Evangelism is the Good News of the coming of Jesus Christ into this dark world. And it is news not simply because without this light we are in the dark, but also because it comes to us unwarranted, unsought, without our initiation.

Jesus comes to us. This is the free work of God to bring light into the darkness. It's not technique, it's not manipulation, it's not organisation, it's not systems... it's God. It's raw God.

The men in the picture were not looking for Jesus; He came to them and transformed their world. In fact He caused great disruption. Jesus is the light of every person; He comes to all and for all. Apart from him there is only darkness. He comes not just to those who might seek him, or to those who have an interest in that kind of thing.

Caravaggio brings the drama into the painting through the outstretched hand of Jesus. This hand singles out Matthew. It's a definite choosing – a particular invitation. Jesus comes and reaches out to each of us.

And those who first saw the painting could be in no doubt as to what Caravaggio was implying – notice the similarity between the hand of Jesus and the hands in his scene from the roof of the Sistine chapel.

The hand of Jesus is both the hand of the second true Adam and of God. The Gospel is the call of God himself through the true man Jesus Christ. It is an act of creation, and recreation; a bringing into being, a life-giving calling, which is only possible because of the initiative of God.

We do not bring about this alteration, but it has been accomplished – it is done – apart from us, in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We did not contribute to it; but we are alive because of it.

We all know that. But it is as we get hold of that truth that we are impelled outwards into the world. Because it's as that truth grabs us that we remember that this isn't us, it's God. This is no survival strategy for the Church. It's God. It's raw God.

Matthew clearly can't quite believe that this invitation and command are addressed to him. Could he be so lucky? Surely there has been some mistake. You can see him thinking that – 'Me? What, me? You're kidding. Wrong guy. There's another Matthew down the road.' What on earth could he have done to have warranted this action of God on his behalf?

Pope Francis said: "That finger of Jesus, pointing at Matthew. That's me. I feel like him. Like Matthew. It is the gesture of Matthew that strikes me: he holds on to his money as if to say, 'No, not me! No, this

money is mine.’ Here, this is me, a sinner on whom the Lord has turned his gaze.”

Does that ring bells with people? That beautiful, wonderful moment when you realise that Jesus looks on you, on me, and doesn’t hate, doesn’t despise, is not indifferent, but utterly compelled and compelling in love, says ‘follow me’.

As a Christian it is my deepest conviction that in Jesus Christ, God comes to call every one He has made. Everyone has been summoned in Jesus Christ. For in Jesus Christ, God has poured out his love and his grace, his forgiveness and his mercy, his faithfulness. God would not be doing this without you or I.

Evangelism is then a joyful proclamation of what has happened. It’s the news of Jesus Christ. His life as the light breaking into this dark world for us. His death as the fount of our redemption. His resurrection as the hope of all. This news must be told, or how will people know?

We live in a world where hope is in increasingly short supply. Cynicism about politics is the opposite of hope. Fear is the opposite of hope. Where there is no hope we turn on each other to give ourselves security – temporarily, briefly. When we’re filled with hope, all things become manageable, even the greatest fears. Who can keep quiet about such a fact?

In 1525 William Tyndale, rumoured at one point to have been locked up by one of my predecessors in a tower at the top there, said this: ‘Euangelio (that we call gospel) is a greke word, and signifyth good, merry, glad and joyful tidings, that maketh a mannes hert glad, and maketh hym synge, daunce, and leepe for joye.’

But before I join Peter and continue Jesus’ ministry of calling everyone to follow, I must be one myself who has heard the call. I am a recipient of this light that has broken into my darkness. It is as one who has received that I offer this gift.

This requires my constant, daily conversion. One of the great phrases of Ignatian spirituality is the call to daily conversion. To receive daily, as Cyprian termed it, ‘one great gulp of grace’.

For me, grace is the most beautiful word in the English language. It is so evocative of all. The fact that the Gospel comes afresh to me as a sinner and astounds me with the news that I am loved, accepted, forgiven,

redeemed and chosen in Jesus Christ.

My spiritual director came here on Tuesday, an extraordinary Swiss monk with whom I speak from time to time, and he celebrated Mass down in the Crypt Chapel. It was a wonderful moment when those among us who are not Catholics received a blessing and the Catholics received the Eucharist – the opposite to what has been the normal pattern here. And we felt that pain of the Church's separation.

And he spoke and he said: "We can do nothing except by grace." It's his great phrase: "C'est tout grâce." It is all grace.

Each day the Gospel comes afresh to me as a sinner and astounds me with the news that I am loved, accepted, forgiven, redeemed and chosen in Jesus.

We must open ourselves and the Church to the continual conversion which the Spirit works in us. The Church must continually be converted from the reduction of the Gospel into its fullness.

We cannot leave things as they are, but we experienced grace best by bowing before it and allowing it, every time, to begin with us as though it were for the first time. Even tonight I must receive His grace again.

And if every Christian knew only to receive His grace afresh each day, what transformation would there be? That we can do.

Having received the goodness of God in Jesus Christ it obviously becomes a priority for us as his Church to let others know of what God has done for them.

Of course the church is called to orientate everything around God – that is called worship. But because of who this God is, we are also compelled to be for others the Good News that made this community and instructs this community.

While the Church always exists in time and space, in a locality with particular people, in a particular

culture, it is this particular Church. Wonderfully this is God's work, done by His Spirit. And God initiates this in every church, in every place.

I was, as you might know, Bishop of Durham for a few minutes. My predecessor was Tom Wright. He has the most helpful analogy as to the work of the Church. Imagine a new Shakespeare play was discovered, but it only had four acts and the last one was missing.

What would we do? It wouldn't simply be discarded. We would call on the greatest directors and producers, the finest actors, to immerse themselves in the first four acts and to engage with the plot and development, and to work together on what the fifth act might be.

This is the position of the Church. We have the first four acts, we have the plot and characters, and now it's over to us.

But we are not left alone. The director, the artistic producer, the prompt and writer with us is the Holy Spirit. It's the Spirit that makes the Church, every day, afresh.

In this fifth act, what does the Spirit compel us to do? To invite people to become, like ourselves, participants in the drama of God.

Karl Barth, one of the greatest theologians of the 20th century said this: 'No other task is so urgent as that of spreading the news on earth and making it known.'

It is God's initiative. We cannot as his Church proclaim his Good News in our own strength or inspiration. The Spirit goes before us, preparing the ground for the seed. Of course the wine of the Spirit takes the form of the wineskin, and so we as a Church must do the job of clearing ground of thistles and weeds, or rocks and trodden-down paths. But only the Spirit makes it possible.

A few years ago I heard it reported that it was the practice in large supermarkets to pump through the air conditioning system the smells from the bakery. So on entering the shop we, the unsuspecting public, would be met by the aroma of freshly baked bread, and we would therefore desire bread.

It seems to me this is a rather unsophisticated way of interpreting one of the crucial drivers of the New Testament when it comes to evangelism: it's the work of the Spirit, the 'go-between God' [Taylor], to prepare the hearts, desires, minds and senses of people that they might receive the message of God. It's why we pray – that God would prepare.

Simon Tugwell, a Roman Catholic charismatic theologian was one of those who coined the title of 'the speech-giving Spirit' for the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enables the joyful proclamation of the Church, in the telling of the Good News of Jesus Christ – news that is literally 'new' to people.

Tugwell traced the early Christian tradition that linked salvation to the opening of the mouth by the Holy Spirit. Again the New Testament sets this out: it's the Spirit that calls us to say "Abba father" and "Jesus is Lord". But why do this?

We know how important motives are in detail and the big picture. Gandhi said: "The moment there is suspicion about a person's motives, everything he does becomes tainted."

How often have we looked at the Church and wondered what they're really up to? Or we're really up to? Or I'm really up to?

Yet the Church gets so many reputations for mixed motivation.

Talleyrand, the great French diplomat, who managed to work for the French royal family until the Revolution in 1789, to work for the Revolutionaries, to work for Napoleon, and to come back to working for the French royal family in 1815 at the Congress of Vienna, died at the Congress of Vienna. And when Metternich, the Austrian Chancellor, was so clever at his manoeuvring that he was told that Talleyrand had died he said: 'Hmm, what does he mean by that?' [laughter]

Our motive driving this priority for the Church is not, not, not – never, never, never – that numbers are looking fairly low and the future is looking fairly bleak. Never. This is not a survival strategy.

This is not to say I am in any way nonchalant about the seismic challenge facing the church. But evangelism is not a growth strategy.

Of course we want to see full churches. But this is not anxiety for an institution, or worst still self-survival.

Martin Luther's definition of sin as a heart curved in on itself is instructive for us here. The Church which is concerned primarily for its own life or survival, a church that is curved in on itself, is signing its own death warrant.

As the wonderful missiologist Lesslie Newbigin said: 'A church that exists only for itself and its own enlargement is a witness against the gospel.' One could say both a lack of action and too much frantic action thinly mask a lack of confidence in the sufficiency of God.

What compels this priority is the same motive that compelled the first proclaimers; that compelled Archbishop William Temple's great report in 1945, 'Towards the conversion of England'; that compelled evangelist Billy Graham; that compelled the decade of evangelism; and all the reports and publications from the General Synod; and Pope Francis' wonderful encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*.

It is summed up in 2 Corinthians 5: 14-15: 'For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.'

It is the love of Christ that compels us. Every time I think of that, I reflect on how often I have failed to act in the love of Christ, and how unsurprising therefore that there is little response.

Everyone has a right to hear the Gospel, and as Christians we have a duty to proclaim the Good News without excluding anyone.

The only qualification for hearing the Good News is that you don't know Christ – and that's not just good news; it's true news. Indeed it's only because it's true that it's good. And if it's true, it's true for all, and must not be concealed from any.

The love that has found us in Christ compels, or constrains us to speak. So does our love for everyone

God has made.

John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople who died in 407AD, said something similar:

“Nothing is more deadly than a Christian who is indifferent to the salvation of others. Indeed I wonder if such a person can be a true Christian. To become a disciple of Christ is to obey his law of love; and obedience to the law brings joy beyond measure and description. Love means to want the best for others, sharing with them the joy of love. So the Christian feels compelled to speak to others about the law of love, and the joy of obeying this law. Of course, many people are shy about speaking to others; in their case actions motivated by love will be a most eloquent testimony. But those who are not shy will surely want to express their joy at every opportunity. There is no need to use fine words or elegant phrases.”

The Gospel is anything but formulaic. Becky Pippert says: ‘evangelism is not memorising techniques to use on unsuspecting victims.’ Nor is it an inter-church competition – and yet we make it so. But it is God who does it.

The same Spirit who gives us speech enables the proclamation of the Gospel to be always fresh and always distinct. This is the Spirit who, as Eugene Peterson says, ‘always has an address’.

At Pentecost, the speech-giving Spirit enables the news of all that has been opened up to be proclaimed in a tangible and comprehensible way. This is a gospel, Luke is saying to us, for the whole world.

If the Gospel is best and most authentically spoken from person to person in a way which is particular to the hearer, as at Pentecost, the task of translating the gospel into graspable words and concepts is essential. And the process of gospel translation is profoundly interactive. We don’t simply arrive with a set of words grammatically related, or a system of ideas. It is a story that makes history, and we must pay attention to what God is already doing and stirring, for God’s work does not begin with us. It begins with him.

In every respect Jesus Christ is the plumb line for our announcing, for he remains not just the central fact of the Christian faith, but the determining point.

Our constant care must be to proclaim the Good News in ways that are appropriate and fitting to Jesus. It's obvious, but so often we fit it to what we need. Like the bed in the ancient legend of Procrustes – when he had guests at his castle, if they were too short for the bed, he'd put them on a rack to stretch them, if they were too long he'd cut them down to size.

So often we want to fit people who are not Christians into our church, not make the church fit for new Christians.

The Gospel can be proclaimed in a way that denies the very one it proclaims. We can do the right thing in such a wrong way that it becomes the wrong thing. Anything manipulative or coercive, anything disrespectful or controlling, is ruled out because of who Jesus is.

Having said that, it is clear that God gloriously puts up with all kinds of ways of announcing the Good News which are less than ideal. For example, he uses me. [Laughter]

Having insisted that we take care to speak the Good News in ways that are good news, I am persuaded that the confession of faith in all languages and to all cultures is possible because of the distinctive character of God's action.

Christian good news must not become bad news for people of other faiths, but we must not shy away from true engagement.

It is not unethical to present the Gospel with love, grace and gentleness borne of true assurance. The privilege of living in a free and mature democracy is that we can both be held accountable for what we do and what we profess, while having the freedom to pray expectantly and to speak intentionally of what we know to be the transforming love of Christ.

That is a freedom to cling to. If our motivation is truly of love and of divine calling, then we must share our experience of Christ with one and all.

Having laid out the motive for evangelism, let us think about how we might go about it.

The old adage is attributed to St Francis of Assisi: “Preach the gospel at all times, where necessary use words.” Lay it aside, put it down, forget it. Don’t even think about it. Mainly for the reasons that he almost certainly didn’t say it, and even if he did, he was wrong. As T.S. Eliot’s character Sweeney said: “I gotta use words when I talk to you.”

But in order to know how to speak and proclaim, we must listen and converse. We are those who have listened to the Gospel, and our reception of the Good News has formed us.

Luke Bretherton of Duke University in North Carolina says this:

“The merciful command to listen first is ever present, as we cannot presume to know what needs to be said and done with these people, in this place, at this time if they are to truly hear and dwell within the Gospel. Listening to God and neighbor is the prerequisite of proclaiming the Word that, as a human word, can only be heard in dialect.”

The listening and speaking to God is where we start. This is God’s work. Ears only open, eyes only see, hearts only open, hands only receive when the Spirit works. At my installation service the anthem sung took early words from the Rule of St Benedict: “Listen, listen O my child...”

The importance of prayer cannot be overestimated. As St Paul testifies: “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has made it grow.” [1 Corinthians 3: 6]

In prayer we actively acknowledge that and practice it, by imploring the Spirit to work powerfully before and behind us, in our stumbling words and efforts.

The subject of Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3 is that his friends “may have power, together with all God’s people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know that love that surpasses knowledge”.

For example, there is no evidence of any revival of spiritual life taking place in a society in the Western Christian tradition without the renewal of prayer and the Religious life. How much more would the Lord do if we do but ask Him?

Hospitality, openness and a deep desire to love and accept the other who has not heard and responded to the gospel are fundamental to our proclamation.

At times I wonder about Bonhoeffer's letter to Eberhard Bethge, in which he set out the idea that common theological language is so misunderstood we could do with ceasing to use it for a generation and then reintroducing it to fresh ears – so that we might be able to define our terms without any of the baggage these words have accumulated. Words like 'evangelism', 'evangelical', 'gospel', and so on and so forth.

However, that's not what we can do. Wherever we bring the Gospel, we are certain that we do not know the full implications of what it means to say: "Christ has died, Christ is risen and Christ will come again." And when we set forth the Gospel invite, there are always fresh nuances and gifts for us to receive in how each person receives it.

Years ago, in a church we were worshipping at, there was someone who came to Christ quite unexpectedly. The impact of that on that church was profound. The vicar found a whole new desire to evangelise, as he saw the transformation in that person's life, which he has never lost since. And this was well over 20 years ago. [That person] struggled with faith, but so many people saw what it was to become a Christian and therefore saw their own hope that they had.

The best evangelism takes place when the evangelist and the evangelised learn something new about Christ.

Anything that is tired or worn, blasé or bland, hasn't begun to cope with the Gospel. The Spirit inspires us to greater and more inspiring creativity and imagination, co-opting every medium possible to extend the invitation, always compelling, definitely arresting – calling on all our senses to be open to His love.

Having said that the Gospel is profoundly personal, I want to mention the corporate element.

The Gospel also has the most profound of public implications. Lesslie Newbigin again: "A serious commitment to evangelism means a radical questioning of the reigning assumptions of public life."

That's not a party political statement, just for the record. It is clear in many of the comments that are made regularly in the media that the Church's basis of faith is not grasped. The starting place for all thought and action is Jesus Christ, who was, and is, and is to come. He cannot be accommodated or co-opted. We can't say, "well we'll put him on this to make it more attractive".

The simple truth is that the resurrected one cannot be accommodated in any way of understanding the world unless He is the starting point.

And finally we think about those whose task it is to proclaim the Good News.

There are of course those who have the gift of setting this forward in ways which are most compelling and constraining. We call those people evangelists.

The church, however, is essential for evangelism. Not just in action and prayer, in activity and engagement, but as the place where the Gospel is seen to make sense.

The American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr asked in the middle of the last century why the lives of most Christians looked like celebrities who endorsed products you knew they didn't use themselves.

And of course Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* said why is it that so many people go to evangelise looking as though they've just come from a funeral?

That is, why should people believe what we say about forgiveness and grace, reconciliation and sacrifice, love and commitment, welcome and acceptance, if when they look at the life of the Church they see something so diametrically opposed to it?

Lesslie Newbigin, as we know, said "the church is the hermeneutic of the gospel." The tool of interpretation. For our words must be backed up by integrity.

The institutional life of the Church must reflect, enable, promote and speak of the Good News.

How does our structural life reflect and empower our proclamation? We must insist that all of our structures and committees, budgets (which are merely theology in numbers) and plans are appropriate to Jesus Christ, and the imperative to make him known.

What the Church has to do must not be determined by its institution; its institution must be determined by what it has to do. Evangelism is good for us, it is necessary for a healthy church, because by it the Gospel takes a fresh hold of us and Jesus Christ increases his presence and joy among us.

And that is a priority for every Christian. Luke says the last words of Jesus to the disciples: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses.” [Acts 1: 8]

He is not describing what they’ll do – witness is not a verb, it is a noun. He is describing what they are. The question is not whether we want to be witnesses; it is whether we are faithful witnesses. We are all witnesses; it’s just whether we live that out. It is such a strong concept.

For a witness simply says what they have seen and experienced. We say what we know. Each witness is unique; no two witnesses can witness in the same way.

In 1945, the report which William Temple instigated came out, ‘Towards the conversion of England’. In it they were uncompromising: there would be no significant turning to God in the nation apart from the witness of every Christian. In 1985, the Church of England published the report, ‘All are called – Towards a theology of the laity’. It argued that by virtue of baptism every Christian was called to witness to Jesus Christ.

The man acclaimed as the best theologian in North America, Stanley Hauerwas, goes as far to say: “Witness names the truth that the only way we can know the character of the world, the only way we know ourselves, the only way we know God, is by one person telling another.”

Do our lives reflect that call? It’s the biggest hill for the Church to climb. That is the one that we have not cracked. Professional evangelists are wonderful; thank God for them. They are utterly necessary, totally essential – but they are not sufficient. Every Christian is required to be sufficient.

To go back to Chrysostom as we come the end:

“Don’t tell me ‘it is impossible for me to influence others.’ If you are a Christian, it is impossible for you NOT to influence others! Just as the elements that make up your human nature do not contradict each other, so also in this matter – it belongs to the very nature of a Christian that he influences others. So, do not offend God. If you say, ‘the sun cannot shine,’ you offend Him. If you say, ‘I, a Christian cannot be of service to others,’ you have offended Him and called Him a liar. It is easier for the sun not to shine than for a Christian not to do so. It is easier for light itself to be darkness than for a Christian not to give light. So don’t tell me it is impossible for you as a Christian to influence others, when it is the opposite that is impossible. Do not offend God. If we arrange our affairs in an orderly manner, these things will certainly follow quite naturally. It is impossible for a Christian’s light to lie concealed. So brilliant a lamp cannot be hidden.”

This is not easy or without cost for any of us. As we remind ourselves that the Greek word for witness is martyr, we are more and more, in these days, confronted with the fact that the word has come to have the associations it has with death, because of the price the first witnesses were prepared to pay to be faithful.

A couple of weeks ago we know 21 Christians were murdered in Libya. I was talking to Bishop Angelos, the Coptic Bishop in England, who I went to see to offer condolence. He told me that from one who escaped they heard that as each one was killed, most savagely, they cried out, “Jesus Christ is Lord”. Their last words were witness.

As I finish let us return to Caravaggio’s painting. Notice, if you will, down at the bottom of the picture, another hand that mirrors the calling hand of Jesus. It’s that of Peter. You see him hesitant, not confident, and seeming to look not at Matthew but one of his friends.

Jesus involves us in His work of calling people to follow him. This is the work of evangelism.

However weakly, however hesitantly, He calls us to extend our hands and our hearts, to use our words and lives, to echo His call to every person to follow Him.

For it is the best decision anyone can ever make is to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Amen.

THE RISE OF EVANGELICAL CATHOLICISM

by George Weigel

For more than thirty years it's been my privilege to explore the Catholic Church in all its extraordinary variety and diversity. I've traveled from inner-city parishes to the corridors of the Vatican; from the barrios of Bogotá to the streets of Dublin; across the United States and throughout Europe, Latin America, Oceania, and the Holy Land. I've spoken to Catholics of all states of life and stations in life, from popes and heads of state to cloistered nuns and campus ministers and literally thousands of clergy; with political activists of all stripes and the wonderful people of the parish in which I've lived for almost three decades; with modern Catholic confessors and martyrs and with men and women who are troubled in their faith.

The experience has been exhilarating, sometimes exasperating, occasionally depressing; I've been immeasurably enriched by all of it, in ways I can never adequately repay. But I've tried to make a small down payment on a large debt with the publication of *Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st-Century Church*. In the book, I've tried to focus what I've learned in more than thirty years of Catholic thinking, writing, and activism through two prisms: a new interpretation of modern Catholic history linked to a fresh proposal for how we should understand the Catholic possibility in the third millennium, and a detailed program of Gospel-centered reform that will equip the Church for its evangelical responsibilities in a time of great challenge.

The challenge can be defined simply: Throughout the Western world, the culture no longer carries the faith, because the culture has become increasingly hostile to the faith. Catholicism can no longer be absorbed by osmosis from the environment, for the environment has become toxic. So we can no longer sit back and assume that decent lives lived in conformity with the prevailing cultural norms will somehow convey the faith to our children and grandchildren and invite others to consider entering the Church.

No, in our new situation, Catholicism has to be proposed, and Catholicism has to be lived in radical fidelity to Christ and the Gospel. Recreational Catholicism—Catholicism as a traditional, leisure-time activity absorbing perhaps ninety minutes of one's time on a weekend—is over. Full-time Catholicism—a Catholicism that, as the Second Vatican Council taught, infuses all of life and calls everyone in the Church to holiness and mission—is the only possible Catholicism in the twenty-first century.

The Evangelical Catholicism of the future is a Catholicism of radical conversion, deep fidelity, joyful discipleship, and courageous evangelism. Evangelical Catholics put friendship with the Lord Jesus at the center of everything: personal identity, relationships, activity. Evangelical Catholics strive for fidelity despite the wounds of sin, and do so through a daily encounter with the Word of God in the Bible and a

regular embrace of Christ through a frequent reception of the sacraments. Evangelical Catholics experience dry seasons and dark nights, like everyone else; but they live through those experiences by finding their meaning in a deeper conformity to the Cross of Christ”on the far side of which is the unmatched joy of Easter, the experience of which gives the people of the Church the courage to be Catholic. And evangelical Catholics measure the quality of their discipleship by whether, and to what extent, they give to others what they have been given: by the degree to which they deepen others’ friendship with the Lord Jesus Christ, or bring others to meet the unique savior of the world.

Evangelical Catholics enter mission territory every day, leading lives of integrity and charity that invite from others the question, “How can you live this way?” That question, in turn, allows the evangelical Catholic to fulfill the Great Commission by offering others the Gospel and the possibility of friendship with Jesus Christ. Having responded to the Risen Lord’s call to meet him in Galilee, evangelical Catholics go into the world in witness to the Christ who reveals both the face of the Merciful Father and the truth about our humanity.

Strong truths generously lived: that’s Evangelical Catholicism.

George Weigel is Distinguished Senior Fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C. His previous “On the Square” articles can be found in [First Things](#) .

MY COMMENTARY

This post goes to the root of what Christianity is all about. I start with a talk given by Justin Welby who, although he is the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, could well have been expounding the teaching of Pope Francis. Four videos of Pope Francis follow, also on evangelisation and on the importance of bearing witness "in synergy with the Holy Spirit." . I use videos of Fr Robert Barron who gives us a commentary on Pope Francis and evangelisation. I also use N.T. Wright, the Anglican expert on the New Testament whom Fr Robert Barron calls the greatest scripture scholar alive. He tells us that the Church on earth and heaven are not two separate entities; but that they are two dimensions of the same kingdom. This leads me to a link with Fr Stephen Freeman who is a convert from Protestantism to Orthodoxy and who has a wonderful blog called "Glory to God for All Things." He tells us that heaven and earth are not like two storeys in a building, but that we form a single community with the angels and saints. This is why Our Lady, the angels and saints play such a large part in Catholic/Orthodox worship. The Protestant objections to that practice only make sense in a two-storey cosmos. Every video contributes to the theme. Please spend time in absorbing what is said. Read it. Digest it. Pray it.

SIMPLY GOOD NEWS

WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?

This contribution is available at <http://fatherdavidbirdosb.blogspot.com/2015/07/justin-welby-of-canterbury-pope-francis.html>

Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Chesterton, Tolkien and Lewis in Elfland by Joseph Pearce [at Monks and Mermaids]



It is difficult to overstate the influence of G.K. Chesterton. Apart from the numerous converts who have come to Christianity, at least in part, because of an encounter with his writings, two of the bestselling books of all time were written, at least in part, under Chesterton's benign patronage. *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, both of which are in the top ten bestselling books of all time, were written by authors who cited Chesterton as a major influence.



J.R.R. Tolkien grew up, as a young and devout Catholic in Edwardian England, in the shadow of the wings of Chesterton's flights of fancy. In his celebrated essay "On Fairy Stories," Tolkien cites "Chestertonian Fantasy" as a powerful "means of recovery," which he defined as a "return and renewal of health" and as a "regaining of a clear view" of reality, of "seeing things as we are...meant to see them."

C.S. Lewis



C.S. Lewis had first read Chesterton in a field hospital in France during World War One and was surprised by the joy that Chesterton exuded in his essays. In spite of the fact that Lewis was an atheist at the time, he couldn't help liking Chesterton's jollity, his sense of humour, and his rumbustious joie de vivre. Chesterton had more common sense than all the moderns put together, the young atheist believed, except of course for his Christianity. A few years later, after reading Chesterton's classic work, *The Everlasting Man*, Lewis perceived the whole Christian outline of history laid out before him for the first time in a way that made sense. This revelation proved to be a significant pointer on Lewis's own path to conversion.

Although it is evident that Tolkien and Lewis were well-versed in Chesterton's work, the essay of his which was probably most influential on the philosophy of myth that underpinned their own approach to story-telling was "The Ethics of Elfland," which formed the fourth chapter of Chesterton's book, *Orthodoxy*.

For many people, this essay, or chapter, is best remembered for the perceptive and surprising connection that Chesterton makes between tradition and democracy:

I have never been able to understand where people got the idea that democracy was in some way opposed to tradition. It is obvious that tradition is only democracy extended through time.... Tradition may be defined as an extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death.... I, at any rate, cannot separate the two ideas of democracy and tradition; it seems evident to me that they are the same idea.

G.K. Chesterton



For Chesterton, the traditions of the past, extended through time by the continuum that we call civilization, constitute a powerful voice or presence in the present which ensures their being handed on in trust to future generations. Tradition is, therefore, truly, as Chesterton insists, "an extension of the franchise;" it is an extension of democracy through time, the proxy of the dead and the enfranchisement of the unborn. Such an understanding of tradition as a shared inheritance across the generations is clearly a potent and palpable presence in Middle-earth and Narnia. It has a gravitas that does not weigh heavily on one, like

an oppressive force from above, but grants security and therefore freedom from the winds of change by securing one with a healthy rootedness in the soil and soul of the culture which has nurtured and nourished one. It is the freedom that comes with a sense of belonging.

Another facet of Chesterton's "Ethics of Elfland" which would prove inspirational to Tolkien and Lewis was Chesterton's insistence that myths and fairy stories were not unbelievable, in the sense that they conveyed untruths, but were the most believable things in the world because they conveyed truths and taught lessons that the world needed to know and learn:

The things I believed most then, the things I believe most now, are the things called fairy tales. They seem to me to be the entirely reasonable things....Fairylnd is nothing but the sunny country of common sense. It is not earth that judges heaven, but heaven that judges earth; so for me at least it was not earth that criticised elfland, but elfland that criticised the earth.



In this brief passage, Chesterton reminds us that we should always judge sin from the perspective of virtue, even if, especially if, sin is more common than virtue. The should judges the is. This is the sense in which Tolkien, in his essay "On Fairy Stories," states that one of the functions of fairy stories was to hold up the mirror of scorn and pity to man. They show us ourselves and are most powerful when they show us what is wrong with ourselves.

This ability of fairy stories to show us ourselves is dependent on our ability to see ourselves in the mirror that they hold up to us. Whereas the sin of pride blinds us so that we cannot see our image in the mirror, humility opens our eyes. Only when our eyes are opened by humility to the sense of wonder in the goodness, truth and beauty of the cosmos can we attain the gratitude at the heart of all true joy:

The test of all happiness is gratitude; and I felt grateful, though I hardly knew to whom. Children are grateful when Santa Claus puts in their stockings gifts of toys and sweets. Could I not be grateful to Santa Claus when he put in my stockings the gift of two miraculous legs? We thank people for birthday presents of cigars and slippers. Can I thank no one for the birthday present of birth?

In stark contrast to this sense of wonder that opens and widens the cosmos, the philosophy of materialism seeks to imprison the senses within the confines of mere physical space. The materialist, wrote Chesterton, “like the madman, is in prison” and, what was worse, he was seemingly consoled by the fact that the prison, i.e. the material universe, was very large:

It was like telling the prisoner in Reading gaol that he would be glad to hear that the gaol now covered half the county. The warder would have nothing to show the man except more and more long corridors of stone lit by ghastly lights and empty of all that is human. So these expanders of the universe had nothing to show us except more and more infinite corridors of space lit by ghastly suns and empty of all that is divine.

Evidently inspired by this metaphor of materialism as a prison, Tolkien resurrected it in his own essay “On Fairy Stories” in which he spoke of “Escape” as “one of the main function of fairy-stories”: “Why should a man be scorned, if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls?”

We desire something beyond the prison of time and space because our true home is to be found beyond the prison walls, and the reason that the greatest truths are told in stories is because history itself is a story told by the greatest of all Story-Tellers. History is His Story. As Chesterton put it,

“this world of ours has some purpose; and if there is a purpose, there is a person. I had always felt life first as a story: and if there is a story there is a story-teller....I felt in my bones; first, that this world does not explain itself....Second, I came to feel as if magic must have a meaning, and meaning must have some one to mean it. There was something personal in the world, as in a work of art....”

Such a view of the world as being a work of art evokes images of God’s Grandeur as exclaimed by the great Gerard Manley Hopkins:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed.

It will also remind lovers of Tolkien and Lewis of the Great Music of God’s Creation in The Silmarillion and of Aslan’s singing of Narnia into being. And as for Chesterton’s proclamation that “this world of ours has some purpose” and that “magic must have a meaning, and meaning must have some one to mean it,” it

leads us into the words of Gandalf, whose words of encouragement to Frodo will serve as appropriately encouraging words with which to conclude our musings on the magic of Elfland:

[T]here was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and not by its maker. In which case you were meant to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought.



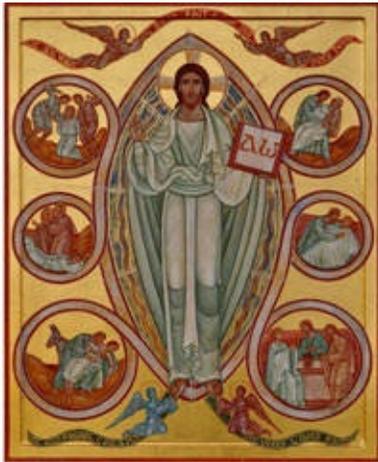
Joseph Pearce Joseph Pearce is a Senior Contributor at The Imaginative Conservative. He is writer in residence and director of the Center for Faith and Culture at Aquinas College in Nashville, Tennessee. His works include: G.K. Chesterton: Wisdom and Innocence, Literary Converts, Tolkien: Man and Myth, Solzhenitsyn: A Soul in Exile, The Quest for Shakespeare and Old Thunder: A Life of Hilaire Belloc. He is the series editor of the Ignatius Critical Editions, and editor of the St. Austin Review. Mr. Pearce has hosted two television series for EWTN on Shakespeare's Catholicism.

Books on the topic of this essay may be found in The Imaginative Conservative [Bookstore](#)

This contribution is available at <http://fatherdavidbirdosb.blogspot.com/2015/08/chesterton-tolkien-and-lewis-in-elfland.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Mercy of God from Taize, Pope Francis & St. Isaac the Syrian [at Monks and Mermaids]



THE ICON OF MERCY from TAIZE

The icon of mercy

Throughout the year 2015, our Community at Taizé is celebrating the 75th anniversary of its foundation, and invites people to remember its founder, Brother Roger, 100 years after his birth and ten years since his passing to the life of eternity. The theme especially proposed for reflection this year is “Towards a new solidarity”; and the Community has decided to have an icon painted telling the story of the Good Samaritan. This Bible text from chapter 10 of St. Luke’s Gospel gives a clear example of solidarity put into practice. The icon was made by the Icon Workshop of St John of Damascus in France.

The main person visible on the icon is Christ, standing in the centre. His figure is elongated and wears a garment coloured white with a greenish tint. The most significant part of the figure is his kind and welcoming face. With his right hand, he makes a gesture of blessing, and in his left hand he holds an open book of the Gospels showing the Greek letters alpha and omega.

Christ is surrounded by a long halo or mandorla made up of deep blue and red bands and of white and gold lines that give its surface mandorla an undulating movement. A thick white band forms the mandorla’s outer edge. This band does not just follow the outline, but twists outwards into loops that make six circles placed regularly around the edge of the mandorla. Within these circles, the parable of the Good Samaritan is represented in six episodes.

So from top to bottom and from left to right, the images on either side of Christ recount the gospel

passage. The first image shows the robbers attacking their victim. In the second, we see the victim lying on the ground, as the priest and the Levite pass by on the other side in prayer, but leaving the victim on the roadside. Then the Good Samaritan arrives with his donkey, leans down to the man and lifts him up. He tends his wounds. At the inn, the wounded man is in bed, and the Samaritan stands beside him. In the final image, the victim, the Samaritan and the innkeeper are seated together sharing a meal around a table.

Above and below the mandorla with Christ at the centre, four angels are depicted worshipping God. Three are in red, and the last is in a greenish blue. At the very top, behind the angels, is a red ribband with a waving movement, and at the bottom, behind the angels, is a green ribband. On the ribbands are the words (in French) “Whatever you have done for the least of my brothers or sisters you have done for me” (Matthew 25:40).

Meaning

Christ, dressed in white, is the heavenly Christ, transfigured, as he will come at the end of time. By his presence he blesses us and he tells us the story of the Good Samaritan. The mandorla signifies the mystery of God that is beyond our understanding. But, dressed in white like a newborn child, Christ comes to us and reveals God to us.

In the images telling the parable story, the victim is also represented clothed in white: Christ is present in the wounded person who needs our help. In several of these images, the position of the victim echoes moments of Christ’s passion (the scourging, the taking down from the cross). The good Samaritan is dressed in green, a colour that symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is true that it is not easy to come to help those who are in need, but if we begin to do so, the Holy Spirit comes into us and works through us.

In the first image, three figures are visible: the two robbers and the victim they are attacking. It is the image of a disfigured trinity. Recalling the story of the murder of Abel by Cain at the beginning of the Bible, the parable begins by showing harmony broken by sin. Humanity, though created “in the image of God”, is no longer in his likeness. In the last image, again we see three persons. They are sitting around the table, on which stands a cup – as on the icon of the Holy Trinity: the Trinitarian harmony has been re-established. While a piety that forgets one’s neighbour, like that of the priest and the Levite who pass by the victim, is only a form of idolatry, love, the work of charity accomplished by the good Samaritan, restores humanity to the likeness of God.

Artistic Style

The icon was made using the traditional iconographic technique handed down in the Orthodox Church: egg tempera and gold leaf on a wooden board covered in lefka (a white chalk-based gesso). As in most icons, the representational style is essentially that of Byzantine art. But since the art of the icon is not a gift reserved solely for the Christian East, different elements of the Western artistic tradition, especially that of the Burgundy region, have been introduced into the figure of Christ and to the composition as a whole. So the Christ figure recalls the image of Christ in glory in the Chapelle des Moines at Berzé, or Christ as he is represented on the tympana of Romanesque churches such as Vézelay. The composition as a whole, with the bands springing from the mandorla, is inspired by the art of manuscript illumination.

From the artistic point of view, the interest of this icon is in the fact that it is not a copy of a traditional image, but a new representation. It is a new image, born from reflection on the parable of the Good Samaritan, whose forms and colours reveal aspects the gospel with a new freshness. So the icon is a part of a living tradition in which the Holy Spirit enables us to keep rediscovering faith in a new way.

Last updated: 8 June 2015

THE CHURCH OF MERCY

by Pope Francis



The Church of Mercy Quotes (showing 1-30 of 35)

“To be faithful, to be creative, we need to be able to change. To change! And why must I change? So that I can adapt to the situations in which I must proclaim the Gospel. To stay close to God, we need to know how to set out; we must not be afraid to set out.”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

“Situations can change; people can change. Be the first to seek to bring good. Do not grow accustomed to evil, but defeat it with good.”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

“And here the first word that I wish to say to you: joy! Do not be men and women of sadness: a Christian can never be sad! Never give way to discouragement! Ours is not a joy born of having many possessions, but of having encountered a Person: Jesus, in our midst.”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

“Jesus on the cross feels the whole weight of the evil, and with the force of God's love he conquers it; he defeats it with his resurrection. This is the good that Jesus does for us on the throne of the cross. Christ's cross, embraced with love, never leads to sadness, but to joy, to the joy of having been saved and of doing a little of what he did on the day of his death.”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

“If we—all of us—accept the grace of Jesus Christ, he changes our heart and from sinners makes us saints. To become holy we do not need to turn our eyes away and look somewhere else, or have as it were the face on a holy card! No, no, that is not necessary. To become saints only one thing is necessary: to accept the grace that the Father gives us in Jesus Christ. There, this grace changes our heart. We continue to be sinners for we are weak, but with this grace which makes us feel that the Lord is good, that the Lord is merciful, that the Lord waits for us, that the Lord pardons us—this immense grace that changes our heart.”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

“The language of the Spirit, the language of the Gospel, is the language of communion that invites us to get the better of closedness and indifference, division and antagonism.”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

“I think this is truly the most wonderful experience we can have: to belong to a people walking, journeying through history together with our Lord, who walks among us! We are not alone; we do not walk alone. We are part of the one flock of Christ that walks together.”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

“St. Paul says that “the love of Christ compels us,” but this “compels us” can also be translated as “possesses us.” And so it is: love attracts us and sends us; it draws us in and gives us to others.”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

“Our faith in Christ, who became poor, and was always close to the poor and the outcast, is the basis of our concern for the integral development of society's most neglected members.”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

“Brothers and sisters, let us not be closed to the newness that God wants to bring into our lives! Are we often weary, disheartened, and sad? Do we feel weighed down by our sins? Do we think that we won't be able to cope? Let us not close our hearts, let us not lose confidence, let us never give up.”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

“Let the risen Jesus enter your life—welcome him as a friend, with trust: he is life! If up till now you have kept him at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms. If you have been indifferent, take a risk; you won’t be disappointed. If following him seems difficult, don’t be afraid. Trust him, be confident that he is close to you, he is with you, and he will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do.”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

“One who believes may not be presumptuous; on the contrary, truth leads to humility, because believers know that, rather than ourselves possessing truth, it is truth that embraces and possesses us.”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

“Do you allow yourselves to be gazed upon by the Lord? But how do you do this? You look at the tabernacle and you let yourselves be looked at . . . it is simple! “It is a bit boring; I fall asleep.” Fall asleep then, sleep! He is still looking at you. But know for sure that he is looking at you!”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy 1 likes Like “It is not creativity, however pastoral it may be, or meetings or planning that ensures our fruitfulness, even if these are greatly helpful. But what ensures our fruitfulness is our being faithful to Jesus, who says insistently: “Abide in me and I in you” (John 15:4).”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

“Newness often makes us fearful, including the newness God brings us, the newness God asks of us. We are like the apostles in the Gospel: often we would prefer to hold on to our own security, to stand in front of a tomb, to think about someone who has died, someone who ultimately lives on only as a memory, like the great historical figures from the past. We are afraid of God’s surprises.”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

“to start anew from Christ means being close to him, being close to Jesus. Jesus stresses the importance of this with the disciples at the Last Supper, as he prepares to give us his own greatest gift of love, his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus uses the image of the vine and the branches and says, Abide in my love, remain attached to me, as the branch is attached to the vine. If we are joined to him, then we are able to bear fruit.”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

“worldliness, which is a homicidal attitude. Spiritual worldliness kills! It kills the soul! It kills the person! It kills the Church! PART NINE”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

“But I am telling you: I would prefer a thousand times over a bruised Church to an ill Church!”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

“What a beautiful truth of faith this is for our lives: the mercy of God! God’s love for us is so great, so

deep; it is an unfailing love, one which always takes us by the hand and supports us, lifts us up and leads us on.”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy: His First Major Book: A Message of Hope for All People*

“This is what it means to be close to Christ. Abide in Jesus! This means remaining attached to him, in him, and with him, talking to him. Abide in Jesus!”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

“Let us remain with Christ—abiding in Christ—and let us always try to be one with him. Let us follow him; let us imitate him in his movement of love, in his going forth to meet humanity. Let us go forth and open doors. Let us have the audacity to mark out new paths for proclaiming the Gospel.”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

“A pastoral presence means walking with the People of God, walking in front of them, showing them the way, showing them the path; walking in their midst, to strengthen them in unity; walking behind them, to make sure no one gets left behind, but especially, never to lose the scent of the People of God in order to find new roads.”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

0 likes Like

“Let us pray to the Holy Spirit, who is truly the author of this unity in variety, of this harmony, that he might make us ever more “catholic” in this Church that is catholic and universal!”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

“The prophet Ezekiel said, “I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” This is the experience the apostle Paul had after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. It radically changed his outlook on life, and he received baptism. God transformed his heart! However, only think: a persecutor, a man who hounded out the Church and Christians, a man who became a saint, a Christian to the marrow, a genuine Christian! First he was a violent persecutor, then he became an apostle, a witness of Jesus Christ so brave that he was not afraid of suffering martyrdom. In the end, the Saul who wanted to kill those who proclaimed the Gospel gave his own life to proclaim it.”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

0 likes Like

“It is so very sad to find a worldly Christian who is sure—according to him or her—of that security that the faith gives and of the security that the world provides. You cannot be on both sides. The Church—all of us—must strip herself of the worldliness that leads to vanity, to pride, that is idolatry.”

— Pope Francis, *The Church of Mercy*

“Humility, meekness, magnanimity, and love to preserve unity! These, these are the roads, the true roads of the Church. Let us listen to this again. Humility against vanity, against arrogance—humility, meekness,

magnanimity, and love preserve unity.” — Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

“Let each one ask him- or herself today, “Do I increase harmony in my family, in my parish, in my community, or am I a gossip? Am I a cause of division or embarrassment?” And you know the harm that gossiping does to the Church, to the parishes, the communities. Gossip does harm! Gossip wounds. Before Christians open their mouths to gossip, they should bite their tongue! To bite one’s tongue: this does us good because the tongue swells and can no longer speak, cannot gossip.”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

“The Holy Spirit is the mover. This is why prayer is important. It is the soul of our commitment as men and women of communion, of unity. Pray to the Holy Spirit that he may come and create unity in the Church.”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

0 likes Like

“You could say to me, “But the Church is made up of sinners; we see them every day.” And this is true: we are a Church of sinners. And we sinners are called to let ourselves be transformed, renewed, sanctified by God.”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

“The Church, which is holy, does not reject sinners; she does not reject us all; she does not reject us because she calls everyone, welcomes them, is open even to those furthest from her; she calls everyone to allow themselves to be enfolded by the mercy, the tenderness, and the forgiveness of the Father,”

— Pope Francis, The Church of Mercy

PODCAST OF PETER KREEFT ON

Questions posed by Peter Kreeft:

The following questions do not divide Protestants and Catholics—and they are the most important questions of all...

Is God a transcendent, supernatural, personal, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, providential, loving, just Creator? Or is God an immanent cosmic force evolving in nature and man?

Do miracles really happen? Or has science refuted them? A transcendent God can perform miracles; a merely immanent, naturalistic God cannot. The three great miracles essential to orthodox Christianity are the Incarnation, the Resurrection and the new birth.

Is there a heaven? Or is heaven just all the good on earth?

Does God really love me? Or is that just a helpful sentiment?

Does God forgive my sins through Christ? Or is sin an outdated concept? In other words, is Christ a mere

human example or a Savior from sin?

Is Christ divine, eternal, from the beginning? Or is he only divine “as all men are divine”?

Did he physically rise from the dead? Or is the Resurrection only a myth, a beautiful symbol?

Must we be born again from above to be saved, to have God as our Father? Or is everyone saved automatically? Does everyone have God as Father simply by being born as a human being, or by being reasonably nice during life?

Is Scripture God’s word to us? Or is it human words about God? Does it have divine or human authority behind it? And can an ordinary Christian understand its true meaning without reading German theologians?

Most important of all, can I really meet God in Christ? If I ask him to be my Lord, the Lord of my life, will he really do it? Or is this just a “religious experience”? This question is really one with the question: Did Christ really rise from the dead? That is, is he alive now? Can I say: “You ask me how I know he lives? He lives within my heart!”?

Affirmative answers to these questions constitute the most important kind of unity already: not unity of thought but unity of being, the new being, being “in Christ”.

The evangelical resurgence, the charismatic movement, and the born-again phenomenon are all indications that God is working in our time at precisely this center, this place of unity. No human can create new being, and therefore no human can create unity, for unity follows being. But although with man it is impossible, with God all things are possible. God can and does create new being in us, and therefore God can create new unity among us—and he’s doing it right now! We are witnessing with our own eyes in this generation the definitive solution to the problem of division in the Church. God is solving the problem in exactly the same way he solves all our problems. He has one answer to all our needs, and the answer is a Person. It’s working. You can see it, surely, at charismatic prayer meetings: without compromise, indifference, or watering down their faith, Protestants and Catholics are experiencing the kind of Christian unity New Testament Christians experienced: unity in Christ. And the world is noticing: “See how they love one another!”

St. Isaac – Mercy and Justice

by Fr. Stephen Freeman (Orthodox)



Isaac the Syrian

[my source: Glory to God for All Things](#)

There is a strain within some forms of Western theology that is deeply concerned with the “justice” of God. Some even go so far as to say that God is constrained by His justice – that He cannot deny its demands (to do so, they argue, would make Him “less than just”). It is common for Orthodox theology to find this problematic. Here St. Isaac of Syria states the case quite clearly:

Mercy and justice in the same soul is like the man who worships God and idols in the same temple. Mercy is in contradiction with justice. Justice is the return of the equal. Because it returns to man that which he deserves and it does not bend to one side neither is it partial in the retaliation. But mercy is sorrow that is moved by grace and bends to all with sympathy and it does not return the harm to him who deserves it although it overfills him who deserves good. ... And as it is not possible for hay and fire to be able to exist in the same house, the same way it is not possible for justice and mercy to be in the same soul. As the grain of sand cannot be compared with a great amount of gold – the same way God’s need for justice cannot be compared with his mercy. Because man’s sin, in comparison to the providence and the mercy of God, are like a handful of sand that falls in the sea and the Creator’s mercy cannot be defeated by the wickedness of the creatures.

I understand that many have a passion for the justice of God – believing that in the end everyone will be requited in the proper manner and this “balancing” will somehow make right all of the evil that may have been tolerated for a while. There is no doubt that many times our evil actions bring evil consequences on us (not as punishment from God but as our own self-willed estrangement from His Divine Life). But the vision of the Fathers and the vision of Christ’s revelation of the Father as received in the Church is of the infinite mercy of God.

Abba Ammonas states:

Love is not in enmity with anybody, it does not abuse anybody, it does not detest anybody neither believer nor unbeliever or foreigner or fornicator, or unclean. On the contrary it loves more the sinners and the weak and the negligent and for their sake it toils and mourns and weeps. It empathizes with the wicked and the sinners more than it does with the good, imitating and drinking with them.

Therefore when He wanted to show us which is the true love he taught saying 'be then compassionate as your Father is compassionate'(Luke 6:36) and as he sends his rain on the good and the wicked and makes His sun rise on the honest and the dishonest, the same way he who truly loves, loves everybody and has compassion for all and prays for all.

This sort of discourse can provoke anger in some readers – particularly those who demand that justice must, in the end, be done. I cannot help but feel that those who demand justice of God are like those who stood about the woman taken in adultery and demanded her stoning. Christ rebuked them, seeking to show them the sin in their own heart (“he who is without sin let him cast the first stone). By a strange quirk of Christian theology, there are those who feel “righteous” in their own heart, arguing that, having accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, they now have the righteousness of Christ (“imputed righteousness”) and thus feel safe in calling for justice to be done to others (thinking, I suppose, that this threat will provoke repentance). But justice is a very dangerous thing indeed. Though it may be called for in the interest of provoking someone to repentance, it can quickly become a thing in itself, and gather us up into the company of those who are outwardly righteous but inwardly “full of dead men’s bones.”

Spiritually, it is of far greater benefit and safety to simply beg the mercy of God for those who are trapped in sin, and see and treat them with the mercy of God. We are commanded to love even our enemies. I can think of no commandment that says we are to judge the unrighteous.

By the same token, I think it becomes theologically dangerous for us to project this judgement onto God who has shown us His mercy in that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” This unbounded love of God is limited only by theologians who seek to set requirements on the reception of the love of God. Let them return to His mercy and first determine where it ends before they suggest the beginning of something else.

This contribution is available at <http://fatherdavidbirdosb.blogspot.com/2015/07/the-mercy-of-god-from-taize-pope.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

Super Saints really work! [at Equipping Catholic Families]



Bridget just received her own set of the **Super Saints** cards from our Parish after attending the summer **Totus Tuus** program this week. I guess I really should have tried this before...but I'm pleased to announce that these **Super Saints cards really work!** After briefly looking over the cards, we had an awesome game of **Super Saints Showdown**...playing a friendly game of [Top Trumps](#) with the cards. Bridget has already made her own connections between the saints (*did you know that St Therese and St Kateri both died at the age of 24?*) and she has a growing number of favorite saints.





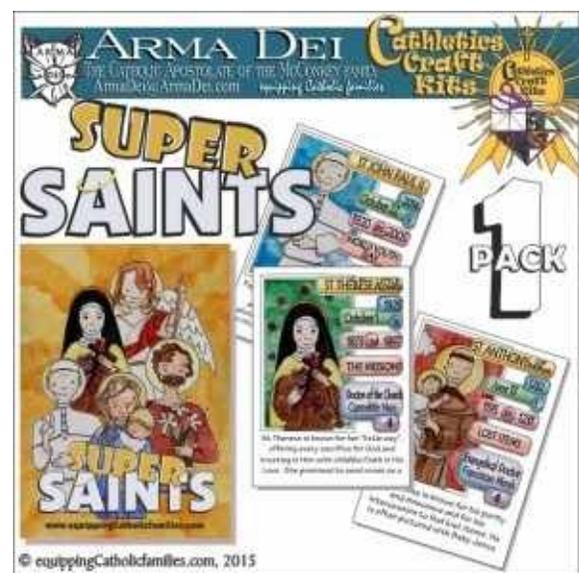
She has already been asking some cool questions about canonization...discovering that 'Pre-C' means that the saint was canonized before the official process was in effect.

One of our commenters recently asked if the game was inhibited by the fact that there are only 18 cards currently available, noticing that the official [Top Trumps](#) card games include at least 30 cards. (Pack Two will be released soon!)

I'm happy to report...that even with only 18 cards, you may have to choose when to end the game as the cards are constantly traded back and forth. As the players get increasingly familiar with the cards, the questions are carefully chosen to win cards and inevitably different questions are asked with each match. *You won't believe how quickly you'll discover and retain key facts about these holy heroes!*



I think that we have also discovered a **THIRD** way to play with the **Super Saints** cards. This version would be more of a “Clue” based game where a player reveals one detail at a time until the other player can guess correctly which saint is presented. This game can be quite challenging...and even though *I made these cards...*Bridget won the first match!



Would you like to purchase your own **Super Saints Craft Kit**...to print up to 5 sets for your own home or classroom use?

Check out the [Super Saints Craft Kit Pack One](#) (\$5, for a limited time)



Would you like an *already-printed* **Super Saints Pack One** deck?

Check out [Super Saints Pack One Printed Deck](#) (\$6 + shipping)

OOPS: SOLD OUT!

Make sure that you're subscribed to find out when our next print run happens!

This contribution is available at <http://www.equippingcatholicfamilies.com/2015/07/super-saints-really-work.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

The Anti-Christ is Here [at Catholic Girl Problems]

When I was seven, I was snooping through my mother's stuff, when something caught my eye.

The book was titled [The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow](#) by Constance Cumbey. To my innocent mind, rainbows were a wonder to behold, and I could not fathom anything dangerous about those glorious bursts of colors in the sky. The book's cover, however, begged no alternative. A circle of red, yellow, green, orange, and blue sat front-and-center, while various symbols decorated the circumference...

Symbols of the occult, I would later learn.

For the time being, however, I was young and naïve. Life and all creatures were kind, fair, and good. The blissful ignorance of childhood swaddled me, so much so, I could not fathom the idea of evil.

Then my mother caught me going through her things.

"What are you doing?" she asked, her eyes quickly diverting to the book in my hand.

I don't recall how the conversation began, but for some reason, she decided to give me a crash course on the Book of Revelation and the Anti-Christ. *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow*, she said, uncovers the secrets of the New Age Movement and the eventual uprising of the dark figure. She said the Anti-Christ would appear as someone good and trustworthy, but once his power was secured, he would persecute anyone who pledged devotion to the one, true God.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Would he kill me if I said I loved Jesus?"

"He might," she replied matter-of-factly, and within one fell swoop, my childhood bliss was destroyed.

Nighty-night, Tara! Sweet dreams!

As a child, I thought everyone loved God. I judged the world against the people at church, which was my safe haven. Mass, Bible studies, church socials, religious education – these activities *were* my world, and I just assumed all people felt the same. I never realized how much hatred for God existed outside the church walls, and along with hatred for God comes hatred for anyone who worships Him.

Now an adult, I am far wiser and more experienced. I remember the conversation of warning with my mother, and while no obvious Anti-Christ has entered the scene, I see and hear and feel him everywhere. The New Age Movement paved the way for the spirit of Anti-Christ, as people waste no time abandoning the Ultimate Truth taught by Christ over 2,000 years ago. No longer do we need God, for we *are* God, and we write our own commandments! God did not *create* the universe...God *is* the universe! God is me, you, the trees, the air, the dog, whatever Oprah says.

To sum things up, there is nothing supreme about God, and therefore, no need to honor Him or His mandates.

Welcome to the New Age, folks.



The annihilation of Yahweh has always been the goal of the New Age, and considering recent events, I am certain proponents of the “age of Aquarius” are much pleased. I am referring, of course, to the legalization of same-sex marriage across the United States. I could write about how God “created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve,” but the issue delves much deeper. The simple fact is the Church is poised to experience immense persecution, and the stage is set for the complete elimination of God within the minds and hearts of humanity.

And who will replace Him? Why, the Anti-Christ, of course!

Should you think I am over-dramatizing, consider the following facts: 9,035,223 individual persons received some form of assistance from Catholic Charities USA in 2013; Catholic agencies and affiliates provided client services (ranging from basic needs for clothing and shelter to developing like skills such as financial literacy) over 17,000,000 times during the same year; the Catholic Church has funded 776,456 educational services nationwide, not to mention the funding of 68,271 health clinics, 29,327

dental clinics, 8,851 HIV/AIDS services, and 1,088 hospice services since 2011.

(Source: [Catholic Charities Services Data](#))

And we haven't even discussed the *global* charities.

These numbers barely scratch the surface, but should demonstrate the billions of dollars the Catholic Church invests via various ministries...regardless of the individual's religious affiliation. People from a wide array of beliefs (from devout Catholics to devout atheists) reap the benefits of the Catholic Church's generosity, and as Christ taught to "give to whoever asks of you," the Church expects nothing back.

Remember this the next time you speak ill of Catholics.

But the Church's generosity would not be possible without the tithing of members, which (after the bills are paid) go entirely to charitable missions. What will become of the Church, however, should the young generation grow up with society and the faith at odds? Trends change, social norms change, and with these changes, people change. One thing which never changes, however, is the Church's upholding of the Truth.

Hence, the immense dislike of us, but I digress.

People will believe whatever the media tells them to believe, so the tender suckling you now nurse could (after several hundred hours in front of the television and social media) grow to be at odds with the Church's teaching surrounding same-sex marriage. No big deal, except when you consider the long-term implications.

Catholics who have been brainwashed by the media (a system designed to hypnotize the masses, sorry to burst your bubble) will leave the Church in droves, provided they haven't left already. With them will go the funds necessary to support the Church's countless charities worldwide, which so many people rely upon. Regardless of one's opinion of the Catholic Church, the fact is obliteration of the Church's presence upon the global scene would tear an enormous, black hole in the fabric of society.

And where will the people go when need arises? Why, the government of course! Uncle Sam will take care of Baby, as always. Except people are so quick to forget one, simple truth: the more you need the government, the more control the government has over the people. Unlike the Catholic Church, the government does not practice charity for God's sake, and will always require some form of repayment.

The government doesn't do *anything* for God's sake.

But I think we are a long way from such a reality, so let us consider the short-term implications of the same-sex marriage ruling. Someday soon, you will turn on the news and hear a story which goes something like so:

Homosexual Couple Approaches Church to Marry.

Priest Denies Request to Marry.

Homosexual Couple Screams "Discrimination!" and Sues Catholic Church.

Court Rules in Couple's Favor.

Put another way, the "separation of Church and State" will become nullified...and the State will rule superior. Put *another* way, the "religious freedom" our government swears to uphold will eventually be no more, which (considering the complete lack of reverence for God within the borders of the United States) shouldn't concern too many people...

Until the government overrides a freedom we *do* care about.

Believe me, the psychopaths on Capitol Hill do not care about the American people. The complete disregard for religious freedom is simply the beginning...the "dipping of the toes in the pool of Communism." Once God is completely eliminated and the presence of His Catholic Church a thing of the past, the path will be paved for a New World Order and the Anti-Christ.

But for now, let's pretend everything's sunshine and rainbows.

When I found my mother's book so long ago, I hoped and prayed her words of warning would never come to fruition. I questioned my ability to die for God, should the circumstances demand I do. What I failed to realize was there are many means of dying, and you do not have to meet the sword to do so. Walking the streets, scrolling the Internet, watching the news...each day amidst the spirit of Anti-Christ is a death unto itself. Standing for and with Christ means being slandered, persecuted, and ostracized.

Which only makes me cling to Him more.

Pray the Rosary, people. Seriously. Your mind makes the meditation seem super hard, but your mind is wrong. Prayer of the Rosary is akin to playing with holy, divine fire, and only requires 15 minutes of your 24 hours. Go to Confession weekly, or heck, *monthly*. Guard your eyes, be selective of the programs and movies you subject yourself to, and if possible, eliminate television all together. Spend time with the Blessed Sacrament, as He blesses those greatly who "watch one hour with Him." Unite your sufferings, big and small, to Christ's suffering upon the Cross for the reparation of souls, because souls are no longer making reparation themselves.

Above all, pray. Pray for the humility to recognize God as God, not some mystical being equated with your house dog. Pray for the wisdom to discern the crazy world around you, and for the courage to stand up for His Truth. Pray for the strength to resist the power of evil, running rampant and wild. Pray for the ability to love God as He deserves to be loved, and reap the pleasures and benefits of such a relationship with Him.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. – Matthew 24:35

This contribution is available at <http://www.catholicgirlproblems.com/2015/07/the-anti-christ-is-here.html>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |

The Rights of Evil [at Travels of a New Christian]



Secular Ideology & Christian Ideology

Secular man views society as the common discipline of respect for one another's existence, and the right to be within the society through the birth of their physical form into the physical world. (If you're not born you're not equal.) The foundation of their society is *equality*; that word that we all believe we have the definition of, at least until matters of well-being and preferences are considered as part of the interactional discourse between humans. Then the term *equality* becomes that quality of existence that is always just around the corner of any disparity between us. *Equality*, in truth, is much more abstract than *faith*; but it appears more real because of its deceptive value. In our attempt to quantify and thus use equality for the well-being of society, we do so through human law, or the reliance upon mankind as the sole judge of the moral nature of himself. Think of it as athletes scoring their own performances in a competition. How well do you think that would work?

Christian man views society as a singular body with a diversity of gifts. Respect for those gifts permits the free exercise or equality of the individual within the society. Faith is the catalyst that leaves all judgment to God and relies upon His love to define their law. Christianity states that evil exists as an entity – Satan – who seduces mankind to oppose God's will, and manifests that opposition in what the Christian calls sin. But if man could not be deceived by Satan, could Satan be evil? It appears to me that it takes two to tango, does it not.

So, the Christian looks without to find meaning, and the secularist looks within to find meaning.

Man recognizes two forms of evil; natural evil and moral evil; the evil without and the evil within.

Natural Evil

Natural evil is that perceived evil that is independent of man's actions and involves only victims and not transgressors; such as a hurricane or other natural events that cause harm or death to living creatures or the state of an ecological system, like a mature and beautiful forest. When one hears of a forest fire that consumed thousands of acres of beautiful trees and killed hundreds of innocent animals, we cry out on the pathos of an evil we cannot understand or control. Historically, this definition included cancer and birth defects. Evil, defined as such, appears as a word to describe that event that causes harm to the stability and contentment of a creature or thing; the only exception being death, and there are those who want to

classify death as evil and conquer it by living forever.

What we see in such a definition is a convenience for human understanding; a behavioral shortcut, a device of natural selection, which permits one to comprehend a threat to their stability without really having to engage it or gather full knowledge of it. It's a defense mechanism, yet does it actually exist as an objective fact? Under such a definition, evil would have a threshold of existence based upon the individual perceiving the quality of the word or action. If this is true, then evil is more likely to be a subjective concept as it has gained relativity. That means it has a threshold of definition and is relative to the purpose or intent of the word or action being judged. PETA considers man's use of animals as food, sport, and clothing as barbarous and evil, but PETA does not consider the lion chasing down, killing, and the eating of its dinner as evil. The former is a moral evil in their minds and the latter is a natural law. To the extreme, while one would think that genocide is an absolute and universal evil accepted by all, we have numerous experiences with societies that viewed genocide as a moral good. So clearly we have a confusion between natural law and moral evil.

And what of those conditions that we once thought to be a natural evil that are now considered to be a moral evil? A moral evil is that form that involves a transgressor who causes harm or death to living creatures or the state of an ecological system. A hurricane or a forest fire, in past centuries, would be a natural evil, yet today we know that our influence on the world's environmental balance contribute to climate conditions that regulate weather patterns. The natural evil is now a moral evil. Yes? Cancer, once thought a natural evil, is now being realized as a preventable disease that man can bring upon himself through his own actions. Perhaps this makes cigarette manufacturers men of moral evil?

Mankind constantly reassesses the threshold and definition of evil to facilitate those societal actions that guides the environment towards what mankind perceives as good. This is an act of revelation and/or relativity. This word or action is good, this one is bad. Rarely is there any fully disclosed fact sheet for the majority of us to comprehend on such assessments as modern man engages evil based upon revelational and relative matters. Due to increasing relativity, our society is in constant flux and evolution of thought. And as relative thought increases there must be a corresponding decline in absolute truth. We are expected to hear the term evil and respond with the proper defensive action; content only in the authority of man to define evil for us. Unfortunately, our increasing sensitivity to our relative emotions is redefining evil faster than our biological clock can keep pace with and so we invariably finds ourselves in compromising or accusatory situations that we could never anticipate.

In addition, as a victim to natural evil, man's suffering is particularly abstract due to his lack of control of natural events. He frequently cannot blame it on a specific cause that is within his control and thus prevent it from happening in the future. Instead he must endure or disperse; both of which prolong suffering. Suffering causes psychological damage and a withdrawal from the normal exchange of human relations for those affected. This is not only a problem on the physical level, but also on the spiritual level; that withdrawal not only being from other individuals and groups, but also from God. After all, as noted earlier, how can an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good God permit such evil to take place? The confusion is natural, and the frequent consequences can be devastating to the unprotected soul. This leads me to our second form of perceived evil.

Moral Evil

Moral evil, as I noted prior, is that form that involves a transgressor who causes harm or death to living creatures. Here, the problem of evil becomes ever more focused as we now have a personal point of

reference; ourselves. In the case of the train derailment in Santiago, that reference point is the engineer driving the train too fast.

For the secularist, moral evil resides within the words and actions of one who demonstrates disrespect for the right of an individual as equal; that being their access and stability to the cause of happiness. Moral evil is not tied to absolute values, but rather draws its definition from the term “right” and the future resources of relative thought over that of the finite past. All things finite and all things past are subject to the new-found scrutiny of human inward thinking. The secularist sees the society of man as an evolving work whose principles are in the future advancement of his scientific, technological, educational, social, recreational, and pastoral pursuits. He hopes for the coming man, like the father of the prodigal son. The difference is that the secular man will never be able to recognize his son when he arrives because the fluid nature of relative thought on such things as good, evil, ethics and moral value will render but a shadow of the son and not the actual one. We saw this with Christ.

For the Christian, moral evil resides within desire and idolatry. When an object used by man becomes an end in itself, that object is perverted to man’s sole use and not for the singular body of mankind. In such a state, the object, as well as man’s intent and interest, is corrupted and thus defined as an evil to society. Through idolatry of the thing, man’s desires are unrestrained from leading the individual to personal sins or acts of immoral behavior; both unconscious and conscious or venial and mortal. Continued idolatry and indulgences in desire create a mindset that eventually is incapable of seeing the pain one inflicts upon others. It’s the gradual process of redefinition of immoral behavior, or perhaps even the elimination of the reality of immoral behavior. It’s a type of sociopathic behavior I refer to as the “hidden conscience”. We know what we are doing, yet a hidden resource within us resists all attempts to recognize it for what it is. Christianity calls it “fallen”. Modern man has given it many other names.

I would have to agree with the thoughts of M. Scott Peck, psychiatrist and author of the book, *The Road Less Traveled*. He sees people who consistently engage in moral evils as self-deceiving; unwilling to face the truth of their moral evils and the associative guilt, and intent upon the appearance of respectability and perfection to the point of consistently lying. They require scapegoats for their offences, which leads them to further immoral decisions, and they have little ability to understand the consequences of their actions through the viewpoint of their victims. But few of us are so perverted by idolatry that we fall into such a category of man. Rather, we are simply open to certain seductions that our nature leans to, and we unconsciously set up circumstances that permits us to fulfill our idolatrous desires. Once committed, we repent, but we come back again and again to that idol and that desire.

And we keep it hidden deep; for public shame and guilt is an admission of one’s humanity as subservient to even that of the lowest of form of humanity, which then projects one to accept the truth that God is self-evident. In doing that – the total admission to God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and perfectly good nature – is to force the human psyche to God’s will. The Christian world views evil as those thoughts, words, and deeds that are contrary to the character of God. Our society, in truth, has little patience for saints and less so for those of us in rehab; whether it be for sin or alcohol. I say this for while man does much for the rehabilitation of the addicted, he also places in front of the addicted all forms of barriers that impede their recovery and think little of it.

It is an interesting phenomenon in the study of addiction that the most resilient of cures so frequently take place after the complete collapse of the ego. If death doesn’t consume the body, the mind may find a way out of the addiction, but only after a personal trauma that brings one to the brink of destruction and offers

the addicted only one choice; a public life or a personal death. This is the foundational aspect of the rehab clinic; the public recognition of the addiction through the second-person experience. It's a public conscience that cures.

It is at this pivotal juncture where man would have to face God and account for his actions that I could form my argument for evil as an entity. For Satan to be at all successful in the seduction of man, he must first establish the permanence of man's belief that he is best served without God's will and paternity. Man inclines to bastardship over stewardship; preferring to be born of nature, without a father. We see this most evident today in the dismantlement of the family structure. Something or someone has done this quite well, for man sees that place – with God – as something he must resist with all of the force that continued evil can bring.

The train engineer appears to have been caught in such a personal struggle. If the evidence bears truth, his repetitive desire for speed has cost many people their health and many their lives. He is at that juncture, that place where he can find God self-evident, and in so doing find a way for his own repentance, acceptance of judgment by God, and renewal into God's will and purpose for his life. He can transform, though our secular society has little patience for such matters, preferring punishment to redemption. And why are we oriented so? I can illuminate one, encompassing factor that I find critically significant to this perverted orientation, and I will take on that task in my following posts.

PART 3 – To come.

God Bless and Buen Camino – Reese

This contribution is available at <http://travelsOfANewChristian.com/2013/09/15/the-rights-of-evil-part-2/>
Copyright is retained by the contributing author (follow above link for info on this piece).

| [Contents](#) |