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*February*  
*2018*

# **New Evangelists Monthly #62**

February 2018

- [\*\*New Evangelists Monthly - February 2018\*\*](#)

# New Evangelists Monthly - February 2018

- [Forward](#)  
...about this eBook
- [The Miracle in the Waiting Room](#)  
The Mission of Saint Thorlak
- [Science and Religion](#)  
A Catholic Citizen in America by Brian Gill
- [Nut @ 2](#)  
With Us Still by John Schroeder
- [Unbound, A Practical Guide to Deliverance](#)  
JOY Alive in our hearts by Nancy Ward
- [God's Beautiful and Natural Design](#)  
Plot Line and Sinker (Ellen Gable, Author) by Ellen Gable Hrkach
- [Serving with Compassion](#)  
by Tony Agnesi
- [Speak So I Can Hear You - Words of Affirmation](#)  
Under Thy Roof by Kirby Hoberg
- [When You Pray](#)  
Grace to Paint by Sister Maresa Lilley
- [Bullying Has No Grace; But Forgiveness Does! Here's My Story](#)  
by Virginia Lieto
- [When it's better not to know](#)  
FranciscanMom by Barbara Szyszkiewicz
- [Death: Are You Prepared for the end, of life and of the world?](#)  
One Pearl by Victoria Clarizio
- [Psalm 96 ~ Be Glad and Praise the Lord!](#)  
Pauca Verba by Fr. Stephen Morris
- [The Perverse Use of 50 Shades for Marketing](#)  
Decisions by Birgit by Birgit Jonac

- **[Unintentional Irony: NPR, Abortion, and Maternal Devotion](#)**  
Clinging to Onions
- **[Transferable Lessons](#)**  
Shifting My Perspective by Claire McGarry
- **[The Betrothal of the Blessed Virgin Mary to St. Joseph is tied to the Protection of the Unborn Children, Marriage and Family](#)**  
Cradling Catholic by Larry Peterson
- **[Reevaluating Time Schedules](#)**  
Renew The Church! by Thomas and Deborah Richard
- **[Intoxicated 'drifter' speaks clearly about life](#)**  
Peace Garden Passage by Roxane Salonen
- **[I Believe in God](#)**  
Creo en Dios! by Susan Stabile
- **[Deliver Me](#)**  
The Not by Mary Cooper
- **[Fathers - You are vital; Males - Be Men before God!](#)**  
In the Breaking of the Bread by Fr. Gilles Surprenant
- **[Blessed John Duns Scotus - A Theology of Love](#)**  
by David Torkington
- **[Best Confession Ever!](#)**  
by Vijaya Bodach
- **[The Battle Belongs to the Lord!](#)**  
beautiful thorns by Lisa Ponchak
- **[Putting on Christ: What does this mean?](#)**  
A Moment From De Sales by Fr. Richard DeLillio
- **[Learning to Pray](#)**  
From the Pulpit of my Life by Ruth Ann Pilney
- **[A Means to Listen](#)**  
The Frank Friar by Fr. Nicholas Blackwell
- **[Epiphany: a deeper look](#)**

Catholic Deacon by Deacon Scott Dodge

- [\*\*Mystical Body of Christ - Why Individuals Matter\*\*](#)  
Quiet Consecration by Leslie Klinger
- [\*\*Who Is Your Family?\*\*](#)  
A Spiritual Journey by David Wong
- [\*\*Sacred Art is flourishing and inspiring now in the city of Phoenix\*\*](#)  
by Tom Perna
- [\*\*Disobedience: Why We Can't Have Nice Things\*\*](#)  
Carolyn Astfalk, Author by Carolyn Astfalk
- [\*\*Cleansing Our Temple\*\*](#)  
Bartimaeus' Quiet Place by Bartimaeus Timeo
- [\*\*Forgotten Fathers: Waiting Room Men in an Abortion Clinic\*\*](#)  
Christ's Faithful Witness by Susan Fox
- [\*\*My Child Is Good\*\*](#)  
The Running Hail Mary by Carolyn Smith
- [\*\*Never Harsh, Always Loving and Caring\*\*](#)  
bukas palad by Fr. Adrian Danker
- [\*\*Boldly Catholic\*\*](#)  
Boldly Catholic by Rick Rice
- [\*\*Emmanuel: the Entrance into Inadequacy\*\*](#)  
CatholicSoup by Vinny Carr
- [\*\*When the Sun of Culture is Low on the Horizon, Even Dwarves Cast Long Shadows\*\*](#)  
V for Victory! by Anita Moore
- [\*\*John of the Cross by George P. Evans\*\*](#)  
The Koala Mom by Bonnie Way
- [\*\*I am a political orphan\*\*](#)  
A Drop in the Ocean by Laura Peredo
- [\*\*Attracted to Jesus\*\*](#)  
Walking the Path by Christian Miraglia

- **[Mistaken Papal Critics and History We Forget](#)**  
If I Might Interject
- **[The Most Ridiculous Commandment](#)**  
Real Life Rosary by Jim Hahn
- **[Laws of Life and the Road](#)**  
A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars by Ebeth Weidner
- **[Man-Made Spirituality versus Communion With God](#)**  
joy of nine9 by Melanie Jean Juneau
- **[Michael Savage likens the Roman Catholic Church to Isis!](#)**  
The Shield of Faith by Frank Rega
- **[Radicals Misrepresenting Traditionalists and Their Infection Within the Body Of Christ: 1 Peter 5 and My Brother in Christ](#)**  
Servimus unum Deum by Julian Barkin
- **[Knowing Thy True Self](#)**  
Theologyisaverb by Elizabeth Reardon
- **[How the Homeschool Year is Going So Far!](#)**  
Veils and Vocations by Jennifer Elia

## 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.

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## The Miracle in the Waiting Room [at The Mission of Saint Thorlak]



*This is a true story.*

The scene is an urban hospital, in the surgical family waiting room. There is a cross-section of people anxiously hoping to have a nurse appear, call out the name of their loved one, and give a good report. It is equally likely that someone is waiting while her father electively has cataracts removed as it is that the person next to her is the girlfriend of a twentysomething year old being operated on for a gunshot wound. There are older men, teenagers asleep on knapsacks for pillows, and middle-aged women staring blankly at the news channel on the television overhead.

A very young mother walks up to the reception desk, toddler in tow, and negotiates an issue that can't be overheard in detail but is obviously causing much aggravation for everyone involved. The toddler, bored and unable to see over the height of the counter, begins to fuss.

The mother interrupts the receptionist to silence her child's whining. The child begins to cry.



*“SHUT UP!!! NOT NOW!!!”* The mother has gone past her ability to cope with any more problems. Not understanding this, the child cries harder and says she wants a snack.

*“I SAID SHUT UP OR I’M GOING TO SPANK YOU, HARD!!!”*

The child reverts back to whining, persistently whimpering between hiccups.

The mother leans down to the child and hisses something in red, hot anger.



The people in the waiting room begin to look back and forth to one another, sharing unspoken thoughts of discomfort and uncertainty. Nobody wants to witness this. Nobody wants to make anything worse. And, many do not want the noise. A good number, in fact, wish that both mother and child would remember they are in a hospital setting and please keep their voices down.

The child is quiet for a minute or two, then begins to cry again, loudly.

A woman, sitting alone and reading, puts her book down and slowly walks over to the mother. Everyone in the waiting room is watching, expectantly. Here is a volunteer who is going to speak what is on everyone’s mind and put this mother in her place.

The woman says to the mother, “How old is your daughter?”

The mother, surprised, says, “She’ll be three next month.”

The woman smiles. “I thought so. My own daughter just turned three, and boy, is she a handful. She could outscreech your daughter any day. I’m glad I could leave her with my mother, because she would absolutely hate it here.”

The mother, looking exhausted, says, “You want to hold her?”



The woman smiles and picks up the child. “Hi! You’re hungry, huh. Me, too. I wish everything didn’t take so long. But it’s easier for me. I can see everything. You’re stuck looking at everyone’s knees, and that’s no fun. And this is a huge place. I bet you’ve walked a long way and just wish you could take a nap.” The child looks quizzically at the woman, who looks back at the mother and says, “You’ve got a tough job with a strong little girl like this.”

The child reaches for her mother, and the woman hands her over. The child snuggles into her mother’s neck, and the mother gazes at her child thoughtfully.

“Hang in there. It gets easier, especially when everyone is back home.” The woman smiles and sits back down. The receptionist hands the mother something which apparently satisfies the need at hand, and the mother leaves toward the exit with her child nearly asleep in her arms.

Oblivious to the buzz around her, the woman is back to reading. The receptionist calls out: “Ma’am? Ma’am? Excuse me?”

The woman looks up.

“Thank you so much. That was a miracle, what you did there. I was so scared for that little girl.”

Others start chiming in. “Yes, thank you!” ---- “You were so brave, I would have been afraid to approach her like that.” ---- “How did you do that? You’ve got a special touch!”

Everyone present agreed that a miracle had taken place. Hostility and exhaustion do not just melt away. The woman herself thought: yes, there has been a miracle. But not the miracle everyone else claimed.



This woman being hailed for such courage and kindness lives each day as a person with autism. Eye contact makes her heart race. Speech is a chore, and “shy” is the kind way to describe her habit of hiding wherever she goes. She struggles between the wish to be invisible and the longing to be known. Relating is hard work. No matter what she says, she second-guesses her wording, feeling more like she is performing than connecting with others. It is a labor for her to be here, but having a book helps drown out the noise and keep her eyes from having to look toward others. Small talk is torture.

In relating this story, the woman said with astonishment that she never, ever imagined doing what she did. She thought a moment more and added, “There was just something about both of them that said the same thing. The little girl was overwhelmed, like I feel most of the time, and so was her mom. The only difference is, people let little children cry when they can’t handle any more, but adults have to put on a strong show and keep going. Who was there for the mom? Who is there when I am at my lowest, except a bunch of people who look at me like everyone was looking at that mom? I didn’t even have to think about it. This time, it wasn’t a social skill I had been taught and had to practice just right. This was just being human, one struggler talking to another. No rehearsing required.”



**The first two objectives of the Mission of Saint Thorlak are:**

- **To make people aware of our humanity: our human need to be known and loved**
- **To make people aware that these are also the immediate needs of those around us**

The woman with autism in the surgical waiting area accomplished our second objective much more effectively in her observations and actions than any essay we might attempt to post.



**Pray:** Heavenly Father, give us eyes that see the human needs of those around us.

**Contemplate:** How would we treat people around us if we prefaced all of our actions by thinking, “These people are showing me, this very moment, their human need to be known and loved”?

**Relate:** Use that contemplation at least once in action, and see if it changes anything – an action, a reaction, an attitude, an outcome.

[activities/missionary-thought-for-the-week-of-january-22-2018-the-miracle-in-the-waiting-room](#)

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| [Contents](#) |

## Science and Religion [at A Catholic Citizen in America]

I've seen a few op-eds saying that science needn't interfere with religious beliefs.

Some even said that science and religion, faith and reason, get along fine. Those were nearly always Catholic publications.

The one I saw this week was in Forbes, an American business magazine. That got my attention.

- Facts and fancy
- Views — view, actually
- Options



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**Seeking and Using Knowledge: an Ancient Tradition**

Folks like Aristotle and Anaxagoras studied the natural world.

They were systematic about it, and tried to understand what it is and how it works. In that sense they were “scientists.”

But they weren’t “scientists” in today’s sense. More like natural philosophers.

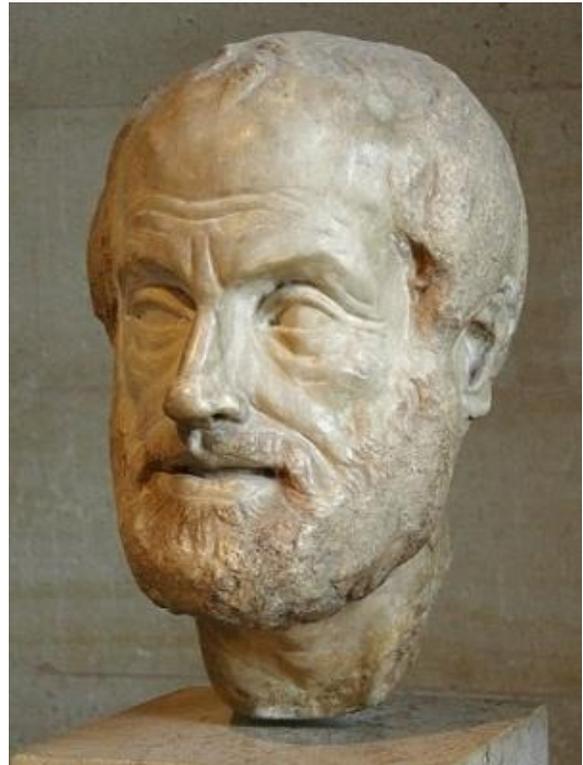
“Science” is how the Latin word “scientia” sounds in my language.

Scientia means knowledge. Or it can express ideas like skill, expertness, awareness — depending on context.

Science, in that sense, predates the ancient Greeks by a very long time indeed.

So do practical uses of scientia. The earliest medical text I know of was written around the time [Ahmose I](#) ran Egypt.

It’s almost certainly copied from older texts. We’ve developed more effective medical technology since Egypt’s 18th dynasty, but haven’t found a better



treatment for Dracunculiasis. ([May 12, 2017](#))

## Attitudes

Folks feeling edgy about studying nature isn't new, either. It didn't start with Christianity.

I could claim that Aristarchus was almost charged with impiety because he said the sun wasn't divine.

That might have seemed “relevant” in my youth, or whatever's the current term for 'kinda now, kinda wow.'

A remarkable number of folks assume that religion, particularly Christianity, depends on ignorance.

A few Christians do too, although they probably don't think of their alternative reality as “ignorance.” ([October 29, 2017](#))

Being “relevant,” or “Bible believing,” or whatever, isn't an option for me.

I might like fitting in with a well-defined clique. But I like truth more. Much more.

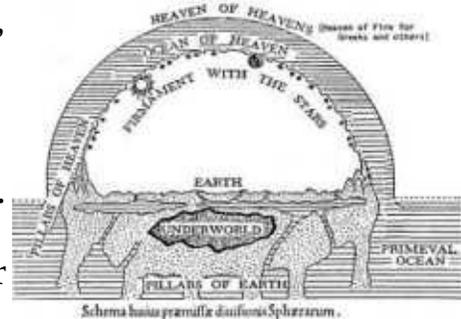
I'd have to ignore what I know about a botched translation of Plutarch's “On the Apparent Face in the Orb of the Moon.” ([March 24, 2017](#))

Don't get me wrong. I take the Bible, Sacred Scripture, very seriously. Also read it and think about it. That's 'being Catholic 101.' Catechism [101](#)–[133](#), actually.

Now, about that translation. Plutarch said that Cleanthes, who saw the sun as divine, **jokingly** told Aristarchus that he should be charged with impiety.

Gilles Ménage garbled Plutarch's grammar, turning the joke into a flat-out accusation.

The Ménage translation went to press around 1600.



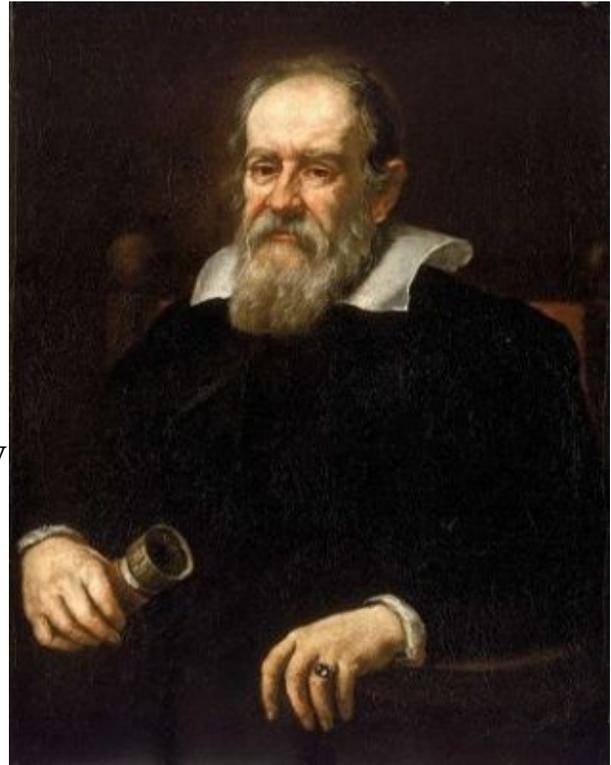
## A Legend and Mr. Squibbs

Galileo's and Bruno's trials were fresh memories in the early 1600s. European politics were more volatile than usual.

Some folks seemed fearful of **any** new ideas. Others were arguably eager to embrace ideas **because** they were new. ([June 2, 2017](#); [March 17, 2017](#))

Imagination and selective memories inspired now-familiar tales of a legendary confrontation between scientists and the forces of ignorance and oppression.

It makes a good story. I think it's about as reliable as some 'based on actual events' movies. ([November 5, 2017](#))



Europeans recovered from the Thirty Years' War, eventually.

The era gave us an enduring legacy of state-run religions, famines, plagues and witch hunts. Survivors had good reason for taking a long, hard look at old assumptions.

Enlightenment ideals — like a more egalitarian society and better-informed public — were, I think, reasonable. Some outcomes, not so much. ([August 20, 2017](#); [November 6, 2016](#))

I've never heard someone actually denounce "tampering with things man was not supposed to know," as Mr. Squibbs put it. Not in those words.

But I've known a fair number who apparently had the attitude, or a close approximation.

Some were Christians, some weren't, and all seemed badly rattled by what we're learning.

I can understand that.

The 'inevitability of progress' idea was getting replaced by the currently-fashionable 'we're all gonna die' outlook in my youth.

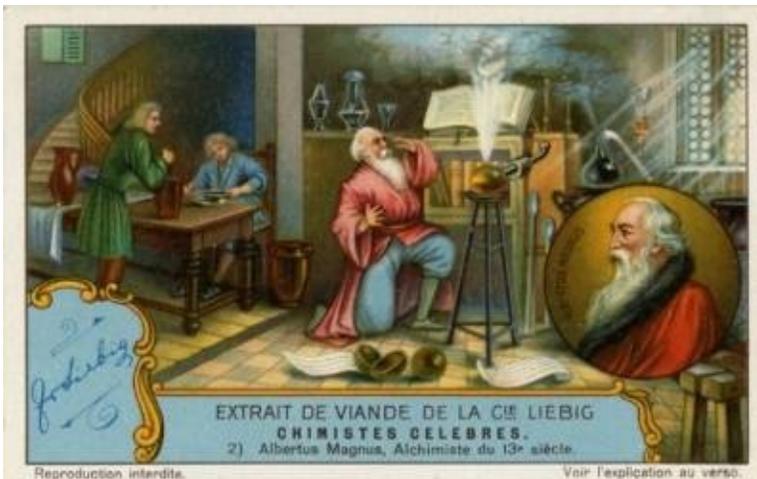


There's something to be said for the old optimism, but I don't think either attitude makes sense. ([June 23, 2017](#); [October 30, 2016](#))

We didn't start calling a particular sort of natural philosophy "science" until a few centuries back.<sup>1</sup>

Calling them "scientists" is even newer, dating back to the 1830s. ([March 31, 2017](#))

**Albert: A Busy Friar**



(From Chemical Heritage Foundation, via Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.  
 (1929 trading card.)

Albert of Lauingen’s studies earned the admiration of scholars.

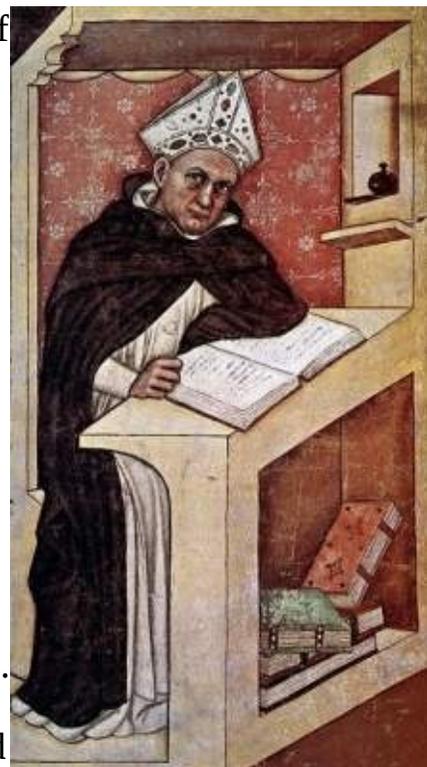
They also inspired tales of wizardry and dark arts. And a Liebig’s Extract of Meat Company Trading Card.

Albert was a natural philosopher, among other things. But he wasn’t a scientist. Nobody was in the 1200s.

Folks speaking my language often know Albert as Albertus Magnus.

Those of us who are Catholic recognize him as a Saint. He’s a patron of natural sciences and scientists.

Also medical technicians, philosophers, students, and Cincinnati, Ohio.



Folks like him and St. Hildegard of Bingen helped lay groundwork for today’s sciences. ([October 27, 2017](#))

I get the impression that Albertus Magnus kept busy. He was Dominican friar and served as a bishop for three years. He studied Aristotle when he wasn’t

doing his own research, and was the first European to comment on most of Aristotle's work.

That helped make Aristotle available to other European academics. Other scholars, including St. Thomas Aquinas, thought Aristotle's ideas made sense. Some of them took another step, looking at **how** Aristotle got his ideas.

That, I think, was a very good idea.

Others got overly excited about the ancient philosopher's ideas. Grabbing Aristotle's conclusions, they took off running. Right off the ragged edge of reason.

## God: Large and In Charge

Some folks in Medieval Europe were ignorant and superstitious.

The same is true today.

But we knew Earth is round in the Middle Ages. Those of us who pay attention, and think about what we see.

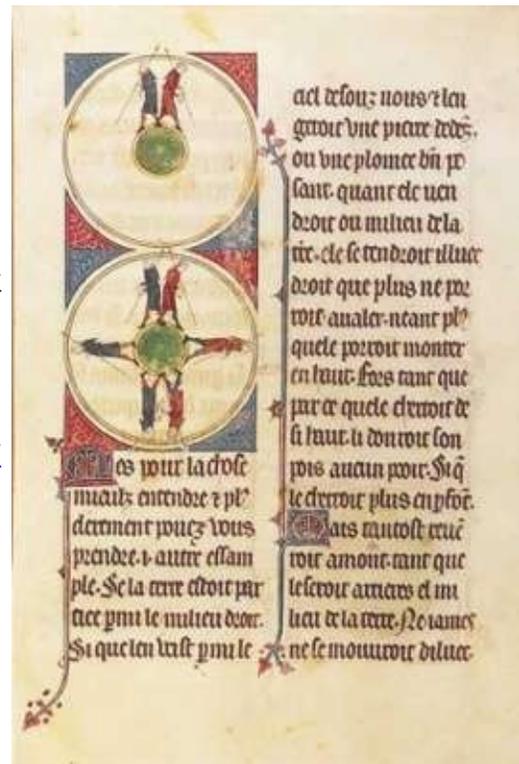
I've talked about that, the (real) dark ages, Leo XIII and truth before. ([November 5, 2017](#); [July 23, 2017](#); [July 15, 2016](#))

One of many topics of the mid-1200s was whether or not we were on the only world. The question made sense at the time.

Telescopes wouldn't be invented for another few centuries.

Observations and analysis refined Aristotle's cosmology epicycles and the like, but not the basic ideas. Our moon's cyclic phases and occasional eclipses were another matter.

Basically, Aristotle said Earth, the world we stand on, was at the bottom of an



otherwise-perfect and unchanging reality. I'm oversimplifying the idea something frightful.

Given what folks knew in Aristotle's day, it made sense. So did what Aristarchus said. But Aristotle was more famous in his day. His model was my civilization's default assumption until a half-millennium back.

Agreeing with Aristotle made sense in the 13th century.

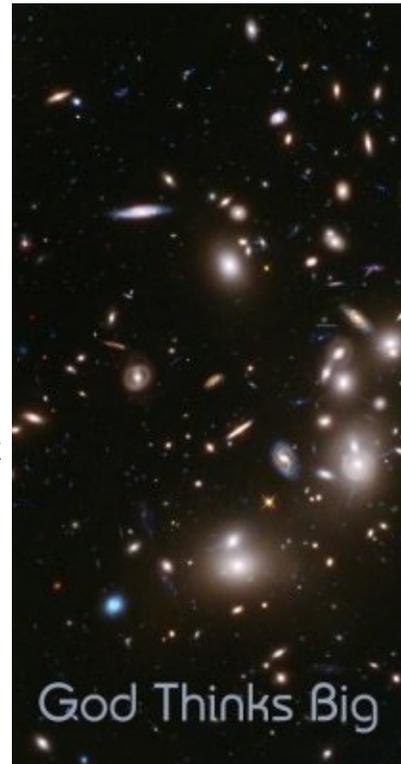
A few scholars had reasons for thinking maybe 'one mutable world at the bottom' wasn't the only possible model, but precious little data and less proof.

Observations and analysis confirmed post-Ptolemaic Aristotelian models pretty well.

That wasn't enough to stop academic debate. Still isn't for that matter. And that was no problem.

Then Aristotle's fans said other worlds couldn't exist: **because Aristotle said so.**

That's a problem. I've mentioned Proposition 27/219 of 1277 before. It's been rescinded, but the principle still holds.



God decides how reality works. We don't. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, [268](#))

It's not a new idea.

"Our God is in heaven; whatever God wills is done."  
([Psalms 115:3](#))

The way I see it, God is large and in charge. Part of my job is appreciating this universe. Not telling the Almighty how it should work.

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**Wonder How It Works? Ask!**



(From Forbes, used w/o permission.)

(“The Earth at night, as viewed from the International Space Station...”  
(Forbes))

[“Yes, Science Is For The Religious, Too”](#)

Ethan Siegel, Starts With a Bang contributor group, Forbes (January 9, 2018)

“If you want to figure out how the Universe works, you have to ask. Not by asking some authority figure, but by finding a way to ask the Universe itself: to theorize an idea and to test it, via thorough experiments, observations, and measurements. The ability to formulate an idea, to infer and calculate what the physical implications of that idea are, to gather data that tests those implications, and to then draw conclusions is the hallmark of scientific thinking.

“The scientific method insists on taking this steps in a rigorous, repeatable fashion, and teaches us the scientific answer to any question we’re clever enough to ask. Science is both the method of investigation and the full suite of knowledge we gain from asking such questions, with the joys and wonder of discovery open to everyone. Despite the widespread perception that science and religion conflict with each other, the overwhelming majority of people experience no such conflict. Anyone can learn how to investigate the world like a scientist, and a scientist can belong to any religion. Around the globe, this is exactly what the data shows....”

First off, I read this online. Subscribing to Forbes might be fun, but it’s beyond my budget. Far beyond.

I take the second-to-last sentence with a grain of salt.

I think the vast majority of folks can learn to ‘think like a scientist.’ If that means learning to see what’s fact and what’s not; and thinking about how facts fit together, not relying on what emotions they trigger.

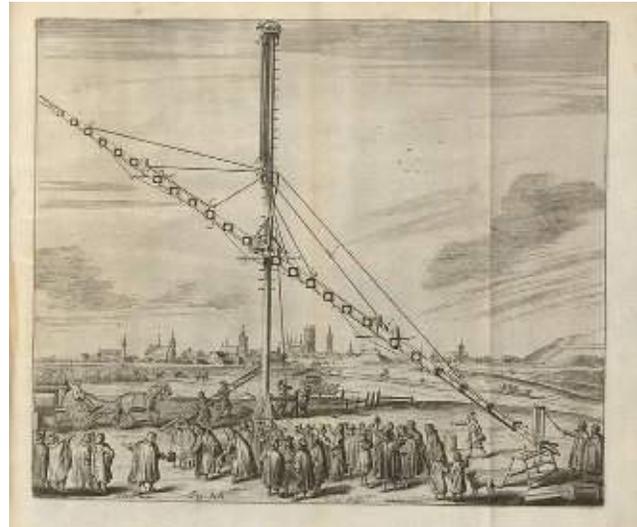
Agreeing that a scientist can “belong to any religion” depends on how “religion” gets defined. The assertion makes sense, given what I’ve learned, if “religion” means one of the world’s more-or-less major belief groups.

I have no trouble imagining a scientist who grew up with and follows the beliefs and practices of, say, Islam.

Good grief, philosophers in Christian Europe learned by reading translations of work from what we call the [Islamic Golden Age](#), about a thousand years back now.

I think Islam’s good times weren’t perfect. Neither were Europe’s Renaissance and other cultures’ high points.

I think we’re in one now, although it’ll probably take a few centuries for many to see it. Maybe a millennium or two.



We don’t have a perfect civilization either. But we’re learning. And, I think, correcting some faults. I’m glad to see more recognition of folks like Ibn al-Haytham and Al-Kindi in my branch of Western Civilization. ([October 6, 2017](#); [September 29, 2017](#))

Imagining scientists who believe and practice Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism or Christianity isn’t hard, either.

Imagining a competent scientist who also follows the beliefs of a Christian outfit that demands rejecting science? Or at least the parts of reality they don't like?

That might be possible, with great effort.

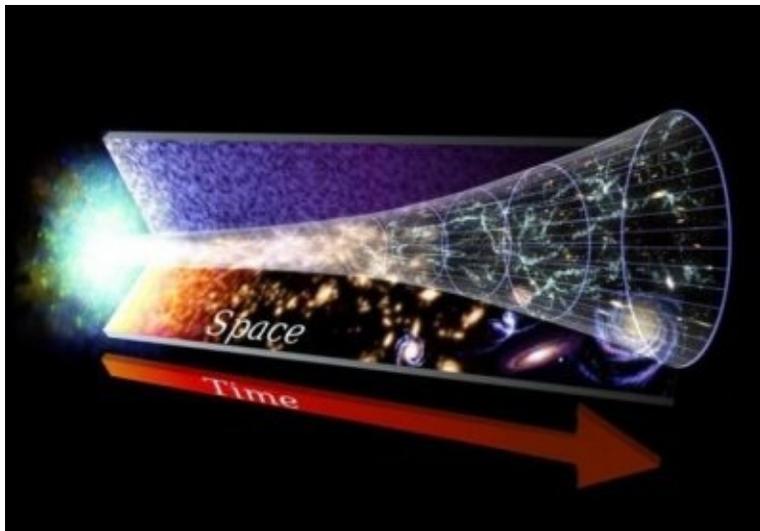


Folks of that ilk came up with “creation science” in the 1960s. What I’ve seen of it is imaginative and displays an admirable grasp of fun facts about this world.

I like that a whole lot more than the older distaste for physical realities.

Active rejection of what we’ve been learning in the several centuries? How physical reality works, how it all fits together? That strikes me as unreasonable. ([July 23, 2017](#); [March 31, 2017](#); [December 16, 2016](#))

## The Universe and Me



(From NASA/GSFC, via Forbes, used w/o permission.)

“There is a large suite of scientific evidence that supports the picture of the expanding Universe and the Big Bang, but that does not necessitate a conflict between scientific conclusions and religious beliefs.”

(Forbes))

I was born during the Truman administration. Quite a bit’s happened since then.

A kindergarten teacher wisely let me spend available free time in a semicircular 'book nook.' There were, reconstructing images in my memory, maybe upwards of a dozen shelf feet of picture books there. Those were good times.

I've been — not so much an avid, as a nearly-constant — reader ever since. I'd read ingredients labels, textbooks, Agatha Christie mysteries, dictionaries. You get the idea.

Yeah, I'm one of **those** people.

We've learned a lot about how our brains work since Truman's time.

Folks with non-standard neural circuitry often get caught early. ([November 19, 2017](#); [April 9, 2017](#); [March 19, 2017](#))

I think efforts to prevent or cure people like me are well-intentioned. Usually. It might be a good idea, in some cases. ([November 19, 2017](#))



That's not what I was was talking about. Not quite. Where was I? Science, religion, Truman, breakfast cereal. Right. Belief and the Big Bang. Also Genesis and me.

Like I said, I was born during the Truman administration. Most science books I had access to in elementary and high school had been written quite a few years earlier.

That let me experience a sort of fast-forward look at current scientific knowledge from around 1900 to 1970. In a few years. I loved it, but I'm quite sure some wouldn't. At all.

**Let there be LIGHT**

And that gets me to Genesis and the Big Bang.

“In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth—

“and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters—

“Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light.”

([Genesis 1:1–3](#))

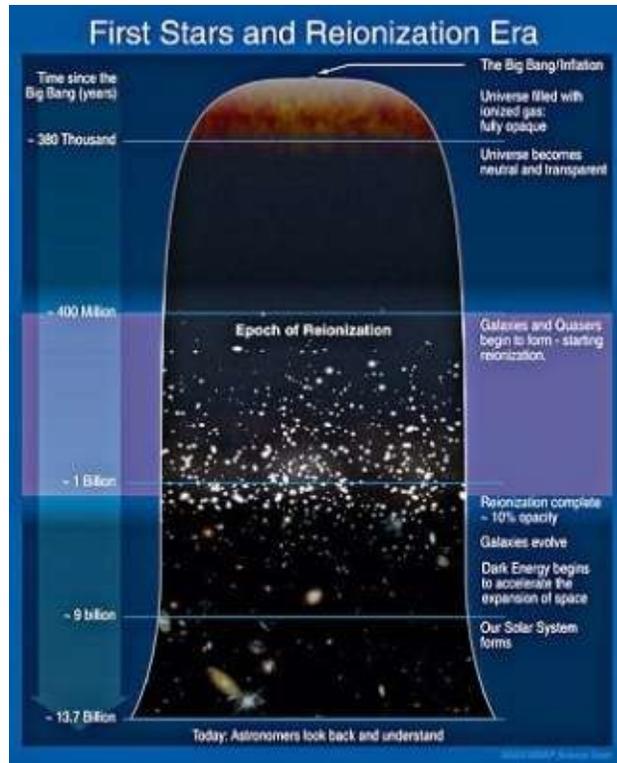
I take the Bible seriously. That’s ‘Catholicism 101,’ like I said earlier.

I think the Bible is true. That needs explaining, given more-or-less recent silliness.

Taking Sacred Scripture seriously and thinking that it’s true isn’t even close to imagining it was written by an American. Or a Jacobean scholar with a taste for slightly-antique prose.

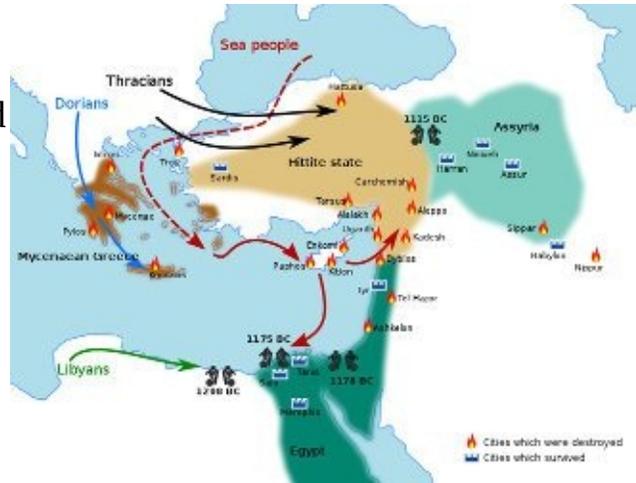
Or even someone with today’s Western attitudes, and a whacking great chasm where poetry and metaphor should be.

## Style and Assumptions



Oddly enough, I've yet to see someone say the Bible can't be true since religious folks say God is the author: and it shows no stylistic consistency.

Hardly surprising, considering it includes poetry and prose from many centuries. Millennia, counting oral traditions. I think God is the author. And that God decided that humans would do the actual writing.



That's why the Bible looks like it was written by many different folks, living in different eras. It was. And God inspired the human writers. (Catechism, [105–107](#), [109–111](#))

Expecting a contemporary Western worldview from folks living just west of the Fertile Crescent after the Late Bronze Age Collapse isn't reasonable.

Never mind oral traditions that were likely enough ancient when Abram lived in Ur. More than just "ancient," and that's another topic.

Neither is imagining that they'd know what we've learned about this wonder-filled universe in the last few decades. Or what we'll be learning when the 42nd century rolls by.

## The Big Bang and Beyond

I grew up in 20th century America, and have been paying attention.

I understand why saying that the Big Bang model "does not necessitate a conflict between scientific conclusions and religious beliefs" makes sense.

But I think it's an understatement. From my viewpoint, anyway.



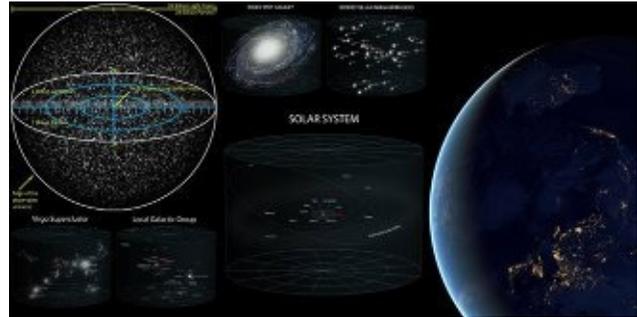
I can see the first chapter in Genesis as a wonderfully poetic description of what's happened in this universe from the moment it began to "now."

A scientist wouldn't describe a point of infinite density and temperature as "without form and void."

But a scientist didn't write Genesis.

Besides, that sort of thing we can work out on our own. Have worked out. And we keep finding new puzzles.

Kvetchng because Genesis 1 talks about days instead of eons or eras is an option, but not a reasonable one.



I figure God's viewpoint and mine aren't quite the same. On the other hand, I think conforming my will to God's is a good idea. Kairos, chronos, and all that will wait for another day.

Siegel has more to say. I do too.

Basically, I think his op-ed is worth reading. And not what I've gotten used to seeing. Particularly since he took the trouble to back up his opinions with facts. Nice touch.

---

**Living in the Real World: Or Not**

Being offended by Wiley Miller's "Church of Danae" gags is an option, too.

So is calling upon those who hold dear their assumptions to mightily smite folks who like living in the real world.

But I don't think it makes sense.

I might be offended by Non Sequitur's take on Danae's religion. If I thought it was attacking my faith.

As it is, I think real analogs to Danae and Captain Eddie, another Non Sequitur character, have a funny side. Not the people who cherish such beliefs. What they believe, and how they express it.



I suspect the 'back to the days of yore' fringes of American beliefs encourage more easily-found headlines. These two, from 2015, were near the top of my recent 'science religion opinion' Google search:

- "Why Religion and Science are Mutually Incompatible"
- "Science & Religion: A Centuries-old War Rages On"

Next, how I see autopsies and movies.

## Skittish About Science and Autopsies

Quite a few folks are squeamish about autopsies. That's understandable, I think. But I know they can be useful.

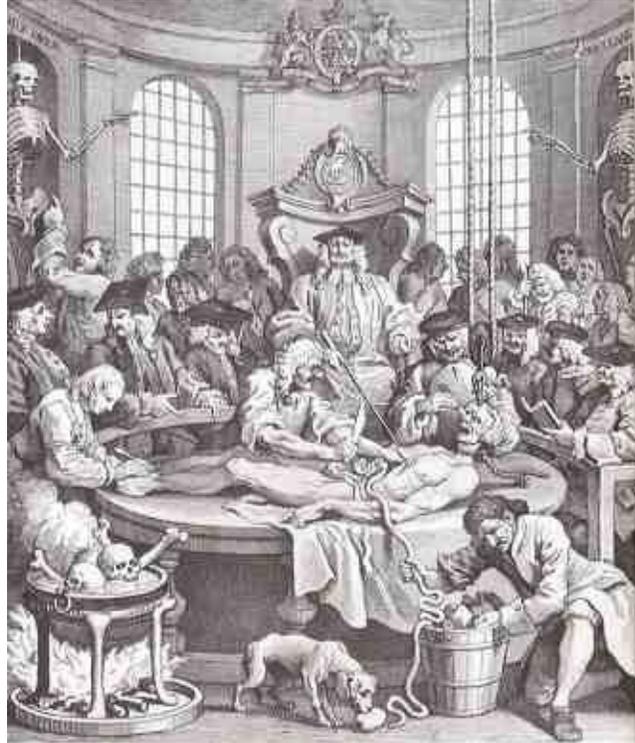
Elizabeth, our youngest child, died shortly before birth.<sup>2</sup> After medicos were sure my wife would survive, a doctor asked me if we wanted an autopsy.

I wondered if it was likely to yield practical information. That seemed like the only reason for asking. And a good reason.

It's not why the doctor asked. Seems some parents are concerned about details I think are irrelevant when someone's dead. That's yet another topic, for another day.

I said no. An autopsy seemed like an unnecessary complication. Religious scruples or superstitious fear had nothing to do with the decision. I'm pretty sure about that.

I could understand a recently-bereaved father feeling that an autopsy would offend God. But I wouldn't agree.



Autopsies are legal these days, and not particularly controversial.

That could change, if we dig up and reanimate old-fashioned values. I don't think it'd be a good idea.

Textbooks often said autopsies were illegal in Europe because Europeans were Christian. That was back in my 'good old days.' I don't miss them.

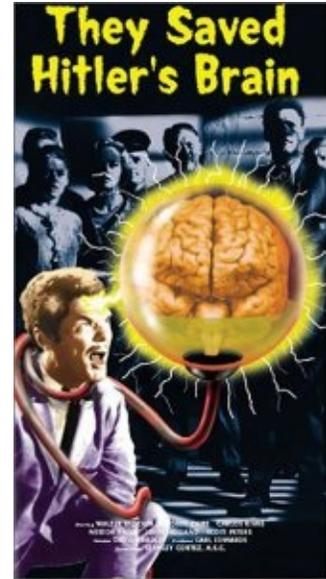
There's a little truth in it.

Many Europeans saw themselves as Christian. It wasn't all that long ago that they were flat-out illegal in parts of "Christian" Europe. ([June 16, 2017](#); [March 31, 2017](#))

Autopsies, I mean. Not Europeans. Pronoun trouble.

I see the attitude more as Europe's adoption of Roman imperial law and custom.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Church of Danae, Autopsies and Togas**



Greco-Roman culture and beliefs didn't allow autopsies.

That's why [Galenus](#) studied monkeys. ([July 15, 2016](#))

Squeamishness and ancient attitudes may help explain the lasting popularity of Shelley's "[Frankenstein](#)" tale.

Mary, not Percy. It was [Victor](#), actually, and I'm rambling again. ([August 5, 2016](#))

Seeing aversion to autopsies as a plot by progress-hating clerics, feeding on the ignorance of a superstitious rabble might make a good story. But it'd fail fact checks. ([October 30, 2016](#); [July 15, 2016](#))



The European branch of Western civilization inherited much of the ancient Roman set of values and scruples, which had thoroughly pagan roots long before our Lord arrived.

Old Roman values aren't particularly bad, but let's get a grip: the Roman Senate did not write the Decalogue. I don't have to wear a toga to be a Christian.

Studying the natural world is okay. Including our bodies. Worshiping nature would be idolatry, and a bad idea. (Catechism, [282–283](#), [2112–2114](#))

Folks who understand what the Catholic Church says realize we can study nature without fear of offending 'the spirits.' We should, anyway.

[Christianity's attitude](#) toward reason and the study of nature allows autopsies and makes other scientific research possible. The Catholic version, anyway.

On the other hand, mad scientists make such nifty heroes, antiheroes and villains.

**Fiction: Like Frankenstein and Lovecraft's Tales**



(From Cornhill Publishing Company's 1922 reprint of "Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's "Frankenstein...", via Wikimedia Commons, used w/o permission.) (Frankenstein's do-it-yourself project, from a 1922 reprint of M. W. Shelley's tale.)

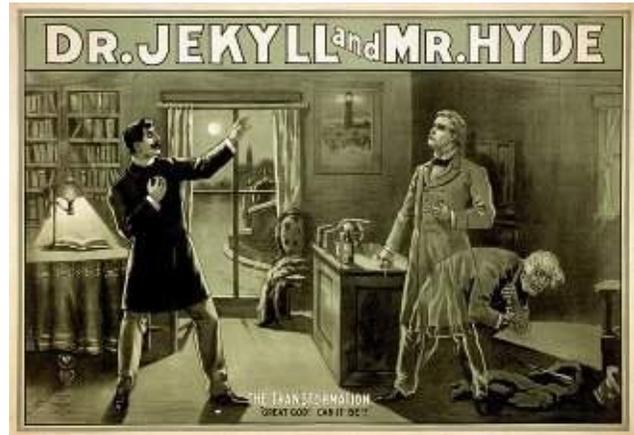
I've enjoyed the occasional 'mad scientist' tale.

Their real-life counterparts are, happily, few and far between. And anything but entertaining. ([November 11, 2016](#); [October 16, 2016](#))

One of these days I may read Shelley's "Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus." I understand that it's more substantial than the seemingly-endless succession of 'Frankenstein' movies. Which wouldn't take much, I'll grant.

I have read Stevenson's "[Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde](#)." We've learned quite a bit since 1886, so the Stevenson's fictional science seems more fictional than it would have at the time.

But I think it's still a good story, and suffers from an image issue similar to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein.



Like I said, I enjoy some 'mad scientist' tales. I think they can be useful cautionary tales, making ideas like 'consider risks before acting' memorable.

But I see them mostly as entertainment. Which I think is okay, in moderation. I've talked about enjoying life, Ecclesiastes, and the Epic of Gilgamesh before. ([October 8, 2017](#); [November 11, 2016](#))

Expecting a science education from watching the likes of "[The Devil Bat](#)" isn't reasonable. Not that someone's likely to assume that's the case.

Assuming that ignorance is a virtue isn't particularly sensible either.

On the other hand, finding folks who act as if they agree with a Lovecraftian assumption about ignorance isn't hard. Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" says it's the only defense we have against cosmic horrors.

I like some Lovecraft tales, don't agree with his philosophy, and that's yet again another topic. Topics. ([March 31, 2017](#); [December 16, 2016](#))

## Movies and Attitudes

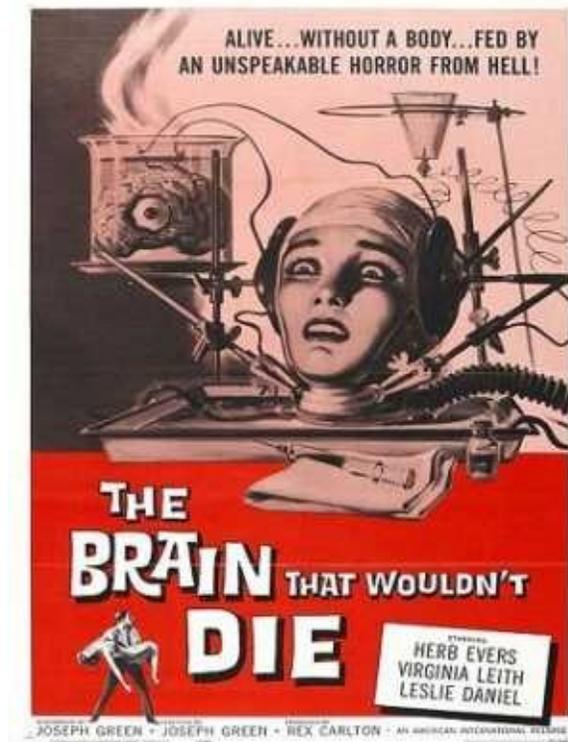
I doubt more than a few, if any, folks would think "[The Brain That Wouldn't Die](#)" represented state-of-the-art medical science of the late 1950s and early 60s.

But the 'beware tampering with nature' attitude that I see in the Sterling Productions movie is pretty common.

There's a little wisdom in it. We'll be cleaning up the mess from Industrial Revolution blunders for a long time.

Assuming that God gave us brains and we offend an irritable Almighty by using them? That doesn't make more sense. Not to me.

The version of Christianity some folks have seems to have more in common with old-school beliefs, where tiptoeing around capricious spirits made sense. I've talked about that before. ([November 5, 2017](#))



Also blaming Mother Nature for disasters, Edward II and the Little Ice Age, Ecclesiastes, Heraclitus and a defunct Packard factory. ([November 17, 2017](#); [September 10, 2017](#); [August 4, 2017](#))

Had enough? If not, there's more:

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<sup>1</sup> Origins of science and scientists:

<sup>2</sup> I'd rather not go through that again. But I see no point in being miserable. Trouble happens, life doesn't come with guarantees, and I'm looking ahead:

<sup>3</sup> Remembering some of the 'good old days:'

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| [Contents](#) |

## Nut @ 2 [at With Us Still]

One thing I noticed on New Year's Day: When walking an outdoor labyrinth in a 2° chill, you can pretty much count on having the sacred pathway to yourself.

To be sure, there was plenty of 'community' in the immediate vicinity: Gerri and I were two of the 40-plus souls who took part in the [New Year's Eve Retreat at King's House](#) in Belleville. Our first time to take it in, but the overnight event is something of an annual tradition at the center from what I understand. And every one of my fellow retreatants had the good sense to stay indoors...as they reflected on the blessings of the past year and contemplated their hoped-for changes in the year just-now-dawning.



A chance to enter into the sacred at King's House

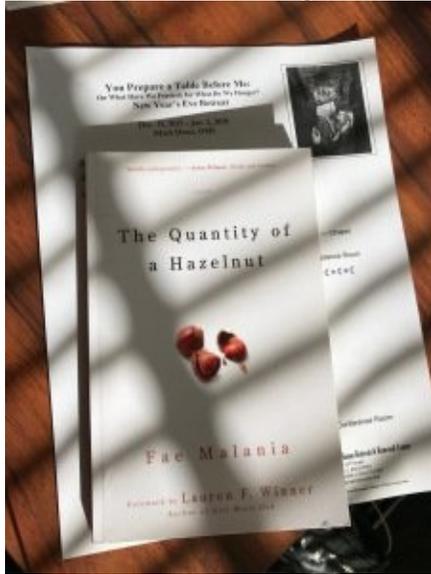
*'But what's a little cold?'* I said to myself as I bundled up and ventured out, alone.

Or so I thought.

In truth, I wasn't even heading toward the labyrinth – not on purpose. Rather, something just seemed to draw me in. A chance to *'get in my steps'*, perhaps, without wandering too far from the building?

I *did* know I had some sorting out to do – reflecting on an odd coincidence in my spiritual reading from the night before. I'd brought along a book, you see: A

Christmas present – *The Quantity of a Hazelnut*. Just a couple of pages into Fae Malania’s marvelous little collection of essays, I learned that she had lifted its title from the writings of a 14<sup>th</sup>-century mystic, Julian of Norwich. Curiously, as I rummaged through another pile of reading materials later in the evening, I came across the original essay, written by Julian herself.



*Our good Lord shewed me a little thing, the quantity of a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, and to my understanding it was as round as any ball. I looked thereupon and thought: ‘What may this be?’*

*And I was answered in a general way, thus: ‘It is all that is made.’ I marveled how it could last, because it seemed to me it could suddenly have sunk into nothingness because of its littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: ‘It lasts, and ever shall last, because God loves it; and so hath all-thing its being, through the love of God.’*

A puzzling concept. An even more puzzling coincidence. That’s some of what I had rattling around in my head as I made my way into the labyrinth. Before long, though, I noticed that most of my high-level brain activity had ceased. I became focused instead on the physical activity in which I was (foolishly) engaged: making my way through the elaborate layout – eleven circuits around the labyrinth’s center.

Four or five circuits in, I took note that the exposed skin on my face was starting to become uncomfortably cold. I soldiered on, alternating between thoughts of mortification and folly. Reaching the center, I was rewarded with a simple gift – profound awareness of the beauty of the morning: both the bright blue sky and

profound awareness of the beauty of the morning. Both the bright blue sky, and the long sharp shadows cast by an otherwise ineffective sun.



Alas, having reached the center of the labyrinth, there's still half the journey to be done. And by then, I was *really* getting cold. I didn't want to 'cheat' by stepping across the stones to short-circuit my exit, but I *did* pick up the pace.

Rushing along, I almost missed it.

Not Julian's nut, nor Fae's. But a nut nonetheless – poised there, in the very center of my path.

How about that? God shewed *me* a little thing on the first day of 2018: A wink. A nod. A gleeful presence, in the sacred stillness of a cold winter's morn.



A seed of contemplation: Happy New Year, 2018!

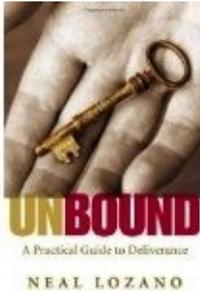
*Let us pause now...to recall that we are in the presence of the Holy & Merciful One.*

*IHS*

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| [Contents](#) |



I discovered [Neal Lozano's](#) book, "Unbound," when our covenant community planned an Unbound Conference with him. About 50 of us learned how to cooperate with the Lord to gain freedom from the influence of evil spirits and then guide those coming to the conference in this prayer method.

We learned the five keys that unlock the doors we have opened to intimidating spirits and how to close them. The five keys are not complicated when we understand that not our power but the power of the name of Jesus accomplishes it all: Repentance and faith. Forgiveness. Renunciation of evil spirits. Taking authority over those spirits. The Father's blessing. That's the strategy that answers our prayer "deliver us from evil, freeing us from the lies Satan tells to keep us from God's plan for our life.

### ***Five keys***

As we learned these keys, we tried them out on one another. Instead of believing the lie that I could never do this right, my confidence grew that the Lord could use me in this ministry. That attitude developed from many healings I experienced through ordinary people in the Unbound ministry with no extraordinary powers within themselves.

Using the keys, I then helped them discover and renounce the hidden roots of their difficulties that blocked their freedom. I heard reactions from "I feel lighter as if a heavy load of furniture shifted from my core" to "Unbound by the Blood of Christ. My spirit is dancing and celebrating with the Lord."

The Unbound conference displayed the Holy Spirit working beautifully among many strangers with the common goal of freedom, yet with such different blocks to unlock and remove. The blocks are lies we believe are part of us such as, "I can never do anything right. I don't belong. God could never forgive me. I'm a

victim.” When the light of God’s truth shines on these lies, the pain of traumas such as addiction to pornography, death of a child or parent, child abuse, abortion and abandonment are healed. Forgiving others and ourselves is no longer impossible. As we recognize hidden guilt, fear and self-condemnation we are able to take responsibility for our sins and renounce their roots. The Father’s Blessing restores our self-worth.

### ***Why it works***

Neal says that the Unbound model works from several basic truths:

- Because of Jesus, we have hope and can ask for the blessing we need.
- Jesus is our hope; he is our savior.
- Jesus saves us from sin and from Satan’s plan for our lives.
- Jesus reveals to us our hearts so that we can repent.
- Jesus gives us the power to forgive others and to renounce the enemy in our lives.
- We have authority over the devil’s influence in our lives in the name of Jesus.
- God wants to bless us by revealing who we are, so we might fulfill our destiny.

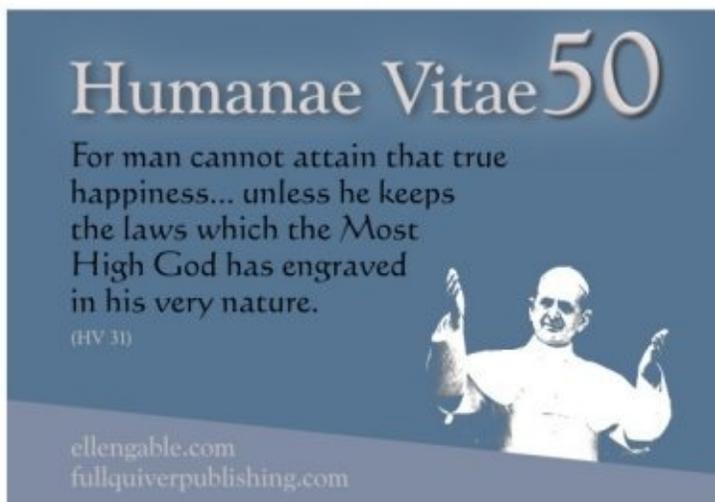
The “Unbound” keys are my do-it-yourself healing kit to apply Neal’s guidelines to the hurts and sins in my life that preoccupy my confessions and my depressions. I began to heal as the examples and reflections peeled back layers of lies I believed. Keeping a journal and engaging in the Unbound deliverance prayers with a trusted friend or small group benefits me even more. Many pastors, spiritual directors and confessors add the Unbound keys to their toolbox.

The keys help me keep resentment and unforgiveness from settling in my soul. I no longer routinely Xerox my list of sins before Reconciliation, Some of them are gone and Jesus and I are working on some others. Every day my awareness of God’s conviction, presence and power to transform me, grows as well as my freedom to live as the woman he created me to be.

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| [Contents](#) |

## God's Beautiful and Natural Design [at Plot Line and Sinkers (Ellen Gable, Author)]



*“The fact is, as experience shows, that new life is not the result of each and every act of sexual intercourse.” Pope Paul VI, Humanae Vitae*

This year, Pope Paul VI’s encyclical, [Humanae Vitae \(On Human Life\)](#) turns 50. Humanae Vitae re-affirmed the Church’s 2000-year teaching that artificial birth control was immoral and “intrinsically evil.” To celebrate this milestone, I’ll be re-posting many of my NFP/Theology of the Body-themed articles.

**God’s natural and beautiful design is that women are only fertile for a short time** each month. Taking into account ovum life (48 hours at most) and sperm life (up to five days depending on the type of mucus in the woman’s body), there are approximately seven days in each cycle that a woman is fertile. Other factors include each woman’s particular level of fertility: the type of mucus, their age (the younger they are, the more fertile) and the man’s level of fertility (sperm count and quality of sperm).

Contrary to popular belief, the Catholic Church does not teach that a couple must actively seek pregnancy each and every time they engage in marital relations. But she does teach that intercourse must at least implicitly retain its procreative meaning and be open to life. **Contraceptives destroy the conjugal act’s**

**procreative aspect.** Therefore, if the couple has serious need, and spacing or avoidance of pregnancy is desired, they may use Natural Family Planning, that is, have relations only during the infertile time.

**Natural Family Planning is safe, healthy and effective** and works as good, if not better, than most of the popular birth control devices and without the unhealthy side effects of contraceptive devices and drugs.

Let us pray each time we approach the marital bed: “I promise to be faithful to you. I come here freely, I love you totally and I am open to creating children with you.”

For more information on NFP:

[www.serena.ca](http://www.serena.ca)

[www.ccli.org](http://www.ccli.org)

[www.woomb.org](http://www.woomb.org)

[www.creightonmodel.com](http://www.creightonmodel.com)

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| [Contents](#) |

## Serving with Compassion



*“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.” — Colossians 3:12 (NAB)*

When we hear of someone who is suffering, we feel sorry for them; we have feelings of pity and empathy. If someone loses a loved one, a job, has an incurable illness or accident, we feel these emotions.

But, are these emotions compassion or something else?

Compassion is literally defined as “to suffer together.” It is often described as “the heart that trembles in the face of suffering.” When we are compassionate we take on that suffering and are moved to relieve it. Compassionate people have the ability to feel what others are feeling. It may be because they know what it is like to suffer. Compassionate people act on their kindness.

*“[And] [be kind](#) to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.” — Ephesians 4:32 (NAB)*

Compassionate people practice self-compassion as well. By being compassionate to ourselves we will be more successful in changing a bad habit, getting back to the gym, or eating a healthier diet. There are many health benefits from being a more compassionate person. Studies have shown an increase in the hormones that counter aging and reduce stress.

What are some of the ways we can practice being a more compassionate person?

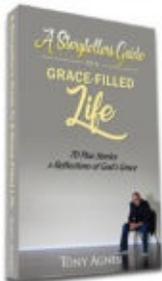
How can increasing our compassion better help us serve others?

How can increasing our compassion better help us serve others?

Here are a few ideas:

- Act on your feelings of empathy and pity. When you hear of someone suffering have the courage to act on it. Try sending them a card or make a phone call and encourage them.
- Practice random acts of kindness. Simple gestures like smiling, saying hello, and thank you, are a start. Inviting someone to lunch or spending some one-on-one time with a suffering friend can work wonders.
- Be kind. As the old saying goes, “Be kind, because everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about.” Your showing compassion will help them open up and share what is on their hearts.
- Be grateful. Being grateful for our blessings helps us to better serve those going through hard times. We all will experience tough times in our lives and our ability to cope is increased by our compassion for others.
- Sometimes a hug will speak louder than anything you can say. Without a word, it says I’m here for you, I feel your pain and will do what I can to help.

As we seek to serve others as our Lord asks, let’s practice being compassionate people. Let’s act on our feelings of empathy. It will be a blessing to the people we come in [contact](#) with and it will have many health benefits, as well. Who can argue with that!



Get an autographed copy of my new book, *A Storytellers Guide to a Grace-Filled Life* with FREE domestic shipping (media rate) by [clicking here and going to our store.](#)

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| [Contents](#) |

## Speak So I Can Hear You - Words of Affirmation [at Under Thy Roof]



In 1992, Dr. John Gray published his revolutionary book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. Apparently, in the 90s, it was quite the epiphany to folks that men and women are different, and have different needs. One highlight of the book is Dr. Gray's little analogy that men and women are speaking different languages: Men speak Martian, and Women speak Venutian.

I'm generally not a fan of stereotypes, but any woman who has tried to get her husband to communicate only to be met with grunts and "I-dunno"s, and any husband who has asked his wife where they will go for dinner only to be answered with, "I don't care, you pick", will be well aware of this phenomenon.

Three years later, in 1995, Gary Chapman provided a kind of translation dictionary, at least when it comes to communicating our love. His book,

### [The Five Love Languages](#)

, broke down some of the various ways that humans communicate love for one another. Just in case you aren't familiar, these five love languages are 1) Words of Affirmation. 2) Physical Touch. 3) Receiving Gifts. 4) Quality Time. and 5)

Acts of Service.

These aren't gender based at all-- one theory is that they come from the deficits we grew up with, but that's a story for another day-- and once you begin to understand how your spouse is trying to communicate their love to you, it's a lot easier to start translating from Venutian to Martian!

Yet, one tricky thing remains: you only have a 20% chance of having the same Primary Love Language as your spouse. You might be pouring out your heart in "Acts of Service" (your love language), but they still feel unloved because all they see is a lack of "Words of Affirmation"(their love language).

I can only speak from my own language for now, and that is "Words of Affirmation". I'd like to share for you a few inside tricks on how to make sure that your spouse who speaks this language keeps their "love tank" full. You really want to make sure there is love in that love tank! An engine can't run without any fuel, and it's very hard to give love when you're running on empty.

My love tank feels the most full when I feel appreciated and when my husband tells me that he proud of me. If I've been keeping the home orderly and the kids healthy for a month straight, and he doesn't seem to care, I get very grouchy. He's a good sport though, and if he notices me fishing for a compliment, he does a good job of giving me one authentically.

### **How to keep your "Words of Affirmation Spouse" feeling loved:**

- Compliment their cooking/car fixing/baby changing
- Acknowledge and thank them for the every day things they do
- Tell them they look pretty/handsome
- Say I love you to the point of nausea (and give them a "because" too!)
- Send them short texts every now and then, just to say "hi, I'm thinking about you"

One thing that gets overlooked occasionally is that while speaking someone's love language is the easiest way to keep their tank full,

*doing the opposite of it is the easiest way to hurt them.*

If I'm not calm enough to discuss things without raising my voice, I generally just remove myself until I calm down or the situation goes away. My husband

just remove myself and I calm down if the situation goes away. My husband likes to talk things out right then and there, and in the first months of our marriage, he discovered that is not a good idea with me at all. As soon as voices raise above a certain decibel, my brain processes everything you say as, "You're a miserable lazy failure of a wife and mother". Irrational? Maybe, but it's how my brain works.

Additionally, if I am trying to communicate something, only to be met with silence, that tells me I'm not worth responding to. So if you're busy, take a second to respond to your spouse, even if it's just to say, "hold on, let me get back to you in a second."

### **How to make your "Words of Affirmation Spouse" feel unloved:**

- Raise your voice
- Ignore them in silence

And to most of us 80% of people who speak a different Love Language than their spouse, I would like to leave you with one reminder. Just because they aren't speaking your language, doesn't mean they aren't communicating love. Adherents to Gary Chapman's philosophy spend a lot of time talking about how to speak a love language. I've hardly ever heard anyone talk about how and why to listen to a love language. So if your spouse is a "Words of Affirmation" guy or gal, try to watch and listen for moments like I listed where they may be offering you love, and make an effort to put those moments into your love tank too!

I'll be back in a few weeks to talk about my husband's love language, which is "Physical Touch". Until then, I hope I gave you all some good ideas and direction.

Love,

Hilary-

AMDG+



*Hilary Thompson is a young wife and mother of two boys in southeast Michigan. She has been an organist since she was twelve. When she grows up, she wants to be a 97-year-old church cleaning lady. You can find more of her work about marriage, mothering, and Catholic trivia at [Messy Buns & Latin Chant](#).*



Need some help fulfilling your spouse's love language of Words of Affirmation?

Check out her story of coming up with this board:



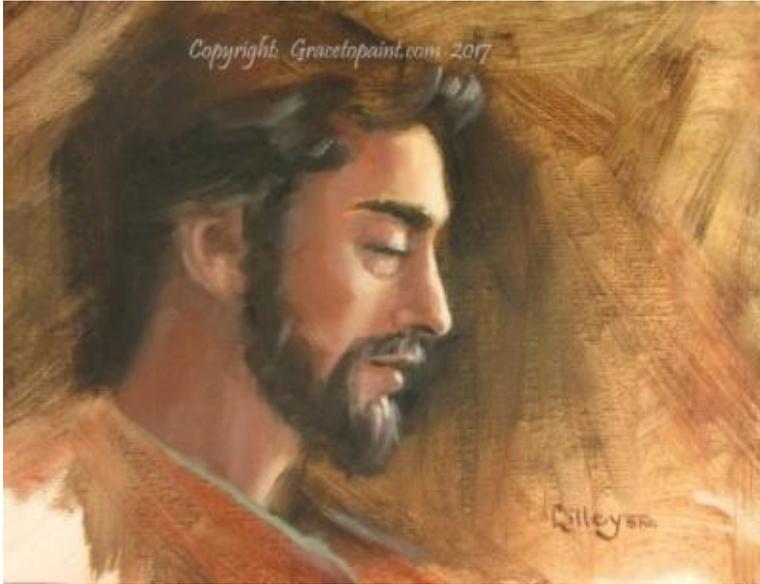
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| [Contents](#) |

# When You Pray [at Grace to Paint]



6×8” oil paint on primed canvas sheet; use ‘comment’ below to inquire.

From Mt. 6: 5-15– Jesus taught us how to pray.

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I have a great deal of personal experience when it comes to bullying. You see, I was bullied for eight consecutive years, while attending a Catholic grade school. There were only 38 children in my class, so I was an easy target. Because of my physical deformity of clubbed feet, I wore braces on my legs. This set me apart from the others, making me the “outcast.” (The photo to the left was taken in 1962, at age 5). After what I experienced, it is amazing that I am still alive to tell my story today.

## **Bullying Has No Grace**

The ugliness of the constant and consistent verbal abuse, demeaning my dignity and self-worth, proves to me that bullying has no grace. Bullying is an evil act. My bullies constantly referred to me as “metal legs,” “cootie bug,” – you get the picture. Their derisive behavior played havoc on my self-worth, leaving me changed, and not for the better. They scarred my psyche.

## **The Lingering Effects of Bullying**

As I progressed through high school and college, I always felt like I needed to prove myself. No matter what I did, it was never good enough (in my mind). I

prove myself. No matter what I did, it was never good enough (in my mind). I didn't realize how damaged my dignity and self-worth was until I was approximately 40 years old. I was at lunch one day, and had an epiphany. This epiphany was the beginning of a very slow process to recovery and forgiveness of my bullies.

I came to realize that my need for appreciation, my desire to excel at whatever I did, my need for recognition, all stemmed back to the verbal abuse from my grade school years. With every person I came across, I was still trying to win over the bullies of my past! With every "pat on the back" or success I garnered, I tried to fill the gaping abyss, formed by my bullies. The hole never filled up with earthly platitudes.

## **The Pain Remained, Until I Could Truly Forgive**

I muddled through my fifties, thinking I had forgiven my bullies. Yet, the pain remained. Then I hit sixty, and the cloud began to clear. God knew that I was ready to let go of the pain. I was ready to truly forgive. How do I know this? Because God helped me to see that it is only through forgiveness that I would fill that gaping abyss. God made clear to me, that I needed to let go of the pain, and set my bullies free. Oh, how true are the words of the Our Father:

*"Forgive us our trespasses, **as** we forgive those who trespass against us."*

That word, "as," has a powerful meaning. I sensed that if I couldn't forgive my bullies, then I would be forever imprisoned with them, and none of us would be free. For any of us to get to Heaven, our souls need to be purified by God; cleansed of our sins, and our pain! So, with the grace of forgiveness, I have set my bullies, and me, free. I can now look back at my life, and what has occurred, and I no longer feel the pain. The Lord healed me enough, so that I can now tell you my story. Forgiveness flows from the font of Grace. Let it flow over you and heal you today. Don't wait 60 years, like me, to feel the effects of God's healing love.

If you would like to purchase an autographed copy of my book, *Adventures of Faith, Hope and Charity: Finding Patience*, then [click here](#).

| [Contents](#) |

## When it's better not to know [at FranciscanMom]

This morning at Mass, we heard the readings for the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of the Unborn. My pastor used the optional reading: Matthew 18:1-5, 10-14.

In his homily, he spoke about our desire for physical perfection: how people spend billions of dollars and devote countless hours to the pursuit of physical beauty.

Father then mentioned that people's desire for physical perfection has extended toward their own children, that he has encountered many women who confided that they were advised that their unborn child might have some imperfection, based on a prenatal test, and that they resisted the doctor's gentle (or not-so-gentle) suggestion to abort their child — only to have their child born perfectly healthy. How many others were there, he wondered, that had not approached him (or his fellow priests) to discuss this? How many others took their doctor's advice at face value?



[Pixabay \(2016\), CC0 Public Domain](#)

**How many children were sacrificed on the altar of perfection on the basis of an inaccurate prenatal test?**

A friend of mine had that test and received that unwelcome news that something might be wrong with her child. She spent the rest of her pregnancy agonizing

might be wrong with her child. She spent the rest of her pregnancy agonizing, wondering if her child would be ok. Today, that child is a young teenager, a leader in her school, a hard worker, an honor student, and a talented baker. Who knows what else she'll be capable of as she grows up and explores her interests?

I didn't hear the rest of the homily, because I started wondering what would happen if prenatal tests were developed that could pinpoint conditions that were not congenital, but ones toward which an unborn child were genetically predisposed.

What if there had been a test that would have told me that my youngest child would develop Type 1 Diabetes sometime during his childhood?

It wouldn't have been a deal-breaker for me. But for someone who has been conditioned to expect perfection at any price, it might be.

I know how my life has been changed because TheKid is in it, and I wouldn't have missed it for the world (much as I may rant about his legendary talent for missing the school bus).

What if there had been a test?

So what?

He's still my child. Taller than me, but still my child. Not perfect by any means (diabetes or no diabetes), but still my child.

If I had known, what would I have done different? Not too much, but there would have been a whole lot more worrying.

I was considered "advanced maternal age" when I was pregnant with TheKid, and I refused all testing for anything that couldn't be fixed before birth (at that time, that means I agreed to an ultrasound to rule out spina bifida and a blood-glucose test to rule out gestational diabetes).

Sometimes it's better not to know.

... and whoever received one child such as this in my name receives me  
(Matthew 18:5)

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This contribution is available at <http://franciscanmom.com/2018/01/22/when-its-better-not-to-know/>  
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| [Contents](#) |

## Death: Are You Prepared for the end, of life and of the world? [at One Pearl]



I learned several things about [my Grandpa](#) after he died. Most importantly, he was prepared. Although his death seemed sudden to us, he had everything in order. In the months before his death he worked harder than his heart could take. He must have had a premonition. He was a few years older than my Grandma and had always talked as if he would die first. Because of this, he tried to make sure she was taken care of after he was gone. He had a list of tasks to complete before he died, including selling their house and getting a more manageable condo.

### Ready for Death

On December 1st, 2017, my Grandpa checked the last thing off on his list. He and my Grandmother signed a loan to borrow money for some repairs they wanted to make to their new condo. After going to the bank and doing a few errands, their last stop was the grocery store, where my Grandpa stocked up on his favorite gluten-free treats. On the way home he began complaining of indigestion.

“Sal, you’ve had more indigestion in the last week...we’re going to the hospital.”

“No, no Aggie, I’m fine. Just mix me up my apple cider vinegar drink when we get home.”

My Grandma got in the house first and started fixing his drink. She heard the door open and then a loud crash. She ran to him. When she saw his mouth hanging open she knew right away that he was already gone.

### **Death did catch him by surprise**

Most families experiencing an unexpected death would be dealing with a nightmare—no will, trying to find the essential paperwork. My grandparents had bought their condo about three months before this. They barely had any furniture because the floors had been redone. But, in the closet was everything we needed—organized and clearly labeled. He had a will, funeral plans, old taxes. He made sure everything would be taken care of and especially that his wife would be taken care of. For example, he chose to receive a smaller pension during his lifetime so that she would still have an income after he passed away. He thought of everything.

### **Grandpa the writer**

We discovered something else as we were going through his files—he was a writer. We found a folder full of poems, most of them dated in the early fifties, when he was in high school. They were filled with themes you would expect from a teenager—loneliness, darkness, trying to find meaning and purpose—but they were pretty well written. He even seemed to express anger at God in some of them. We were surprised by this because he had such strong faith. Later, my grandmother told a story that shed some light on this. “When he was a kid his parents let the doctors do some experimental surgery on him. He couldn’t play sports or do the things he loved after that, so he became angry with God.” I overheard this from another room and shouted, “That’s why his poems are so dark.” There were sounds of revelation from everyone. His anger at God somehow validated my own. It made it okay for me to say to God, “I want him back. Why did you take him away?”

My favorite piece of his that we came across was entitled “Growing Up Italian.” He wrote it for a high school English class. I began reading it outloud to my family but stumbled when I came to a word in all caps that seemed like

gibberish–MED-E-GONES. I read it several times– MED-E-GONES, MED-GONES. “Try reading in an italian accent!” “Oh, Mericans!”

## Death comes suddenly



The Wise Virgins were prepared when the Bridegroom arrived

My Grandpa was a faithful husband, father and provider. He also served the Church as a deacon in a quiet, humble manner and we are only beginning to learn about all the people he served and touched. Sometimes he would send me his homilies, which were insightful, but accessible. His last, and best homily was his death. Although it seemed like the worst timing ever, God’s perfect timing was not lost on me. Two days after he died was the [First Sunday of Advent](#). In the Catholic Church, [Advent](#) is a time to remember Christ’s first coming, but also to look forward to the second. It is a time to ask: am I prepared to meet Christ? When Christ refers to his second coming he warns us that it will take us by surprise. The Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent contains one of these warnings: “Watch, therefore; you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming...May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.”

With his death, Grandpa showed me what “suddenly” means in a visceral, concrete way. He was not caught sleeping, but going about his work. He was ready. I just didn’t realize how suddenly, “suddenly” would come.

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| [Contents](#) |

## Psalm 96 ~ Be Glad and Praise the Lord! [at Pauca Verba]

**Here is Psalm 96** - a most happy invitation to praise the God of the Universe.

**Verse 1:** The psalmist begins by calling out to the temple choir and congregation: "*Sing a new song!*" Did you catch that? A *NEW* song. The energy seems to encourage a happy, new song. Did he imagine the folks would quickly compose a song with new ideas or insights about God? I'm thinking of the resistance I've met over the years trying to get a Sunday congregation to learn a new hymn. And then hearing folks complain: "*Church is boring.*" Go figure.

*Question:* Do I resist what is new about God? *Same-old, same-old*, AA says. God is the Master of *New*: each day is new. The seasons go round and round in newness. A new baby arrives. There is a new school year. Turn a corner and there is a new vista. We make a new friend. How thoughtful of God, always offering what is new, and we are invited to respond to God in kind.

**Verse 2:** "*Proclaim the good news of salvation.*" Religion is *felt* good news. Let's not reduce this word *salvation* to a slogan: "*Oh Jesus died on the cross to forgive sins, to save me by opening the gates of heaven.*" Salvation is NOW! Today! Salvation packs my personal human story. God saves me from chaos. God saved me from dying that day. God has saved me from despair and depression. God has healed me and saved me from confusion and self-degradation. God has saved me from the utter loss of addiction. God has saved me from the fears that were consuming me. In an African American church, this is when folks would start shouting out, "*Tell it brother!*" "*Tell it sister!*"

**Verse 3:** "*Declare his glory among the nations...among all peoples.*" A lot of

Christians really hold back. Maybe they're afraid of being perceived as holy rollers. The psalmist is inviting us to tell everyone. The 12 step folks seem to get it: they sit in a circle and share out loud how: *"I once was lost but now am found; was blind, but now I see."*

**Verses 4,5a:** *"God is to more to be feared than all gods...they are idols."* Idols. I shouldn't think of little bronze statues standing on shelves. Idols: all the stuff that really gets our attention; that we defend *come hell or high water*: money, perceived "rights" - even constitutional ones, treasured opinions, power, political dogmas, my possessions, prejudices, personalities that can do no wrong. Before God, these are worthless. Silly.

**Verse 5b:** *"The Lord made the heavens."* We might remember the lesson we hear at the Easter Vigil from the Prophet Baruch 3:35 -

*'The one before whom*

*the stars at their posts shine and rejoice.*

*When he calls them, they answer,*

*"Here we are!"*

*Shining with joy for their Maker.'*

This is too wonderful! God naming the stars, placing them in the sky above us, calling to them and their happy response. And if God interacts with stars so personally and warmly, all the more must that be so for each of us!

**Verse 6:** Kings and queens, presidents, congressmen, premiers, prime ministers,

CEO's and movie stars travel with an entourage - people who secure their safety and facilitate their movements and interactions. But God's attendants are his own divine attributes: *majesty, beauty, magnificence and strength*. And the beauty of the Jerusalem Temple reflected these attributes, with the brilliant sun bouncing off the roof as if to dazzle and blind us.

**Verses 7-9:** "*Ascribe to the Lord, you families of the peoples.*" The American family today comes in great variety, unlike the tidy affair of the 1950's - a married mom and dad with children like steps. Rather than assessing it all, can't we just share the song and the gladness as the psalmist calls *every* family to the praise of God.

Then we're given a picture of Temple worship: people bringing their gifts, the wearing of clothes befitting the presence of God, even trembling before God. As I walked into a church for a Confirmation ceremony, I overheard a woman say, "*The roof of this church may fall down with my coming here today.*" How did we ever come to reduce our religion with such trivial, silly, cute talk? Have we lost **trembling** before God - not for fear of being sent to hell - but trembling before the enormity of God, the vastness of God, the imagination of God, the compassion of God and the requirements of justice God lays out before us. If we ever *really* thought about God's ideas of justice - we'd tremble.

**Verse 10:** "*The Lord is King.*" Oh God, set up your rule in my life! What might *that* look like? And then the psalmist tells us, "*God made the earth not to be moved.*" God has set our planet in an elliptical orbit perfectly distanced from the sun, perfectly angled, and at the perfect speed that life is sustained here in tremendous beauty and variety. The slightest change could doom it all. Pray we don't throw it all out of whack with the big bombs we pound into the earth. Blasphemy is a God insult.

**Verse 11-13:** At the psalm's end all of creation is invited to share in the congregation's great chorus of glad praise. Let the plants - the very ground

rejoice and be glad. Let the life-teaming oceans and seas thunder their praise. *Oh God, we dump eighteen million tons of plastic into the waters every year - have mercy! By 2050 the plastic in the oceans will outweigh all the fish - have mercy!* Then the fields get in on the praise: flower power, color riot, sensory overload! And the forests - let them *shout* for joy before God. *Oh God, forgive us for burning the forests, chopping them down, defoliating them with chemicals, shattering them with missile practice.* The forests are God's extraordinary gift to oxygenate, purify and cool our planet - and to delight us with their beauty.

*"God comes to judge the earth."* God judges the earth with his righteousness (God's right-ness). God's rule isn't for some far off never-never land. God's judgment isn't a spectacular, heavenly pyrotechnics show. Some people can only think of God's judgment as God's punishment (which usually means punishing the people who are not like us). But God's judgment is God's final display of God's truth - ***God's final attempt to teach our hearts!***

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| [Contents](#) |

## The Perverse Use of 50 Shades for Marketing [at Designs by Birgit]

The following is a re-write of something I initially shared when the first *50 Shades of Grey* movie came out on Valentine's Day of 2015. Unfortunately, 2018 finds us in similar circumstances. This Valentine's Day will again find herds of couples stampeding to attend a movie that glorifies the unseemly and encourages others to experience perversion within their relationships. Below you will read a post about 50 Shades of Grey from 2015 that is, sadly, relevant again (still) now:

### 50 Shades of Nausea 2015

I know sharing this makes me guilty of broadcasting something I would prefer no one would view...but using the phrase, 50 Shades, is an attention-getter – an effort to make a moral point. I pray that some will heed the truth of the evil being promoted and walk away.

Ever since the pornographic series of books and then movie, 50 Shades of Grey, came out we have been inundated with 50 Shades of Everything. For example Target not only carried a line of 50 Shades products (lotions, hand cuffs, blindfolds, etc.) – in some stores they were even next to children's toothbrushes. Evidently mommies with kiddies are the chosen demographic. This should makes us think twice about letting Junior spend the night at Tommy's house – especially if you do not know one another well.

Then we had teachers handing out 50 Shades of Grey [word searches](#) to middle school children and other horrifying examples of irresponsible adult example.

This was blatant coat-tail riding on the wildly successful, albeit perverted success of all things 50 Shades. At least you knew what they were about.

### Riding the Coattails of the Perverse

Now, however, we're seeing an entirely new use of 50 Shades – mainstream,

‘normal’ products are joining the porn coattails. I have seen 50 Shades of Gray Hair, 50 Shades of Savings, 50 Shades of [Debt](#), and all sorts of 50 Shades references from sources who have nothing to do with bondage or perverted sexuality. Is this the direction we really want to go?

We have all seen the effects of advertising and how it colors our world. Hearing the same phrase over and over again, ad nauseam (pun intended), tends to normalize an otherwise offensive topic. Yes, many [columnists](#) have expended many keystrokes to objecting to (or recommending) the offending books and movie – and using some twist of the 50 Shades title garnered interest and readership – but using this phrase in mainstream advertising runs the risk of coloring (yep, I went there) the consciences of even the most sensitive souls.

In the same way that marketing PG-13 movies to the toddler set by licensing toys to fast food chains is a problem, so is this. Currently [Subway](#) is giving out [Guardians of the Galaxy](#) take home bags with their kids’ meals, even though the movie is rated PG-13. Now I ask you, how many children will be inclined toward the desire of watching this movie, based on a favorable association with their meal and gift? Will you, a morally responsible parent, take them to see the movie in question? I would pray not.

Why then, associate anything – especially morally neutral somethings – with a horrific display of sexual depravity? That is the question and that is what brings me to 50 Shades of Nausea.

What strange 50 Shades associations have you encountered?

*NOTE: Check back soon for more thoughts on Saint Valentines Day and its misuse.*

### [The Connection Between Saint Valentine and Chastity](#)

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This contribution is available at <http://designsbybirgit.com/perverse-50-shades-marketing/>  
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## Unintentional Irony: NPR, Abortion, and Maternal Devotion [at Clinging to Onions]



### **I listen to National Public Radio all the time**

(as my kids can attest) because it's informative, well produced, and convenient – radio is a terrific medium for those on the go and, what's more, it's free!

However, like most mainstream media outlets, NPR leans pretty far to the left, especially when it comes to social issues, and particularly concerning abortion. Probably they'd deny such editorial leanings, and they'd point to the numbers – like, maybe, the balanced amount of airtime they grant representatives from both the pro-life and pro-choice camps. But you can't listen to NPR long without picking up on a subtle emphasis in tone and language that betrays their pro-choice bias. What's more, pro-choice adherents and their positions are rarely criticized, while pro-life spokeswomen are frequently patronized by their on-air NPR hosts.

This despite the fact that pro-lifers are speaking up for a marginalized and persecuted class of humanity that can't speak up for itself – the very kind of sub-group that NPR likes to draw attention to and defend. Even so, sometimes the NPR editors make programming decisions that buttress the pro-life cause, despite what seems to be their intention otherwise.

### **Case in point:**

Two unrelated stories that appeared on two different shows on the same day a

two unrelated stories that appeared on two different shows on the same day a couple weeks back. In the afternoon, there was a story on

### [All Things Considered](#)

about pro-choice pioneers in Chicago that provided illicit abortions prior to the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision in 1973. The underground group went by the name "Jane," and they developed an elaborate, clandestine system to evade the law, connect with women who sought abortion, and then perform the procedure themselves – despite a lack of medical training. The ATC segment featured early Jane enthusiasts, including Martha Scott:

Scott says she performed hundreds of abortions. It's a relatively simple procedure, but she acknowledges that there were risks to what they were doing. Some clients ended up in the emergency room; some had to undergo hysterectomies. "You're messing around inside somebody else's body. It's not necessarily given that you won't do harm," Scott says. "It wasn't perfect, by any means. But we were dealing with women who really didn't have other options."

By itself, it's a typical NPR abortion puff piece, and it paints the pro-choice scofflaws in the best possible light. The members of Jane are what NPR's largely progressive listening audience would call abortion heroines, after all, who risked jail time, unemployment, and social ostracism in order to facilitate the termination of unwanted children. Yet, in all the years (decades) that I've been listening to Public Radio, I can't recall a single comparable story lionizing the peaceful pro-life activists who risked all the same things in order to bring pregnant women alternative, life-affirming choices.

### **Even so, NPR itself highlighted that alternative perspective**

earlier in the same day that the Jane story appeared. It was a

### [Story Corps](#)

segment during NPR's Morning Edition that featured a conversation between April Gibson and her teenage son, Gregory. When Gibson got pregnant as an unmarried teen, she apparently didn't consider abortion an option – or else she couldn't. "I just took care of you," she tells Gregory in the Story Corps segment. "I did what I was supposed to do." Maybe she didn't really have other options; maybe she didn't have folks like Scott and her ilk proffering clean termination

may be the same that have come into being and that are providing cheap termination services.



From an NPR point of view, that sounds like an injustice: Gibson shouldn't have been compelled to any baby-related "supposed to do." I'm guessing All Things Considered might've preferred to relate Gibson's story as an cautionary tale: "See what happens when women don't have choice? They

*have*

to take care of

*a baby.*"

But Gibson tells her own story with confidence and joy, and she makes it plain that she has no regrets. "I couldn't believe what people told me about myself or about 'those people' like me," she tells her son – and us. "This is my baby, and I love him, and I can feel something. It's not a fairy tale, it's not a failure. It's just a process, and now we're here, 16 years later."

**It was a moving testimony,**

and I couldn't help thinking about Gibson and Gregory later in the day as I listened to the story about Jane. All those hundreds of abortions that Martha Scott and her friends performed, and the hundreds of Gregorys who perished as a result. Their moms might've been convinced that they were justified in resorting to a dangerous permanent solution in order to address whatever crises they were in at the time, but there's no doubt that they also missed out on what Gibson calls "a process" – that is, the mysterious unfolding of lived life with all its tragedies and sorrows, its hopes and possibilities.

Gibson doesn't mention abortion in her conversation with Gregory – she might even be pro-choice. for all I know – but it's very clear that she's glad

he's

in the world. No doubt, all those many women who took advantage of Jane's abortion services were facing excruciating circumstances, or else they wouldn't chosen such an extreme solution. But how many of them had a chance to talk with somebody like April Gibson, who could've assured them that there was still hope? The hardships she endured as a single mom, the doubts and sense of failure – no fairy tale, as she says – were clearly well worth it. It's an outcome she could've never predicted at the time of her pregnancy, but that makes her decision to “just take care” of her baby – to do what she was “supposed to do” – all the more valiant.

### **Happily, it's a valiancy that Gregory himself**

both recognizes and cherishes. As he told his mom at the end of their conversation, “You're just the greatest person that I ever know. And I just want to be like you.”

Me, too. Thanks for your heroism, April, and for sharing your story – and your son – with the world.

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This contribution is available at <http://clingingtoonions.blogspot.com/2018/01/unintentional-irony-npr-abortion-and.html>

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| [Contents](#) |

## Transferable Lessons [at Shifting My Perspective]

**See to it that no one takes you captive... according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. Colossians 2:8**

By total coincidence, I had the [DVD “Ruby Bridges”](#) to watch with my kids on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day last year. Based on a true story, it’s a movie about one of the first African-American students to attend an all white school in Louisiana in 1960. Ruby was all of six-years-old.

As the angry white people spat at poor little Ruby, and threatened to kill her, my kids were squirming in their seats. Mason, especially, kept saying how much he hated the movie. I explained that there was a big difference between a poorly written movie with awful acting, and a well done movie that made you feel bad. The first was a waste of time. The second was very necessary if that bad feeling had a good lesson in its hands.

My kids are incredibly sheltered. Although they’ve seen some bullying at school, they’d never witnessed the true hatred depicted in that movie. They couldn’t believe that people acted so cruelly during desegregation. It made me realize all I haven’t exposed them to yet.

There is so much I grapple with as a mother, but exposing my children to the atrocities of the real world is one of the biggies. If I can’t handle watching the evening news without getting overwhelmed and depressed, why would I expose my children to that? Yet, how will they grow up to be informed people who can possibly make a difference, if I don’t?

I think it’s kid appropriate movies like this one that are my answer. Although it made my kids squirm, that movie was the springboard to a fantastic conversation about intolerance. Multiple times throughout the movie, I paused it so we could talk.

At a level they could understand, we discussed how Ruby was just like them: a gift from God, just wrapped up in a different skin color. From there, we talked about all the other types of people who may look and act differently from them, but are still God’s gifts to the world. The more we embrace them, the more they show their gifts to the world. The more we reject them, the more we discard their gifts to the world.

snare their girls with us. The more we reject them, the more discord there is in the world. Although the conversation was basic, it was the foundation for how peace is created, and why war is waged.

Lo and behold, when the movie ended, all three of my kids said they loved it. In fact, they wanted to watch it again this year.

This experience helped me realize my kids are ready for more. I don't have to shelter them so much. I've built a foundation of love, security, and acceptance in my home. Now it's time to equip my kids to spread all that love and acceptance out in the world. If little Ruby could do it, my kids can too!

**If you have any suggestions for good, lesson-teaching movies, appropriate for kids, I'd love you to share them in the comment section below. Thanks!**

***Questions for Reflection:***

***\* How do I cope when I hear about the atrocities in the world?***

***\* Do I expose my children to any of them? If so, how?***

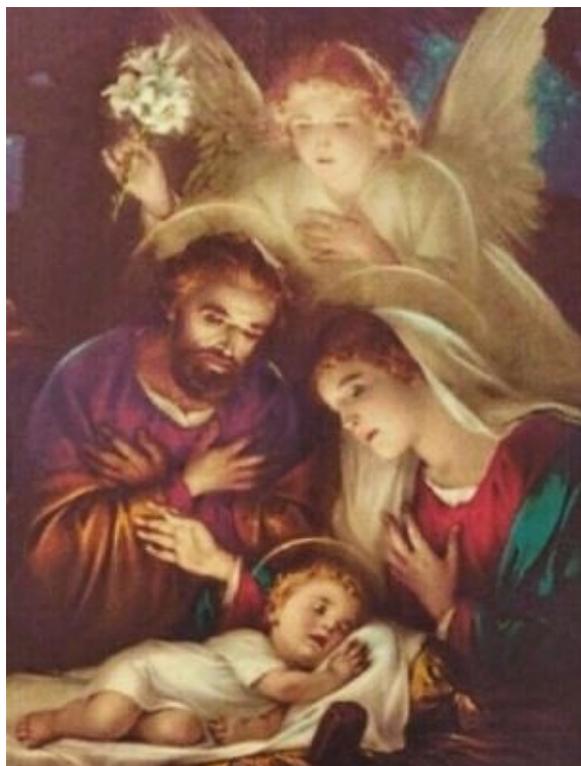
***\* What are the ways my kids and I can help spread love and acceptance in the world?***

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## **The Betrothal of the Blessed Virgin Mary to St. Joseph is tied to the Protection of the Unborn Children, Marriage and Family [at Cradling Catholic]**



Holy Family—they show us how to Respect Life

By Larry Peterson

January 22, is the day the Catholic Church in America sets aside all else and joins in prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children. Traditionally, in the pre-1955 Church calendar, this day was set aside to honor the [“Betrothal of the Blessed Virgin Mary to St. Joseph”](#). Today, this Mass is still celebrated by some religious orders using the Latin rite.

This is such a beautiful thing for the Church to do. By simultaneously, joining together the Day of Prayer for the Unborn with Roe vs. Wade and the Betrothal of Our Lady, it heralds the beauty of Motherhood, and it trumpets the profound, spiritual importance of marriage and family.

From the Gospel of Matthew 1: 18; *“When Mary was engaged to Joseph, before their marriage, she was discovered to be pregnant—by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly.”*

From Matthew 1: 23: *“Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name Him Emmanuel.”*

In the old testament, Jewish marriages happened in stages. First came the betrothal. At this ceremony, the couple gave their consent. They were now considered truly married. However, before they would actually move in together as a husband and wife, there was a period of time where they spent time away from each other. This could be up to a year, and it was during this separation that the “newlyweds.” were to learn from older married couples how to be good, Jewish spouses.

In his 1989 Apostolic Exhortation, [Redemptoris Custos](#), Pope St. John Paul II, used the following words to describe the marriage ceremony of the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph: *“According to Jewish custom, marriage took place in two stages: first, the legal, or true marriage was celebrated, and then, only after a certain period of time, the husband brought the wife into his house. Thus, before he lived with Mary, Joseph was already her husband.”*

When God does things, He sure is meticulous. Mary and Joseph were, according to the law, married. There are those who say that Jesus was born out of wedlock. If the betrothal had not taken place, that might be accurate. But under the law, they were married. There are some who would have you believe that Mary was no different than an unwed mother. This is false. The Blessed Mother was a married woman at the time of the Annunciation. She even asked the Angel Gabriel, *“How can this be since I know not man?”* And she is told it will be by the Holy Spirit. The Angel also informs Joseph. Therefore, within the Holy Family, the sanctity of marriage and family is fully protected.

Since [Roe vs. Wade](#) and [Doe vs. Bolton](#) on January 22, 1973, more than 60,000,000 lives have been eradicated. The number is incomprehensible. Yet there are so many who justify this by using the rare examples of teenage rape or incest, out of wedlock pregnancies, Downs Syndrome, deformities, lack of finances, etc. We could also say the Blessed Virgin Mary’s pregnancy was abnormal or irregular. After all, Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. Jesus’

total DNA comes from a woman. Biologically, Jesus is not the son of Joseph, the Nazarene carpenter. But this man define's fatherhood, and his example screams out to all men; *Love and protect the child and his/her mom, no matter what. Be loyal and true. Give them your name if you must.*

Fittingly, on the 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the two most ignominious Supreme Court decisions ever handed down, as we pray for the protection of the unborn, we can look to the marriage of Joseph and Mary, a marriage established by God and made perfect by His Son.

Lastly, it is hard to even imagine a better husband or father than a simple carpenter named Joseph. He is an example for all mankind.

We ask the Most Holy Family to pray for all the unborn and children everywhere.

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This contribution is available at <http://cradlingcatholic.com/2018/01/january-22-the-betrothal-of-the-blessed-virgin-mary-to-st-joseph-is-tied-to-the-protection-of-the-unborn-children-marriage-and-family/>

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| [Contents](#) |

## Reevaluating Time Schedules [at Renew The Church!]

These are trying days! The world has been living under the shadow of nuclear war for a long time now – as a child the 1940's, I remember the drills in school to prepare for a nuclear attack. We were to duck under our desks, head between our knees, hand over back of neck, eyes shut, waiting for further instruction. I suppose the adults understood more clearly the world-wide catastrophes that would follow, after the explosive effects began to smother and strangle, and radiation began to poison, life throughout the biosphere.

It is difficult to imagine such horrors, but even the possibilities cast new light on the end-time prophecies of Holy Scripture. What seemed so impossible if not very distant, in these end-time prophecies, is beginning to be yes, possible, and maybe not as distant as we would like. A boy-god king in North Korea has weapons of mass destruction – nuclear, chemical, biological – and he seems to have nothing inside himself to restrain the beast. The world has had such rulers before, but never before have they had such deadly power to inflict catastrophic horror upon so many, around the whole world.

Being a Christian is a great comfort, in such a time. We have a foundation of faith that helps us to understand the temporary – the passing – nature of this life here and now. This life is a trial, a life-long moment of testing, and also of opportunity to build upon and strengthen the foundation of our individual lives with lasting values, with enduring treasures, with eternal blessings. We are invited to, and we must, use our moments well.

Therefore it is said, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light.”

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit,

addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart,

always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. (Eph 5:14 -20)

In his Letter to the Ephesians Paul used the familiar analogy among all humans, of battle, of war, to help Christians see more deeply into the struggles we face. Our battle, finally, is a spiritual and interior one:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; besides all these, taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,....  
(Eph 6:10 -18)

Paul's exhortations are good ones, my friends: we need to take them seriously! We need to guard our hearts (a breastplate of righteousness), to be careful to love and value all that God loves and values! We need to guard our minds, our thinking (the helmet of salvation), to be careful to protect right thinking, discerning truth from lies! We need "the shield of faith" in this battlefield of amoral and godless political correctness. We need "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God," because He, the living Word, is Truth. Jesus Christ taught us,

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." (Jn 14:6)

So many people – so many Catholics! – continue to use up so much precious time, with trivial pursuits. As if we had "all the time in the world"! No, for every man and woman there is a last day, a last hour, a last breath. And a last time for prayer, for Holy Scripture, a last time for worship in Holy Mass, a last

Holy Communion, a last act of holy charity for God, for a friend, for a stranger, for an enemy. A last moment to live the life of Christ here and now, for the glory of God.

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

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This contribution is available at <http://renewthechurch.com/2018/01/04/reevaluating-time-schedules/>  
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| [Contents](#) |

## Intoxicated 'drifter' speaks clearly about life [at Peace Garden Passage]

*I can think of no better piece to share than this one today, as our four buses from Shanley High School get ready to depart for Washington, D.C., to take part in the 2018 March for Life to end abortion, and bring awareness to the pro-life cause. Please keep us in your prayers. Thank you!*

Anyone who frequents the sidewalk of our state's only abortion facility to pray eventually comes to understand there's more there than meets the eye.

It's not just about the people who enter the facility, and what we can do through our prayers and messages of hope. It's also about what we can bring those who pass by that desolate pathway – or perhaps more importantly, as I recently discovered – what they can bring us.

I'm talking about the homeless, often intoxicated individuals who drift by each week. They've become part of the reason I, and others, feel so committed to keep showing up.

Of course, one must be discerning. Downtown isn't a place for the naive. But by paying attention, I've also seen God show up in disguise.

Many of these drifters – the great majority I've witnessed or met – are pro-life, and, perhaps because their inhibitions are lowered, they're not afraid to make it known. Sometimes, they're almost too vocal, and we find it necessary to encourage them toward a more charitable stance.

Recently, though, one came wandering by and, in stopping to chat, changed the whole tenor of the sidewalk, and left me practically skipping away with joy in my heart.

It might sound crazy, but it was as if – through someone with breath heavy with the stench of hard liquor – God himself spoke to me.

He first paused near the escorts, who turned away from him. He then pivoted from them toward me, giving me a questioning look, like, "What?" And I looked

back and shrugged, as if saying, “I don’t get it, either.”

He then approached my friend and I who’d been praying, making his intentions clear. “I’m pro-life,” he said. “I’ll come stand with you.” And he did.

Repeating over and over his regard for life, he shared why he feels so strongly about it. What struck me was his passion, and clarity, through slurred words.

With zeal, he declared, “Every day, children are born into the world. Every day, some of our elders leave. Those babies are a sign that God hasn’t given up on us yet.”

I gulped. It was a profound insight that had never, not in quite that way, occurred to me before.

He persisted, saying that if God hasn’t given up on us yet, why would we? It’s plain wrong, he said, to diminish the hope that God wants to bring us.

After telling me his name, he shared some of his story. “I’m from Arizona,” he said. “I’m Navajo.”

“Why are you here in the cold country?” I asked.

“I’m here to cool off. It can get 115 degrees there.”

We laughed at him needing to escape to North Dakota for relief.

He was abandoned by his parents as a baby, he continued, and raised by his grandparents, who taught him, firstly, to speak in his Native tongue.

Then he returned to talking about his life convictions, how each child born is a miracle, and that we should never take away what the Creator gives us. It’s not our right to do so.

“Yes,” I said. “You are so right!”

He told me about his job, apartment, and vehicle, which he said he won’t drive when he’s been drinking, because he can’t bear the thought of hurting another human life.

Then he showed me his tattoo, which, written into the insides of his arms,

stretched from one end of his hand to the other. The first word, in Navajo, meant “Creator,” he explained. The rest: “Hear my prayers.”



“I don’t have anyone,” he said, “no wife, no kids.” And yet he told me how he prays four times a day in gratitude to God.

I believed him, and I assured him God loves him, and affirmed how spot on his ideas were. We had a great conversation, and I promised I would pray for him – and I’ve kept that promise.

I am thankful for the chance to converse with this lonely man who simply wanted to let the world know, “Life is hard, but it is good, because it came from a God who loves us.”

If only we could all be so wise.

Just a short time before he arrived, another prayer advocate had said, pointing to other drifters on the sidewalk, “You see them over there? They are the ones who will be first to enter the Kingdom of God. Just you wait.”

I have a hunch she’s right.

*[Note: I’ve been writing about my experiences on the sidewalk Downtown Fargo on Wednesday, the day abortions happen at our state’s only abortion facility, for a year now for [New Earth](#) magazine — the official news publication of the Fargo Diocese. I think these stories are worth repeating, so I’ll begin doing so here*

*after original publication, including playing catch-up with the 11 I wrote in 2017. I hope you find “Sidewalk Stories” helpful in better understanding the truth about abortion and the scene as it plays out tragically each week here in Fargo, N.D. The preceding ran in New Earth on Jan. 4, 2018.]*

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This contribution is available at <http://roxanesalonen.com/2018/01/sidewalk-stories-intoxicated-drifter-speaks-clearly-about-life/>

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| [Contents](#) |

## I Believe in God [at Creo en Dios!]

Today was the first of a three-class series on the Creed I am teaching for the Our Lady of Lourdes parish RCIA candidates. I began by talking about what we mean by a creed and why having one matters. I then spent most of time dealing with the first part of the creed – where we affirm believe in “God, the father, Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.” There is a lot packed in that first line – starting with the first four words.

***I believe in God.*** The first part of this first segment of the Creed does nothing to distinguish Christians from non-Christians. That is, all religious people who follow a theistic faith – whatever their particular religious beliefs – share the conviction that “God” exists – that God is something real that truly exists whatever their understanding or concept of God, and whether or not they use the term “God” or “Allah” or “Jehovah” or something else. (Even some people who are nontheistic, have a sense of something transcendent.) Having said that, the line matters tremendously.

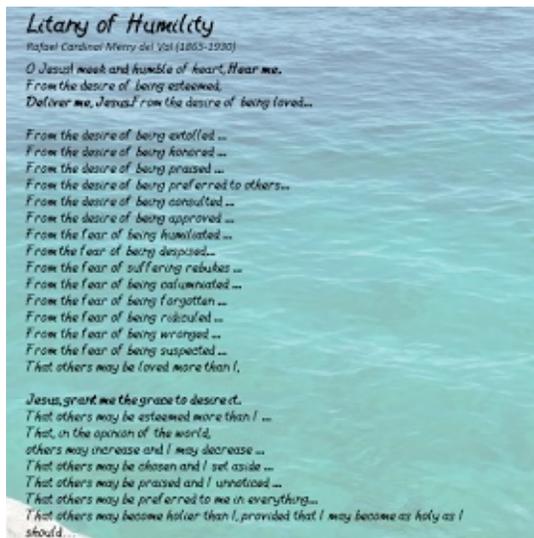
Luke Timothy Johnson says that to declare that God exists “suggests that the world we see and touch points to a power or powers beyond our own and outside our control, beyond our sight and touch, which must be taken into account even if we are to give an adequate account of the world that we can touch and see. To affirm the existence of God, then, means to affirm that the physical world, which can be measured and calculated, is not all that is.”

That, he claims is a critical theological concept. Because we are not here affirming one belief among many, that is not a belief of limited consequences. Rather it is statement of belief that commits us to a fundamental posture toward everything else that exists. Everything else depends on the truth of this statement, a statement that we can’t prove in the way we can prove geometric theorems.

And so, by affirming God’s existence, I affirm (in the word of Joan Chittister) that “I am steering by a star I cannot see but which I am convinced is there.” And that affects everything about who I am in the world.

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| [Contents](#) |



## The Struggle is Real

As a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) in the public schools, I have a pretty thankless job. The thanks I do receive is usually in the form of having a child "graduate" from Speech/Language Services. My school system (especially my special education coordinator) has tried on a monthly basis the past few years to spotlight some of her teachers/SLPs in different ways. A couple of SLPs appear to have been targeted for providing professional development, either in person or through technology. I'm really struggling with this. I have been an SLP for over 30 years and have had an enormous amount of different experiences that I could share with other SLPs and teachers. I bust my tail each and every day for my school system and have learned about technology in order to "work smarter, not harder". Yet I am overlooked. Therein lies the struggle.

## It's All About HIM

The past couple of weeks God has certainly been sending me messages. It's not all about me. The reason I am in my profession is for

*Him*

. I have to remember why I am an SLP...not for the recognition but to serve HIM. It all started to hit home for me during the Gospel Readings about John the Baptist. No doubt John was an important part of Jesus' ministry by paving the

way. Did he ever once say, "What about me?" "Doesn't anyone see what I'm doing?" It would appear that he didn't...he pointed the way to Jesus. I am no John, for sure. I am also nowhere near being able to emulate Jesus. Even Jesus didn't want recognition, he wanted it all to go to God the Father. His whole purpose in becoming man was to bring people closer to God and to save our souls.

## **A Life-Altering Recommendation**

I was at a diocesan CCW meeting last week. Our spirituality commission chair is a wonderful young sister. She began our opening prayer and subsequent talk on...you guessed it...humility and doing everything for God, not for recognition. Our president then followed up on the same topic. I'm fairly certain that they didn't coordinate ahead of time. As we queued up for lunch, I found myself right in front of Sister and I mentioned how I needed to hear what she said because I was really struggling with it. She recommended that I read the book

### [Interior Freedom](#)

by Jacques Philippe. She said that she's read it several times; it helps her put things in perspective. As soon as I sat down, I pulled out my phone and ordered it. I've started reading it but am taking it slow so I can digest what I'm reading. If it helped Sister, I have no doubt it will aid me in keeping focused.

The president ended with her report with this prayer that I will be adding to my morning prayers:

*"O my God, teach me to be generous, to serve you as you deserve to be served, to give without counting the cost, to fight without fear of being wounded, to work without seeking rest, and to spend myself without expecting any reward, but the knowledge that I am doing your holy will. Amen." — St. Ignatius of Loyola*

## **The Epitome of Humility**

As I read Saturday's mass readings, the thought occurred to me that these didn't really relate directly to the whole "make sure you're doing it for God" theme. I have to admit that I was a little disappointed. I wanted God to talk to me and to remind me that it's not about me. (And by feeling that way I made it all about me!) Then I read the reflection in my

## [Magnificat](#)

. Father Jean-Nicolas Groll, S.J. wrote,

*Oh how true it is that to be anything in the sight of God we must be nothing, we must pretend to nothing, we must only desire to be ignored, forgotten, despised, and considered as the most vile and abject thing in the world.*

He continues by encouraging us to show devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is the epitome of humility and sacrifice. Once again, God didn't let me down!

## **Humility.**

Shortly after the new year, I looked through the prayers in the front of my Blessed is She Planner (which is great, by the way! It has everything a working-which pretty much includes all of us!-Catholic woman needs in a planner/calendar.) and ran across *The Humility Prayer*. Well, I immediately had an "earworm"; you know, a song that is stuck in your head that you just can't get out. Audrey Assad performs *I Shall Not Want* on an album. I've been listening to it almost every day on my way to work just as a reminder.

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This contribution is available at <http://thenotsoperfectcatholic.blogspot.com/2018/01/deliver-me.html>

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## **Fathers - You are vital; Males - Be Men before God! [at In the Breaking of the Bread]**

What is a man? Are all male human beings men, regardless of their character or behavior? Is a male who engenders children automatically a father? In common usage, males of a certain age - which varies according to particular societies and cultures - are henceforth called men. However, whether they truly are men or still only "boys" or "adolescents" or simply immature; this depends on their character and behavior.

In truth, it is common knowledge and our shared experience in human society that not all males automatically become men simply because they reach a certain age. By definition a male human being becomes a man when he accepts to become someone by being willing to endure trials and thereby develop his character, inner strength, and virtue; so as to acquire the ability to behave freely, reliably, and with ease according to high moral standards. The stereotypical expression "preserve and protect" is not far from what a healthy and thriving society expects of its men.

The Jewish and Christian inspired Sacred Scriptures indicate abundantly that God behaves toward human beings as a good father who disciplines his children in order to give them character and to develop them into persons capable of love and responsibility.

"Know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the Lord your God disciplines you. Therefore keep the commandments of the Lord your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him." Deut 8:5-6

"My child, do not despise the Lord's discipline

or be weary of his reproof,

for the Lord reproves the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."

Prov 3:11-12

"My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts." Heb 12:5-6

"I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent."  
Rev 3:19

It is horrendous to observe in every time and place how girls, young women, and mature women are abused by men - those closest to them and from whom they have right to expect respect, love, and protection - but also from men who may claim to love them but only want to use them for their own selfish pleasure or satisfaction of their sexual impulses and instincts.

Girls in who employ a cell phone are more and more likely to be harassed by young males to send back nude photos of themselves - called "

[sexting](#)

" - an abhorrent and degrading practice. Studies such as this one indicate that some girls are ill equipped to resist such demands by males of their age or pressure from girls their age to consent to such requests from boys.

Other sources, as well as our own experience of family life, would indicate that the primary way for girls to become "equipped" to resist such abusive and disrespectful requests is for them to enjoy a very strong and loving relationship with

[their own father](#)

. We already know that children internalize what they observe in their parents. When something bad happens to their parents, children may well feel somehow responsible, that this happened because they were bad. Good and responsible parents who take good care of themselves as well as their children protect their children from such drawing such erroneous and possibly harmful conclusions.

Both girls and boys need their father to be strong, present, reliable, loving, and gentle in disciplining them. Being able to respect and love their father makes it easier for children to turn to him when in doubt or troubled. Knowing that their father enjoys listening to them, won't scold them if he disagrees with them, but will offer practical and wise counsel - all these positive traits protect children

from feeling isolated and trapped in confusing situations.

A good mother will show her daughter a woman's way to follow in her life, but it is important that her father confirm that this is indeed a good way by respecting and loving her mother. A

### [good father](#)

who loves his daughter and cultivates a rich relationship with her from early childhood teaches her that she has value and that she can count on him. The more she enjoys a good rapport with her father, the less urgently is she likely to feel a need to acquire other relationships with males - either substitute fathers or boyfriends. A good father will encourage her to enter into other relationships, but out of desire for friendship rather than out of a visceral need for affection or affirmation.

Girls who feel obliged to "sext" appear to have no adult figure - either mother or father - to whom they can turn in their doubt and from whom they might obtain the counsel they need in order to stand up for themselves and to protect their own sense of dignity as persons and as girls or young women.

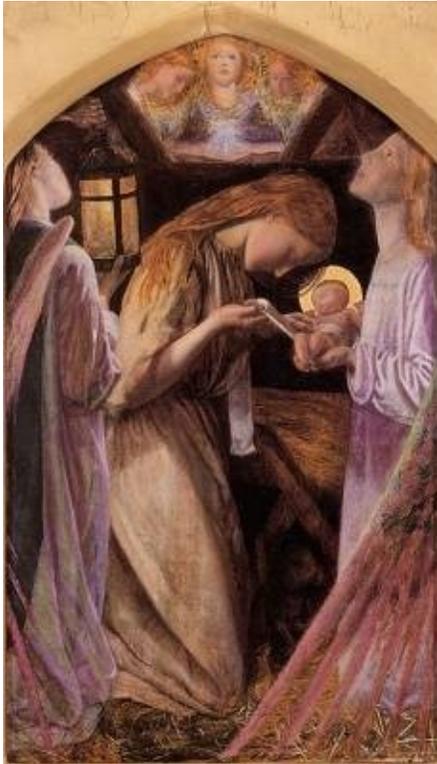
Girls as well as women need to know that their body is good and beautiful, as designed by God their Creator, but that since the original sin, the sight of their nakedness is likely to stir up selfish instincts in males, and most especially in immature young males. Similarly, the sight of male nakedness is just as likely to stir up selfish instincts in females. A boy needs a girl to resist his selfish impulses for his good as much as she needs to resist him for her own good. Inasmuch as a girl might also experience selfish impulses; then a boy also needs to resist her, and for that he also needs a strong and loving father to teach, mentor, and accompany him on his journey to manhood.

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This contribution is available at [http://fathergilles.blogspot.ca/2018/01/fathers-you-are-vital-  
males-be-men.html](http://fathergilles.blogspot.ca/2018/01/fathers-you-are-vital-<br/>males-be-men.html)

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## Blessed John Duns Scotus - A Theology of Love



My school report was so bad that my eldest brother was commissioned with the task of teaching me to read. But when he could not even manage to teach me how to read the Beano, he resigned his commission and commended me to St Jude of hopeless cases. But even St Jude failed. It seems that in those days it was not only in school, but in heaven too, that dyslexia was unheard of. St Anthony was the only real friend that I had. Most people who now know about dyslexia still do not realise how it affects your short term memory. That is where St Anthony came in. He might not have known much about dyslexia, but he was able to find the things that I was always losing. It was through him that I found St Francis of Assisi who may not have been dyslexic, but on his own admission he had little more than an elementary school education.

As so often with people who have little education, they can often see complex truths far more simply than those befuddled with too much knowledge, especially if they have access to the wisdom that is not taught in schools. St. Francis is a case in point; the moment he experienced God's love reaching out to him as he prayed before the Cross in the little Church of San Damiano, he

immediately saw what he must do. If God is full of love and only wishes to give this love to others, then Francis decided to spend the rest of his life trying to receive it and handing it on to others. What else could possibly be more worthwhile? That is why he spent so much time in prayer receiving more and more of God's love suffusing his own, enabling him to return what he had received in kind. This was how he received profound insights about God and about his plan for us that few had seen in quite the same way before or since.

The Greek philosopher, Plato, said that the world is a prison. Shakespeare said that all the world is a stage, and the men and women merely players, and a President of the United States said that all the world was a market place, and the men and women merely buyers and sellers. But for St Francis of Assisi, all the world was a friary, and everyone and everything within it were therefore brothers and sisters to one another. It is not just Brother Francis and Sister Clare then, but Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Brother Wolf and Sister Lamb, Sister Flower and Brother Tree, Brother Fire and Sister Water, for the whole of creation is a brotherhood and sisterhood with a common Father in whose embrace all were created from the beginning. Pope Saint John Paul II named St. Francis the patron saint "of those who promote ecology" in 1979. After all, if you believe that water is your sister you do not pour petrochemical waste into her. You do not fill her with garbage and effluent either, nor with every conceivable plastic that man has made in the last fifty years or more. If the trees are our brothers, then you do not fell them in their millions for money, making hundreds of thousands homeless, destroying their food and habitat and endangering the ecology of the whole world.

As the story of Francis unfolds further, it is full of his love for his brothers and sisters, the birds, the animals, the trees and the plants and even inanimate things who listened to him and obeyed him, beginning with the birds of Cannara and Bevagna who listened to him preaching when nobody else would! When he tells the swallows to remain silent at Alviano so that his listeners can hear what he is saying, they obey him. When he asks the falcon to wake him in the night for prayer, it does so, and when he orders the man-eating wolf to stop attacking the villagers of Gubbio, it obeys. But most of all it is full of his love for Brother Jesus who emptied himself of everything to enter into the world that was created through him, and in him, just so that he could enter into us.

In the first chapter of St John's Gospel we are given the world-shaking news that God's Son, whom he calls The Word, in whom and through whom all things

were created in the beginning, is now made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. He is now not only Brother Jesus in whom all things were created, but the supreme King of that Creation, who has come to rule over all by releasing into it the love that he experienced from eternity, flowing between him and his Father.

Defying gravity that pulls all things down, this love would raise all things up and into Christ the King. Then, through him, back from where he had originally come, to the place where God had originally conceived us, as the place of our final destiny to experience love beyond measure and to all eternity. I used the phrase 'where God had originally conceived us' because for Francis and his later followers, the very moment when God conceived his plan to share his inmost life and love with us, was the moment when Mary was conceived. If his Word was to be made flesh to bring this about, then he would need to have a mother. Nor did God conceive that this mother would be anything other than an Immaculate Mother for she was to give birth to and to nurture his Immaculate Son.

The most important of the later followers of St. Francis, who developed his vision in his own unique theology was Blessed John Duns Scotus, who was beatified by Pope Saint John Paul II in 1993. As his name suggests he was a Scotsman whose family originally came from the town of Duns in the Scottish Borders a few decades after St Francis had died. He argued that the very moment God freely decided that the Word would be made flesh, then that very decision included a human mother; how else would he be made flesh? As Scotus put it – *If God wills an end he must will the means*. This was obviously before creation had taken place in space and time, so his mother would have been conceived perfect in every way, as the mother of the Word to be made flesh, or if you like, Immaculate. She would be totally free from the sin contracted later by human beings. When sin did eventually stain humankind, God made sure that the human Mother of his human Son remained exactly as he had originally intended, as he had originally conceived her, otherwise his plan would be in jeopardy. It was inconceivable for a woman warped by sin and selfishness to give birth to and bring up a perfect man destined to be the King of all creation. And besides, should God's plan be thwarted or changed because of the sinful behaviours of human beings?

It was for these reasons amongst others, that at the beginning of the fourteenth century Scotus was the greatest champion of the Immaculate Conception. He was furthermore in the minority, sometimes of one, as he defended this doctrine against all comers most particularly against the Thomists. For they had all been brought up to believe that original sin affected all mankind including Our Lady.

Many bitter battles were fought over this doctrine until it was finally defined *De fide* by the Church in 1854. Four years later when a French peasant girl, called Bernadette, asked the beautiful lady who appeared to her, who she was, she replied, “Je suis l’Immaculée Conception.”

Although Scotus was a student at Paris only a few decades after Thomas Aquinas, he differed from him in this. From all eternity, eons before and quite independent of man’s fall from grace, God’s plan was to create all things in the ‘Word’, and then the ‘Word’ would be made flesh as his masterwork, to be the King of Creation – Christ the King. He would rule with a love powerful enough to penetrate everyone and draw them up into his mystical body. There, in, with and through him, they would be caught up into the life and loving that endlessly surges to and fro between the Father and the Son.

There was only one thing that could sabotage this plan. Just as God had freely chosen to love in order to share his life with others, these others would have to be made free to choose to love him in return. However, as their failure was not part of God’s initial plan, it did not stop Christ coming, because he was coming anyway. Unlike his contemporaries then, it was quite unthinkable for Scotus to countenance for a moment that God’s sublime plan conceived for others to share in his own glory, should be scrapped because of the behavior of creatures made from ‘the slime of the earth’. We may well have been taught at school that Christ came because Adam had committed an infinite sin in being disobedient to God, but this is a theory that Scotus rejects. He rejected it because it makes God’s plan dependent on human sinfulness. To St Francis and to John Duns Scotus this idea was quite inconceivable.

Although Scotus developed a whole new theology to explain the simple vision of St Francis, St Francis had something far more important to do. He wanted to show people the love of God in such a way that it could move their hearts and help them to generate the love that could take them up into Christ their King. That is why he built the first Crib at Greccio a little town in the Rieti Valley. It was to move peoples’ hearts and stain their minds and their memories with the incredible truth of just how much God loves us, to come amongst us as a helpless baby in a wooden crib, to fill us with his love and joy that can transform us as it transformed St Francis into the man his contemporaries called, ‘the Second Christ’. It is often forgotten that Christ was a man full of joy, and that is why he said to his disciples at the Last Supper that he wanted to share the joy that filled him, with them (John 15:11-12). While St Francis was preaching at

the first Crib, the little statue that he lifted out of the manger came alive and he came alive with an infectious joy that filled the whole congregation, sending them away in a state of ecstatic joy. If only everyday was Christmas day, it could do for us what it did for St Francis and his listeners on that holy night.

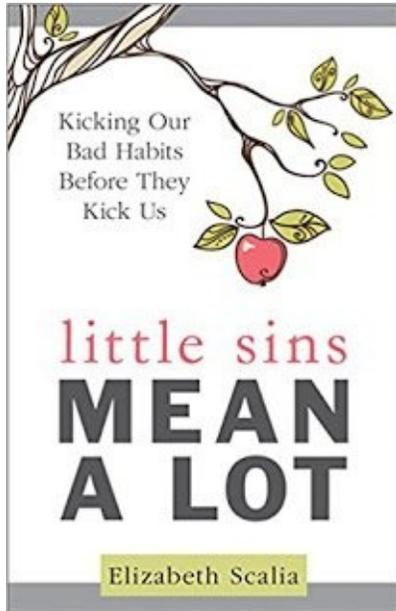
It was his inner joy that drew the first disciples to Jesus and then drew others to them as this infectious inner joy won the hearts and minds of a pagan world and turned it into a Christian world. The message of this Christmas and every Christmas, is that, given open and welcoming hearts, we too can all be filled with the joy that animated Jesus, his first disciples and Francis and his followers, to do what they all did in their day. What they did was to proclaim loud and clear, not so much by what they said, but by the joy that radiated out of them, that Christ is not dead, but alive and well in all who would receive him. Then, at last, Christ the King can begin again, through us, to transform our modern pagan world as he once transformed the ancient pagan world, into his Kingdom of love, of joy, and of justice and peace; to become a friary where we can be like, and act like, brothers and sisters to each other in the One who is the All in All, who first chose to become a helpless baby in a wooden crib, in the little town of Bethlehem, two thousand years ago.

David Torkington's book [\*Wisdom from Franciscan Italy\*](#) has never received less than five star reviews on Amazon. It can be recommended as a must read to see the central mysteries of our faith as never seen in quite the same way before. David Torkington's latest book, *Wisdom from the Christian Mystics* is now available to pre-order at [Amazon.co.uk](#) or [Amazon.com](#)

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This contribution is available at <http://www.davidtorkington.com/christmas-edition-2017/>  
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## Best Confession Ever!



Aren't they all? You might walk in with some trepidation\*, yet you walk out of the confessional light and carefree, pure and holy (if only for several moments), all fear and sorrow gone, with the resolve and the grace to amend your life knowing ALL your sins are forgiven.\*\* And here's what happens when you run into your friends in the confessional line. You make your penance--I still remember one time when we were newbie Catholics in WA, sharing our penances with each other and my husband and kids were told to pray 3 Hail Marys, and I received a decade of the rosary! "Whatever did you do?" they asked. "I'm not telling!" I said. "God has already forgotten :)" But I digress. After you make your penance, you stand outside because it's so lovely and everything is clean and bright like your soul and one by one, friends gather to catch up. You've not had a chance to do this for a while and it is getting a bit chilly (here in Charleston, anything below 70 is cold) so you decide to continue at the local pub over drinks. Best confession ever!!!



I'd had a migraine since Friday and meds weren't doing a whole lot and it didn't seem like a good idea to go to a noisy place but when I asked Michael (isn't he a good husband to drive me to confession because I was unable?) he was in. We already had dinner waiting for us at home and Dagny was taking a nap after work. We had such a good time and half-way through a mango-pina-colada I realized my head was doing much, much better. Wow! Maybe the confession has something to do with it. After all, it is a minor exorcism. I've not kept a record of confessions but maybe I'll add that to my calendar with a big C. I keep a Mass journal and boy is it ever helpful to remember how God has been speaking to me. But maybe it was the rum :) As much as confessing my sins is uncomfortable, it humbles me and prepares me to receive Holy Communion. There is nothing greater than this. It's Jesus Himself. No matter what happens, even if it's something terrible in the news about a pedophile or corrupt priest, I could never abandon this ship. To whom shall I go? I am so happy when I can go to Mass. It's the best 20 minutes of my day. I return home blessed with *Jesus, my Lord, my God, my all* upon my lips.

Jesus, my Lord, my God, my all!

How can I love Thee as I ought?

And how revere this wondrous gift,

So far surpassing hope or thought?

**Refrain:**

Sweet Sacrament, we Thee adore!

Oh, make us love Thee more and more.

Oh, make us love Thee more and more.

Had I but Mary's sinless heart

With which to love Thee, dearest King,

Oh, with what ever fervent praise,

Thy goodness, Jesus, would I sing!

***Refrain***

Thy Body, Soul and Godhead, all!

O mystery of love divine!

I cannot compass all I have,

For all Thou hast and art is mine!

***Refrain***

Sound, then, His praises higher still,

And come, ye angels, to our aid;

For this is God, the very God

Who hath both men and angels made!

***Refrain*** [Etymology here](#) and I am in awe of the people who've written poetry that is theologically sound! Wow!!! I can't wait until [St. Clare of Assisi](#) is finally built here on Daniel Island and we'll have a perpetual Adoration chapel. Scroll down the website for a proposed design--isn't it gorgeous?!!! \_\_\_\_\_

\*Kneel, cross yourself, and begin, "Bless me Father for I have sinned ..."  
[continue](#) for instructions if you've been away from this sacrament for a long time. As [Father Z](#) says "Go to Confession!" Amazing grace for sure. \*\*Words of Absolution (what the priest says to you): *God the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of your son, you have reconciled the world to yourself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins. Through the ministry of the church, may God grant you pardon and peace. And I absolve you*

*of your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.*



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| [Contents](#) |

## The Battle Belongs to the Lord! [at beautiful thorns]

Sometimes you go on retreats or to conferences and it is like a mountain top experience, then you enter back into the real world and nothing really changes. I do not feel that is the case with the Encounter conference I went to two weeks ago. I truly believe it was life-changing and the right timing for me. It has been two weeks so I've had some time to process and start applying what was imparted to me at the conference.



If you haven't yet watched the "

[Fearless" Documentary](#)

", I would seriously recommend it! The guys who started

[Encounter ministries](#)

and put on the Encounter conference, were on it. I cried the first time I saw it. I was so moved to see Catholics doing "Power Evangelism" (a term coined by the late John Wimber). Tom and I were big followers of John Wimber 20 year ago and part of the reason we left the Catholic Church was because we wanted to "do the stuff" like Wimber talked about. Twenty years ago, it didn't seem like the Catholic Church was open to that and it seemed like too big of a ship to turn around so we left and joined the Vineyard church. Wimber is the one that started the Association of Vineyard Churches. I applaud Fr. Mathias and Patrick, the founders of Encounter, that they remained Catholic even though they received an impartation through Randy Clark after reading his book,

[There is More](#)

. Randy Clark is a Protestant. He started the ministry

## *Global Awakening*

that crosses denominational lines. He even wrote a book recently with Dr. Mary Healy (a Catholic professor at Sacred Heart Major Seminary) called

### [Spiritual Gifts Handbook](#)

. Saying that I am excited about what I see happening right now in the Church is an understatement!

Anyway, I'm going to be real now, I was desperate by the time the conference came around. I have a heart for evangelization and a strong desire to reach the people around me but I also realized that things needed to change in my life and in my family first.

As many of you know, I have 6 kids. My oldest is 24 and my youngest is about to turn 5. Just because I've been open to life doesn't mean it has been easy! By the time number 6 came around, I was tired and didn't feel I had much more to give. Number 6 also happened to be our first boy. I feel he isn't just one boy, but ten boys rolled up in one!

Also, since we moved to Indiana, even though it has been a good thing for our family, it has not been without its share of stress. I think it has especially been hard on Isaac. That first year he would constantly say he missed Florida, he wanted to go back to his "red" house, he wanted to go to Disney World, etc. I think all the grief he was experiencing was also causing him to act out.

Anyway, in the last year or so, things have really spiraled out of control in our home. I don't know if it was the stress of moving here or we just needed a good house blessing (I've been told that a very violent family lived in our house before us) or both.

To give you an idea of what was going on, there was no peace in our home. My children were constantly fighting, bickering, complaining and being disrespectful. My youngest two were especially out of control. The defiance and disrespect was off the charts! I honestly did not look forward to waking up each morning knowing what I would probably be dealing with. I was at a loss as to what to do. Every evening we would try to pray together as a family but Isaac would never join us and it would usually end in children fighting. I was very discouraged to say the least!

At the conference, renewal in my family was one of the main things I was crying out to the Lord for. God answered my prayer and I returned home feeling empowered and reinvigorated to reclaim my family for the Lord.



The very night I got home, even though I was exhausted from lack of sleep, I sat my kids down. I explained to them about the fruits of the Holy Spirit. I also listed the opposite of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. I asked them what they were seeing in our home. They agreed, we were seeing a lack of the Holy Spirit in our home. They agreed that we needed more of the Holy Spirit. We then began to pray and cry out to God for more of the Holy Spirit in our home. My daughters all got into it and felt his presence. My son however, still would not pray with us and I kid you not, he even mocked us.

Okay, so we knew what we were dealing with and there may be a battle ahead. I clung to a scripture given to me at the conference however. It was **Exodus 14:14** - **The Lord will fight for you, you have only to be still!**



In the days following, every time Isaac would sit next to us or on our lap, Tom and I would silently pray over him in the Spirit. We also have been praying every night as a family for more of the Holy Spirit. Let me tell you, there has been a radical change in my kids and in our household! Isaac is even letting us pray over him now. I even asked him the other day, "Isaac, do you want more of Jesus in your heart?" He responded, "Probably, yes." I'll take that, so I prayed with him! His heart is softening! Pretty awesome!!!

There has still been a battle, but like that scripture, the Lord is fighting for us. One evening when we were praying, one of my daughters was throwing an all out temper tantrum over something trivial. She wouldn't stop. I calmly called her over to myself and began praying over her in the Spirit. Almost immediately, Peace came over her and she stopped crying. Every evening we have been praying fervently, the Holy Spirit has been showing up and his Peace has been descending on us! During the day, my kids have also been a lot more peaceful, pleasant and respectful. My nine year old is ready to tell all the neighbor kids about Jesus's love. I am beyond stoked!

If you are reading this now and thinking, "I desire and need more of the Holy Spirit in my life!" I pray for you now and impart to you more of the Holy Spirit and his abundant gifts in Jesus name! He desires to fill you up to over-flowing with his presence, his love, the fruits of the Spirit and his grace!

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This contribution is available at <http://www.beautifulthorns.com/2018/01/the-battle-belongs-to-lord.html>

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| [Contents](#) |

## Putting on Christ: What does this mean? [at A Moment From De Sales]

How often have we heard this expression: “*We have to put on Christ?*” As an average everyday Christian, did you ever wonder how we actually do this? After some thought, I offer the following as a possible way to accomplish this. We believe that Christ came to restore a sense of hope and to fill our days on this earth with joy. After all, Jesus Christ died and rose from death so that our ending here would be a happy one.

Remember, God the Father wanted all created beings to have a second chance. Jesus came to do just that. Now, thanks to Jesus, our ending is to be with His Father forever. This means we can live these in-between years with an attitude of joy and hope knowing the wonderful gift Jesus gave us.

When we *wear* this **Hope** and **Joy** in our daily lives we **put on Christ**. This cloak of hope and joy is ours no matter what each day brings. It’s our reminder that Jesus cares and continues to care. Putting on Christ every day is a garment that keeps us optimistic and confident no matter what we face on our path that day and every day thereafter.

In the Scriptures, we see many occasions where Jesus wants to make humans happy. Do you remember His miracle at the wedding of Cana? This miracle was not about healing lepers, casting out demons, or restoring life to a dead person. Rather, it was about saving a newly married couple from embarrassment. When the wine ran out at the reception, Jesus changed water into wine to bring back joy to the festivities. This is a perfect example of *putting on Christ*. When we can help another person receive joy and hope into their lives, we are putting on Christ.

When we help a neighbor find hope in a sad situation, we are putting on Christ. When we surprise a friend who just received bad news with an invitation to have lunch or bring light to a dark place in a friend’s life by listening when no one else is near, we are putting on Christ. In all of these small human acts we have put on Christ and Jesus lives through us.

To do this, we have to embrace Christ ourselves and breathe in His joy and spread His message of hope. For when we put on Christ in our difficult times, we can better help others do the same.

When it comes to putting on Christ, this *cloak* is a one size fits all. All that we have to do is simply find the trust and the courage to wear His message. When we do, Christ is delighted for He is seen walking on this earth through us.

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| [Contents](#) |

# Learning to Pray [at From the Pulpit of my Life]

My initial post of 2018 is about the very personal topic of prayer. It is personal because prayer of every kind is relational. Prayer is about one's relationship with the three Persons, our Trinitarian God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

My first memory of prayer occurred when I was a child in kindergarten at the local Public School. My teacher Miss Kershky asked the class, "Who knows a prayer?" I could not raise my hand because I wasn't sure I knew a prayer. This dilemma disturbed me quite a bit, because I liked being able to answer the teacher's questions. One boy, Billy, knew a prayer and Miss Kershky asked him to say the prayer aloud. It was the *Hail Mary*. I was impressed, as well as a tad envious.

Later that day when I returned home from school, I confronted my mother and dad and rather heatedly asked, "Why don't I know a prayer? Why didn't you teach me a prayer?" I have no recollection of their response, except I feel they were surprised.

In general, after that first encounter with my parents about prayer, my father took the time each evening between our bath time and bedtime to pray with us; that is, with my younger brother John and sister Joan, and me. One-by-one we gathered with Dad in the living room after Mother bathed and pajamaed us. There Dad read a chapter from a book like *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. Then followed a little song fest that included secular ditties and religious hymns. We then walked to our shared bedroom where Dad sat and talked with us about our day and led us in prayer. This was also a time to teach us new prayers, and for us to ask questions about God.

Besides vocal prayers, I absorbed at least the notion of silent or mental prayer by watching my dad praying the rosary. In the living room of our home, when he returned from work, he often lay on the maroon davenport as he silently prayed the rosary, his eyes closed. I sometimes sat on the floor and silently observed him move the rosary little black beads slowly through his fingers. Although I

knew he was somehow talking to God, I didn't understand how God could hear his prayer because there was no vocalizing and his lips didn't move. Even so, I sensed this was a special moment. Much later I learned that God knows everything, even our unspoken thoughts and desires.

I was about nine years of age, when I began to believe and understand that there is a kind of power connected with praying to God. By this time I had been catechized for a few years and was learning prayers more formally. We children were actually required to memorize the prayers in our catechism book, and my dad helped me with that.

I was ill, probably with the flu, and I could not keep food down. I felt terrible and wanted nothing more than to be well. I wondered if I said **all** the prayers in my catechism would God take away this sickness. So I grabbed the little book from its place atop my dresser and found the prayer section. It contained so many prayers! Determinedly I started praying them. Some I knew, but others were very challenging. I persevered, sounding out the hard words as best I could. Then, I waited. After I finished I didn't vomit anymore and I began to feel better and better. I was **sure** that God had heard my prayers and that **He** took away my sickness.

Since my childhood prayer has been integral in my life. I am a person who prays. I think the world needs people who pray and I am happy to be one of them.

Are you a person who prays? When did you first pray? Do you remember? How has your prayer life developed? If you like, share your experiences in the comment section. God bless you and have a blessed New Year!

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## **A Means to Listen [at The Frank Friar]**

### **Listening to a Whisper**

I do not know why it is always at times of trial that I am brought back to you my journal. You've been sitting on my shelf for over a year now. As always, the case, I am my own worst enemy. I get myself into situations of stress becoming lost in a multitude of possibilities and choices. The drive to keep moving, thinking, and avoiding has a noise all its own that is deafening. All of it just distractions impeding on the need to listen to a whispering desire, that rests within me. That noise is calling me away, but away from whom? Myself. Why? So, as not to hear Him. For it is in me that He has decided to rest His head. He, that whispering presence within my heart, which is his place of rest, is calling me from myself.

### **To Start?**

I yearn to listen to Him again, but my senses have grown tired. Now, here you rest again upon my lap, taken from your place of slumber. Are you going to be my path to Him? A means yet again to listen to his gentle voice. Your path entices me, but there is a fear I have within my mind. A fear for what waits along the sides of your path for me. I see in the distance along your path many thorns, pains in need of reconciling. Oh, how that word makes me chuckle at times. Why? Because reconciling is a word that always seems good when applied to others, but for myself, my mind is not yet sure about it.

### **His Invitation**

As I try to listen to His voice in my heart, your blank pages, a barren field, rests open before my eyes ready to receive my words as a seed. Seeds that I must drop upon you myself. Seeds that come out from a place in me I know not where. The hope for fruit ever nudging me along. Yet, that noise of dullness, feeding my desire not to feel, is present, and is ever shouting within me. Its balmy temptation is always for me to turn away from you. Still, He is whispering to me. In that whisper, my head turns to my heart and I feel that He is looking upon me, inviting me into a gaze. A gaze that can only be seen

through your blank pages. I sense, His gaze is not a summons, which is cold and demanding, but an invitation that remains. An invitation that is offered freely if I just choose to travel through the your pages.

*Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ~ Isaiah 55:1*

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| [Contents](#) |

## Epiphany: a deeper look [at Catholic Deacon]

Since I have already posted on the Lord's Epiphany, his revelation to the nations, I feel free to compose something free-form about the Gospel reading for today's solemnity. As I was preparing to proclaim and as I was proclaiming today's Gospel (

[Matt 2:1-12](#)

) in the Eucharistic liturgy, I was struck -

*lectio*

-style - by a phrase I had previously just read over without giving it much thought. The phrase occurs in the third verse of the second chapter of the Gospel According to St. Matthew. The immediate context is the

*magi*

telling King Herod learning that they were seeking "the newborn king of the Jews" (v. 2): "When King Herod heard this," the inspired author conveyed, "he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

The phrase that caught my attention this Epiphany, thus making it an epiphany for me, is the last phrase of verse 3:

*and all Jerusalem with him*

. Why would all of Jerusalem be troubled by the news that a king, perhaps the long-awaited Messiah, was born in Bethlehem of Judea as Isaiah foretold? One way to make sense of this is to think about how few Christians either think about and/or look forward to Christ's return in glory, however that might happen (i.e., cataclysm vs. continuity). This thought took me back to something I included in my homily for Midnight Mass: the Incarnation of the Son of God, the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity "is so earth-shattering that it enacts something akin to the psychoanalytic concept of trauma" on the world.

If his birth in the cave in Bethlehem had this effect, how much more "traumatic" will be his return "in glory," which will be his final and undeniable Epiphany? Try as we might, Christians can't escape eschatology nor should we want to. In other words, like "all Jerusalem" we, too, are often "greatly troubled" at the prospect of Christ' arrival.



Looking at this phrase more exegetically (if I may employ an awkward adverb), it is pretty certain that St. Matthew's Gospel was written in the midst of and for a Jewish Christian community (a Christian synagogue), albeit one that was beginning to receive more and more Gentiles. Receiving more Gentiles certainly makes the pericope that is our Gospel reading each year for Epiphany (i.e., Matt. 2:1-12) very important. It is important because it explains to the Jewish Christians of Matthew's communities how these Gentile converts fit into God's plan of salvation through Christ.

According to the Dominican New Testament scholar Benedict Viviano, the

*magi*

"were a caste of wise men, variously associated with interpretation of dreams, Zoroastrianism, astrology, and magic."

[2](#)

Later, the

*magi*

became kings and later still their number was fixed at 3, which is likely arrived by their three gifts. In the Western Church, Viviano noted, the three kings "were named: Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior, and Caspar became black."

named Caspar, Balthasar, and Melchior, and Caspar became black.

[3](#)

The three

*magi*

turned into "representatives of the Gentile world in all its racial diversity..."

[4](#)

It was Raymond Brown who noted that "all Jerusalem," along with Herod and including the scribes and the chief priests, being so troubled by the news of the birth of the "king of the Jews" that they sought to take Jesus's life are an anticipation of "Pilate, 'all the people,' the chief priests, and the elders of Matt's passion narrative."

[5](#)

Brown made the key point: "In both instances God frustrates the plans of these hostile adversaries (through Jesus' return Egypt, and through the resurrection)."

[6](#)

What's the point? I think it is something like being determined not be God's hostile adversary and to cooperate in ushering in God's reign. How do you cooperate with instead of oppose God? The answer to this is very clear in St. Matthew's Gospel: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.

[7](#)

Until his return, it is by loving our neighbor (our neighbor being anyone we encounter who needs our help) through selfless acts of service that we reveal Christ to the nations.

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1 Creston Davis, John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, *Paul's New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press), 7.↵

2 Benedict T. Viviano, O.P., "The Gospel According to Matthew," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall), 635.↵

3 Ibid.↵

4 Ibid.↵

5 Raymond E. Brown, O.P., *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday), 176.↵

6 Ibid.↵

7 Matthew 22:37-40.↵

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This contribution is available at <http://scottdodge.blogspot.com/2018/01/epiphany-deeper-look.html>  
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| [Contents](#) |

## **Mystical Body of Christ - Why Individuals Matter [at Quiet Consecration]**

The hallmark of American Society is the idea of personal freedom. Do anything that seems to infringe upon our right to determine what we will and will not do and a great cry will erupt. Our nation was founded upon the ideal of Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness being the right of all persons and that those rights were bestowed upon us by God.

When I was a child of grade school age we were taught the word 'rights' along with another important word - "responsibilities". The good Sisters at Christ the King emphasized to us that which each right came a corresponding responsibility - to be good citizens, to be respectful of legitimate authority, to protect the weak, to care for the poor and most importantly to honor God in all we do.

Somewhere along the way the relationship between 'right' and 'responsibility' has been lost. It is my assertion that it was lost for two reasons:

- authority overplayed its hand
- we have confused 'right' with 'because I want to'

All legitimate authority deserves to be honored, respected and obeyed. The problem has been that we often do not recognize legitimate authority. We have also had to confront the harm caused by men and women wearing the trappings associated with legitimate authority abusing the power granted them by the office or position they hold. It is difficult to respect a teacher who calls a child of color the 'n' word or solicits sexual relationships with children or demands obedience on a whim. It is impossible to love a priest, minister or rabbi who does not know their stuff, who abuses their own power and causes sexual, financial or other scandal. How can we trust a politician who lies to his wife or children to tell us the truth about anything? When a police officer rapes someone who has been arrested and is in their charge or shoots an innocent, unarmed man how do we trust the phrase "the police officer is our friend"?

Catholics believe that legitimate authority originates with God (CCC 1902). We

also believe that a person dedicated to serving God works hard to ensure that people they are leading are treated with respect, mercy and justice because that is what God asks of them. The leader is trying to be LIKE CHRIST and so their management style, their means of communication, the very laws they will propose for the community are going to reflect that effort. We do not expect our leaders to be perfect; rather, we expect them to TRY to be perfect knowing all the while that they will fail. This, we believe, is the very acme of humility - trying our best to be perfect while knowing there will be no way on God's green earth we will achieve that goal.

In my opinion, because power was abused and/or neglected, we as a people have lost confidence in the institutions we once looked to for guidance. We are wary of The Church because of the Priest Sexual Abuse Scandal. We do not trust politicians because of "Pick A Scandal". We do not like police because of brutality and/or unanswered questions. 'Authority' overplayed its hand and today we are less likely to accept anything on its face value.

We have also confused our 'rights' with 'because I want to' and that has led to a mishmash of ideas of what we, as humans in American Society, have a right to do. No matter what anyone says, no matter how you want to paint it or color outside the lines, no one has the RIGHT to do something that is evil. It may be my body, my house, my life but I do NOT have the right to use it in such a way as to harm another person.

This is nothing new. We have built society on this foundation - what is the common good (CCC 1905)? It is the common good to not allow people to walk up to random neighbors, knock them down and take their stuff. It is not conducive to the common good to ignore the red light at the intersection. It supports the common good to protect the most vulnerable members of our society so that we are not stepping over dead bodies in the street.

For Catholics, this means recognizing our importance to each other. We are all members of the Mystical Body of Christ. My attendance at Sunday Mass is not just a fulfillment of a personal obligation to Jesus Christ; rather, it also bolsters the strength and harmony of all Baptized Catholics throughout the world. When I obey and accept the authority of Holy Mother Church in ALL things, I am helping those members who are dying in areas where to do just that can mean martyrdom. When I sin, I hurt my brother and sister in New York, Australia, Israel, Nigeria - in other words, what I do matters in the grand scheme of things.

Years ago I saw this as a horrible idea - I am NOT responsible for YOU - while today, as I mature in my love for Jesus and His Church I see it as this marvelous thing. I am a marble in a beautiful mosaic of life here on earth. My actions, my words, my behavior matters in ways I never thought possible - I am a ripple on water, a soft breeze or a raging windstorm...I am a member of something much greater than just me, just Leslie.

If I chose each day to keep my eyes on the prize of heaven, then I can contribute to your happiness. If I remember that my sins affect you, then I can care for you in a way that far exceeds my expectations. If I keep in mind that being a woman of grace and dignity is important for all people and not just me then I will have a greater reason than my own personal comfort to continue to try to be Like Christ every day.

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This contribution is available at <http://quietconsecration.blogspot.com/2018/01/mystical-body-of-christ-why-individuals.html>

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| [Contents](#) |

## Who Is Your Family? [at A Spiritual Journey]

At morning Mass today, I knew that my "true" family are God and all his saints and angels in heaven. My family on earth is merely a temporary one I need for my existence on earth and to which I would belong only briefly. If you don't believe in God, you'll be absolutely left alone after you die. Think about it.

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## Sacred Art is flourishing and inspiring now in the city of Phoenix

On July 1, 2017, I wrote an article about sacred art on display in an Arizona Sonoran Desert city, titled, [Sacred Art is inspiring and flourishing...in Scottsdale, Arizona](#). You will be happy to know that [The Sacred Art Gallery](#) continues to grow and attract more artists and visitors all the time. One of the gallery consultants, Grace Rivera, even shared with me two nights ago that my article on the gallery gave them a bump from views on their website to individuals walking in their front door.

On Wednesday night (same night we saw Grace), my fiancée and I were invited to an open house at the [New Jerusalem Studios](#). We were excited to attend, most especially me, because I first remember when Ruth and Geoff Stricklin were searching for space where Ruth could create her own sacred art. Although I have seen her work at the All Saints Catholic Newman Center located on the campus of Arizona State University and at St. Mary's Catholic High School in Phoenix, I was excited, as was my fiancée, to see where such beautiful art begins to take shape.

As you will see from the pictures that are interspersed through this post, the sacred art is large, meant to cover walls and ceilings – and is absolutely stunning! Like [sacred music](#), sacred art has the tendency to raise our eyes, mind, and soul towards Heaven itself. These images that Ruth has created does that for me and I imagine anyone that comes into contact with them.



New Jerusalem Studios focuses on large liturgical art which is theological in nature. The studio not only can create the image itself, but has the knowledge and capability of designing the image before it is produced on the canvas. Along with the sacred art images, New Jerusalem can assist you in the creation of beautiful sacramental art, such as pews, flooring, sanctuary furniture, architectural pieces, and even lighting. A reasonable restoration can be created at an affordable cost.

Liturgical art created correctly, that is produced within the mind and heart of the Church, can change one's life instantaneously. I remember walking through the Vatican Museum in 2000 – at times I couldn't speak because of the sheer beauty that was before my young eyes. Even today as I write this post, it's difficult to express on "paper" what I witnessed those many years ago in Rome.

The reason I bring this up is because for so long we have been held captive by modern art (as well as modern music) which lacks a true sense of beauty. In my opinion, modern art has no real form to it, it lacks distinctiveness and any real aesthetic appeal, and for the last 50 years or so, that's how Catholic structures have been designed and built.



The good news is that a lot of this modern art is starting to cease within the Catholic Church. [Churches are either being built](#) or being redesigned again with a theological sense. I can't tell you how many parishes that I have read about in recent years who are transforming their [modern Catholic churches into works of beauty](#), and at the heart of these renovations is the sacred art that New Jerusalem Studios can design and produce.

I would encourage you to check out their website, browse around a bit, especially look at the [projects page](#) – you will be blown away to see what Ruth is creating in this quaint studio in Phoenix, Arizona.

To conclude, I leave you with the words of Pope St. John Paul. In his [Letter to Artists](#), he quotes Fyodor Dostoevsky's, *The Idiot*. Under the title heading, "The Saving Power of Beauty", the Polish Pope says,

People of today and tomorrow need this enthusiasm [of wonder] if they are to meet and master the crucial challenges which stand before us. Thanks to this enthusiasm, humanity, every time it loses its way, will be able to lift itself up and set out again on the right path. In this sense it has been said with profound insight that "beauty will save the world."



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This contribution is available at <http://tomperna.org/2018/01/26/sacred-art-is-flourishing-and-inspiringnow-in-the-city-of-phoenix-arizona/>  
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| [Contents](#) |

## **Disobedience: Why We Can't Have Nice Things [at Carolyn Astfalk, Author]**

As a parent, I most often hear myself repeating the same instructions, “Hurry up,” “Leave your brother/sister alone,” or the ever-favorite, “Get off of the bed while I’m making it.” Other times, I’m saying bizarre things I never thought I’d hear myself say, such as, “Get that Spider-Man out of the freezer,” “No, you can’t bring that rifle to church,” or “Get your face out of your brother’s butt.”

But every once in a while, I say something that resonates with me. A few words that make me stop and re-examine them as you would a diamond in the sunlight, twisting it this way and that, examining it from all sides.

A couple of years ago, I escorted my teary, unhappy preschooler away from a store saying, “I can’t give you good surprises if you don’t obey.”

My little girl had been lollygagging again, trailing off behind me and not coming when called. I can’t remember what surprise I had in mind for her, but whatever it was, she’d lost it before it’d ever been offered.

How often have I been denied God’s “good surprises” because I did not obey? How can I receive His gifts if I do not cooperate with His plan?

Like my daughter’s, my disobedience isn’t outright. Rarely do I refuse to comply. Instead, I lollygag. I let His words roll off my back while I fritter away time and opportunity and generally drift off, complacent in the hope that I won’t be left behind. There’s time yet to catch up.

It’s easy to dismiss my disobedience as procrastination. Maybe a little laziness. But, in truth, I’ve failed to obey.

Just as I saw clearly the natural consequences of my daughter’s disobedience, I see the natural consequences of a disobedient culture, one that has relegated God and His commandments to the sidelines. It’s easy to see how our collective rejection of God’s plan for sexuality has resulted in the rotted harvest we now reap in pervasive misogyny, rape, divorce, abortion, and so much more. ([See](#)

[\*Humana Vitae at 50.\*](#))

It's more difficult – or maybe more uncomfortable – to examine my personal sins, connecting my disobedience to the rotted fruits in my life. The absence of those “good surprises.”

I don't have a quick fix, although I think outright refusal to obey seems an easier problem to solve than the lukewarmness we know is repugnant to God. (Rev 3:15-16)

I think the fix is a long, slow one with plenty of backsliding and beginning again and again and again. One that involves prayer and fasting and a good, swift kick in the rear. And a reminder of this verse:

**“Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’  
Anything more is from the evil one.**

**– Matthew 5:37**

- **Which do you struggle with: outright disobedience or disobedience by apathy or sloth?**
- **What have you said to children that you imagine God saying to you?**

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This contribution is available at <http://www.carolynastfalk.com/2018/01/25/disobedience-cant-nice-things/>

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## Cleansing Our Temple [at Bartimaeus' Quiet Place]



Cleansing Our Temple

*The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” (John 2:13-22)*

Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus,

The scripture cited above brings up a question that we must all, at sometime or other, ask ourselves, and that is, are we aware that the cleansing of our spiritual temple is also required. It is our problem of lack of spiritual awareness that I wish to address in this post.

The Apostle Paul sometimes used very pointed questions to critique his evangelized communities' lack of awareness or spiritual sensitivity. For instance, he asked the Corinthian believers several questions, beginning with, **“do you not know...?”**,

When he used such question indicated that he was trying to exhort them regarding their lack of awareness to certain particular spiritual articles of faith that were affecting their ability to truly live a totally pure and obedient life

and were trusting their ability to truly live a totally pure and obedient life committed to our God and Savior, Jesus our Lord!

The primary question was ... ***“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.*** (1 Cor. 6 :18-20)

This question is also relevant for us today, in that many of us Christians do not appear to really have a truly spiritual awareness (knowledge) of the presence of “Christ in us, the Hope of Glory”(Col. 1:27). For those of us who are mainly “cultural” Christians, we treat the concept of the persons of the Trinity as a theological term beyond our realm of experience. You can understand then, why we have so much trouble in understanding how we can be aware of the Spirit of God in us.

Theologically speaking we acknowledge a God and Creator who loves us but whom we cannot approach because of our sinful nature. It is hard for us to realize that ***“in Christ”***, the Spirit of God truly indwells in us through faith, and that, because of this, we have a responsibility as His stewards to maintain the Holiness of the Temple Of God in us!

Now, Paul in attempting to bring the Corinthians to acknowledge their lack of the true spiritual awareness needed to be a participant in God’s Heavenly Kingdom, further rebuked them by continuing with another of this soul-searching questions, namely ...

***“... do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*** (1 Cor. 6:9-11)

The reason I bring this up for us today is not to condemn anyone of being anything like these Corinthians who Paul was trying to reach, but to make us aware that as temples of the Spirit of God in us, we also have to be aware that, like the Jews in Jesus’ time, the bringing the ways of the world to the entrance of the temple of the Spirit of God, that is in us, we also compromise the Holiness needed to place God at the forefront of our spiritual lives

needed to place God at the forefront of our spiritual lives.

By the ways of that world, I mean our business and secular affairs, our personal ambitions, our troubled family relationships, our fears, jealousy, and envy (and so on). These may not be sins to the level of the Corinthians but unless they are also attended to they block our entrance to communion with the Spirit of God that dwells in us – a communion that is essential to maintaining our intimate relationship to the Father, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

That is why we must be as scrupulous as Jesus in cleansing our inner man from the entrance to our spiritual temple. I use the metaphor of Jesus cleansing the temple as the opening scripture to emphasize our need to regularly perform a cleansing of our inner temple, especially in examining ourselves prior to worship and communion.

As we approach the lenten season this is the approach we need to take in preparing our hearts for Jesus to enter in. Of course, confessing and repenting our sins in confession takes precedence in our cleansing, but sometimes we forget to cleanse our consciences from the inroads the world and its minions have made into our minds and hearts – the entrance to our temple.

It is not difficult enter into the awareness of His spiritual Kingdom and unite ourselves with His Holiness. Jesus himself tells us...

***“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!”*** (Matt 7:7-11)

***“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*** (Matt, 7:13-14)

In strengthening our faith for our inner cleansing remember St.Paul’s Prayer for the Ephesians and know that it also applies to us as we walk the narrow way towards union with Jesus in faith ...

***“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.***

***“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen***

**“ (Ephesians 3: 14-21)**

Your Brother In Christ Jesus ... Bartimaeus

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### ***Recommended Links***

[Sweet Yoke of Love](#)

[Responding to the Spirit’s Call](#)

[The Kingdom of God: Our Spiritual Inheritance](#)

[Reclaiming Our Legacy In Christ](#)

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

[Pentecost and the Promise of the Father](#)

[The Empowerment Gifts \(Part 1\)](#)

[The Empowerment Gifts \(Part 2\)](#)

[Building our Spiritual Life on the Rock](#)

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This contribution is available at [http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2018/01/16/\\$-cleansing-our-temple/](http://quietplace4prayer.wordpress.com/2018/01/16/$-cleansing-our-temple/)

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## **No One Speaks About the Unspeakable Injustice that One Word, “Choice,” Inflicts on the “Choiceless” — the Fathers of Children Killed in Abortion**

*“The baby does not know it is trapped in a life and death struggle of motherhood and waiting on Jonah, who is busy running away from fatherhood and now, finding himself trapped in the belly of a Whale, is praying for a second chance that might not come again. We ask ourselves, ‘will the baby push out naturally and so be allowed to live through a mother’s grace to enjoy a proper birthday?’ Or will it be abandoned by its parents to die and be surgically removed from its mother by strangers with forceps; given its own death-day written up as a statistic without a name only to be remembered each year by two forlorn and guilty parents?”* (Father X in **Troubadours Sailing Hibiscus Seas: Meditations on Post Abortion Trauma**)

**by Susan Fox**



Two forlorn and guilty parents?

I thought abortion was about a woman's choice. It has nothing to do with men, does it?

Father X, a British father of an aborted baby, and Judith Gait, an American pro-life artist living in England, rip that idea to shreds in **Troubadours Sailing Hibiscus Seas: Meditations on Post Abortion Trauma**. It is a literary, artistic work charting the emotional journey of a father, whose girlfriend decided to have an abortion even though he pleaded for the child's life. Hibiscus flower tea is an abortifacient, but the father in this scenario is writing a love song to his dead child. He is the troubadour.

The troubadour's anguish and regret bleeds through the pages, demonstrating that our society has plunged into the utter depths of barbarism, especially in our attitude to human fathers. Most cave men — faithful to their wives — enjoyed raising their own children.

Their angst is based on reality. In the United States, the husband has no legal right to be notified — let alone stop — his wife from obtaining an abortion. Our so-called “Supreme” Court decided that.

Being men, they may not talk about it. But Dr. Coyle and other researchers find they are just as likely as women to suffer post-traumatic stress syndrome — with symptoms that may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event.

Males may be at greater risk for depression than females post

abortion. Researcher Brenda Majors and colleagues at State University of New York at Buffalo, studying couples prior to an abortion, found males were more likely than females to blame the pregnancy on their own character. Self-character blame has been associated with increased risk for depression.

Some attempt to abort their own lives, committing suicide and some suffer impotence post-abortion. Even if they want the abortion, their child's sudden death can haunt them their entire lives, wrecking future relationships and marriages. Father X remains an older bachelor caring for his mother. For him, his dream of having a family died with his child. The vast majority of men in these studies say they have been left with lingering and disturbing thoughts. In one study reported by Dr. Coyle, 82 percent of men said they suffered from depression afterwards.

The studies on men are not nearly as systematic or thorough as the ones on women post abortion, but the results are almost identical. **Abortion and Women's Health** — conducted by medical researcher Dr. Gregory Pike — is an evidence based review of the impact of abortion on women released in 2017.

It found that after an abortion

1. Women suffer a 30 percent increased risk of depression.
2. They are more likely to die from any cause vs. childbirth.
3. Abortion is associated with higher death rates for women up to 10 years after.
4. Women experienced mental health disorders 30 percent more often than women who did not have an abortion,
5. In subsequent pregnancies, women are likely to suffer depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.
6. Women have a higher risk of psychiatric admission compared to women who keep their babies,
7. Women are at risk of hospital admission, blood transfusion, emergency room treatment, administration of IV antibiotics and infection.

With women facing all that in an abortion, who can question that the men quietly sitting in the waiting room are suffering as well?

“Meanwhile in a parent’s mind certain things can trigger the phenomenon of what is known as abortion aftershock,” Father X said, “setting off alarm bells in the heart, much like cue cravings do for an addict. The sight of a family out for a stroll, pushing a pram on a sunny afternoon can do it, so can seeing a pregnant woman in full bloom or a look of joy on a child’s face. Any one of a hundred other common sights can set off the Abortion Remorse Orchestra going off in the heart. The musicians always play the same tune, the death knell...”

Judith’s artwork, which relies on ordinary household items to portray an uneasy reality, accompanies Father X in his memories of the event, which occurred on Nov 8, 2011.



One of my favourite pictures is the Anniversary Bouquet, showing the anniversary of the death of Father X’s child. A child’s pyjamas are pinned to a wall while the dark shadow of a flower covers it. The picture distressingly expresses the feeling that something is starkly missing. Someone is not there

who should be on the anniversary celebrated in his or her honour.

“St Augustine tells us that prayer is like silent shouting,” Gait said. “Sometimes the same could be said about drawing. If it is to be any use, it needs to be as intense as the shout which has its origin deep within our soul.” Her paintings silently shout about the emptiness men and women feel after an abortion.

The love affair had hardly begun when the baby was conceived on a weekend getaway in the English Lake District. Father X called it a “area of outstanding natural beauty and one of the most picturesque areas in England.” It wasn’t planned. His girlfriend used birth control. Ironically, they visited the home of the famed children’s author, Beatrix Potter. “Once upon a time there were four little Rabbits, and

their names were – Flopsy, Mopsy, Cotton-tail, and Peter,”

begins the British tale of a disobedient little rabbit, who



sneaks into Mr McGregor’s garden. This is a place — his widowed mother warns — where Peter’s father had a distressing accident. Perhaps the shadow of that event followed Father X out of the Lake District. But his “future bride” failed to heed the message.

Four weeks later, the lady he loved was pregnant. At first she was delighted and willing to let nature take its course. Father X, who had been thinking of marriage, promised to support her and the child, but because of “fear and insecurity on her part, the expected congratulations .. suddenly turned into commiserations of sadness and mistaken folly,” he wrote.

“It was her wedding white dress, my sea green empress, this blue lagoon princess, she slipped into her own heart of darkness on that day she decided to abort,” Fr. X said. Judith shows these emotions with an image of a dark blue vase containing an upside down flower. It is the only flower in focus and in its natural colour. Everything else is black. “It represents the child who is already in the birth position, head down and waiting to be born,” Father X wrote.

Speaking to future parents, Father X writes, “So long as you



waver like Jonah in the face of responsibility and lack both the fortitude and faith of a mother and father to do what is right for their child, you will be offered an abortion by a well meaning doctor from the NHS (British Health Service) He referred to the fact that the Prophet Jonah initially refused God’s call to preach to the Ninevites. He was swallowed by a whale, and then spit out on the shore near Nineveh after three day’s, now ready to complete his mission.

Just days before the abortion, she came to stay with Father X. “She was scared and was in that twilight world of wavering and indecision. She admitted she felt growing warmth towards the baby. I also felt paternal instinct in me for the first time in my life: it felt very different from anything else I had felt. I put my hand on her tummy and we both felt very close for a moment...I might add she also looked very beautiful and radiant...motherhood suited her. But the devil had gotten into her with fear of financial insecurity and just plain self will.”

“I spoke to her on the morning of the abortion,” Father X continues his family’s story, “and found myself pleading for the baby’s life. All gone now was the political correctness of it being her choice, her body, her life, it was all raw emotion and a father’s natural instinct of wanting to protect his child.”

But she had grabbed Thor’s hammer. In Judith’s paintings the hammer is the image for the abortion decision. It is Thor’s hammer in a death grip and the hammer of St. Joseph when one rejects the abortion, and builds a life for one’s family. On the way into the abortion clinic she was distressed to meet



pro-life demonstrators. Then she was left alone in the abortion clinic for one hour before the procedure, and she began to panic and called Father X. “I told her to get up and leave.” But she did not.

“What will the condemned baby experience before the hammer blow of abortion happens?” Father X asks. “It will witness an unknown foe dressed in a doctor’s smock and a surgical mask. The child will only feel that last stab of pain...It is done, the boulder of innocence has been scraped. The empty womb. The bird has flown. Lark ascending.”

Three lives ruined. Both parents were in their 40s.



“For the next several months that we stayed together it wasn’t mentioned, not by me and not by her. Nevertheless it was like an elephant in the sitting room the whole time,” Father X said.

Judith’s Painting, “Breakfast for One,” reflects the life of Father X now. “I sit alone each morning at breakfast and bury my loneliness in the morning ritual of coffee, cereal, tea and toast. Now when we occasionally do meet, we pass each other in the street like strangers with barely an uncomfortable second glance. Both of us hurrying by and trying to get away from the guilty secret we now hold together.”

Sociologist Arthur Shostak ([Abortion & Men: Lessons, Losses & Love](#)) describes male abortion pain as the loss of fatherhood and a “wound you cannot see or feel, but it exists.” The man gets an incredible message. There is real evidence of his virility. His partner is pregnant and he is going to be a father! But then he is told the termination will cost \$560.

Shostak interviewed 1000 men and found that

1. Abortion is a “death experience.”
2. Their most common post-abortion reaction was helplessness.
3. Men, who are unable to mourn the abortion, learn how to be less nurturing parents in the future.
4. The majority of relationships failed post-abortion.

So what is killed is not just a child, but a family.

“Unfortunately, it is a fact that, especially in the West, the family is considered an obsolete institution,” Pope Francis told members of the diplomatic corps of the Holy See on Jan 8. “Today fleeting relationships are preferred to the stability of

a definitive life project. But a house built on the sand of frail



and fickle relationships cannot stand,” he added, describing marriage as the rock: “that faithful and indissoluble communion of love that joins man and woman, a communion that has an austere and simple beauty, a sacred and inviolable character and a natural role in the social order.”

In an abortion, sensitive men who try and show support by accepting the woman's decision are often rejected later for not standing up for their child. "How could you say nothing during this crisis and let me just go out and kill our child?" These forgotten fathers have to deal with double grief — the loss of their child and the loss of their relationship with their children's mothers, according to "[The Effects of Abortion on Men: its Emotional, Psychological and Relational Impact](#)" on [CatholicCulture.org](#) by Vincent Rue and Cynthia Tellefsen.

Men who positively pressure women into having an abortion will face a great emotional price when the reality of the abortion sinks in. Pope Saint John Paul II said, "by leaving her alone to face the problems of pregnancy, he indirectly encourages such a decision on her part (to abort)." (**Mulieris Dignitatem**) He adds, "In this way the family is thus mortally wounded and profaned in its nature as a community of love and in its vocation to be the sanctuary of life." (**The Gospel of Life**)

"Abortion rewrites the rules of masculinity," authors Rue and Tellefsen said. "While a male is expected to be strong, abortion makes him feel weak. A male is expected to be responsible, yet abortion encourages him to act without concern for the innocent. A male is expected to protect, but by law he is encouraged to do otherwise."

"It is clear that in addition to the other victims of abortion, men too suffer. They too pay a high price for reproductive 'freedom.' They too lose in the high stakes world of reproductive 'choice' guided only by the self and expediency. Killing hurts the living too. It knows no gender bias," Rue and Tellefsen concluded.

I highly recommend **Troubadours Sailing Hibiscus Seas**. Author Father X obviously comes from a Catholic background, but the book is full of unorthodox Catholic



positions as he grabs for images from Hinduism, Platonism, and pantheism to explain his feelings. Judith Gait is Catholic, the mother of five children, but she also uses unorthodox

images. The work, however, is catholic in the sense that it is human and universal. It is an act of reparation. Many will decide not to have an abortion after reading it.

“The Valkyries (choosers of the slain) hold the key to the future. The embryo is alive from the moment of Conception. It is an Olympian role model and has exceptional durability. In the world of competitive sport, sperm racing comes out in a league of its own, with over 270 million contestants present at each jet race of love. But only one tad of sperm can be the winner and fertilise the Egg of Life. The Valkyries of Thor, who finally decide to abort, will take away a little life and spoil the mating game in one bold toilet flush.”

Yes, Father X, that is the reality of human life.

Because of the so-called illusory freedom of female “choice,” in the West, our civilisations faces a demographic winter in which our populations will not replenish themselves. How ironic, Hawaii had a false nuclear alert on Jan. 13 that made



everyone fear their life was over. Parents sent their children into drain pipes. That wasn't a pleasant experience. And Hawaii has my deepest sympathy. But drip drop. The real holocaust is silent and slow, and we are causing it ourselves. We are destroying our civilisation slowly one child at a time.

Pope Francis nailed it on Jan. 8: "Disregard for families has another dramatic effect – namely, a decline in the birth rate. We are experiencing a **true demographic winter!** This is a sign of societies that struggle to face the challenges of the present, and thus become ever more fearful of the future, with the result that they close in on themselves."

"Whether to terminate a child or not: decisions which are often made in fear and confusion and yet usually are paid for in a lifetime of regret." (Father X)



**Career or children? by Judith Gait**

"With my partner there was lots of excuses but no compelling reason to have an abortion." (Father X)

*This poem was written by a young single man whose girlfriend decided to have an abortion without consulting him.*

Please tell me about our child.

Don't tell me you haven't thought about it.

I know it's been on your mind a lot.

So tell me.

Please.

I need to know.

Was our baby a little boy or a little girl?

What would he have looked like?

Would she have smiled when you held her to your breast?

Would she have reached out with tiny hands with that warmth in her eyes,  
that comes from knowing that she was safe and loved?

How much did she weigh?

Was carrying her all that hard as you both grew larger and larger?

Did you feel full again and alive, like a woman?

What color was her hair, her eyes?

Did she kick inside you?

Don't tell me you haven't thought about it.

I know you have.

I know it's probably been on your mind a lot since then.

So please tell me.

I need to know.

I need to know because I am a man and I have thought about it a lot.

Every day.

Since before you left me.

And I know that if our baby's going away has torn out of me as much as it has,  
it tore out of you, too, only more.

She was inside of you.

And she was torn out.

I know that what I say is true.

So please don't deny that.

I need to know.

And so do you.

**To order Troubadours Sailing Hibiscus Seas:**

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This contribution is available at [http://christsfaithfulwitness.blogspot.co.at/2018/01/forgotten-fathers-waiting-room-men-in\\_16.html](http://christsfaithfulwitness.blogspot.co.at/2018/01/forgotten-fathers-waiting-room-men-in_16.html)  
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| [Contents](#) |

## My Child Is Good [at The Running Hail Mary]

I am not a wise person, nor particularly bright, but there are a few things I've picked up along the way (this is not the inclusive list).



One of the first things you will often hear new parents say is, "It's not about me anymore." God's Design and Infinite Wisdom is so evident. Just as Our Lady's motherhood helps us to fall in love with her Son in the Infant, our babies awaken in us a love that indelibly imprints on our hearts, and everything we do is for this child. These children. We love them first, the most, more than our own lives. They are our favorite people. We like them.



This is good. This is very very good. Because those bundles of innocence one day turn into three-yr-olds. They made us love them (thank you, Lord, for the Design), therefore we are able to deal with "three". Then seven. Then eleven. And we are able to keep our thumbs on them, their worlds revolve around us, and we kind of like it that way, I think. We say something - It shall be. We're in charge. This, of course, is part of the purpose of childhood - they learn the rules, they learn what's expected of them, they learn how to do things, and we give them a foothold on autonomy. You know, so they can be good adults, go into the world, be capable, and lead responsible lives.

Then, well...then come the NEXT years. You know, where they have to put their autonomy into action. Where they need to make their own decisions. And we have to LET them.



I want to say a few things. They are not universal. They are not aimed at extreme cases. I am still learning. I am not done rearing my children and I have no idea what's in store for all of them, or for me, in the years to come. However, some of my big kids are adults now. It wasn't always easy, and still isn't, and some lessons were a long time coming, and some were VERY VERY HARD! But I know some stuff now, especially regarding our older children - our teenagers:

- Your child will do bad things.
- Your child will be belligerent.
- Your child will embarrass you.
- Your child will get carried away and exhibit poor judgement.

- Your child will disappoint you.
- Your child will break expensive things.
- Your child will enrage you.
- Your child will make you feel betrayed by them.

Nota Bene: your child is NORMAL! They're stupid...and normal. (sometimes it's a humbling thing, isn't it, when we thought ours were better than the other ones).

I've been blindsided. I've been enraged. I've been shocked. I've felt betrayed. I remembered something, though. I remembered that it's not about me. I also remembered that my child is not his actions. My child is not defined by what she does wrong:

- My child is good.
- My children are the same people who stole my heart before they were born.
- My child does more good than wrong.

- My child is good.

- My children, despite their failures, need to know they are loved.

- They need to know, despite their failures, that they have security.

- My child is good.

- A car can be repaired easier than a broken heart or spirit.

- My child needs guidance, not rejection.

- My child is good

- My child may need punishment, but I need to have perspective about the severity of the infraction.

- My child, guaranteed, was not thinking about betraying/hurting/embarrassing ME when they did whatever.

- My child is good.

- No institution, school, group, or team deserves my loyalty over my child.

- My child feels worse about what happened than I do, because she lacks the perspective of a more experienced world-view.

- My child is good.

So, sadly, there's no handbook. I messed SO much up. I'm going to again. Now, though, I have a child who's learning to be an adult, and even though we don't have the same control over them as when they were small (nor should we), we are still so paramount and central to their world. This may be more crucial now than when they were babies. My most fervent prayers are for my children. I pray that I don't overreact when they do wrong. I pray that I remember to not be heavy handed; that when I'm hysterical about something that's "not so bad", what's left?



I see a lot of similarities in what they need as in what I need. I need, and ask

daily, for forgiveness. You know how pitifully we ask Our Lord to show us mercy, even underserved? We have to give that same, loving, parental forgiveness. I need, know, and see daily, the assurance that I am loved, I am remarkable, I am worthy, I am wonderfully and fearfully made. I MUST mete that same security to the child who relies on me to instill it, as a microcosm for Our Father's love. I make mistakes; I sin and I sin big; and then I pray that, in my sorrow, God can't see my transgression anymore. My child needs me to recognize the other parts of his life that he's experiencing, not just what he recently did. There is more to me than the harm I commit. My child is more valuable to me than anything, despite their mistakes.

It's not about me. Perspective is everything.

These children. We love them first, the most, more than our own lives. They are our favorite people. We like them.

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| [Contents](#) |

## Never Harsh, Always Loving and Caring [at bukas palad]



Year B / Ordinary Time / Week 3 / Sunday

Readings: Jonah 3.1-5, 10 / Responsorial Psalm 25.4-5, 6-7, 8-9 (R/v 4a) / I Corinthians 7.29-31 / Mark 1.14-20

Sisters and brothers, do you remember these words being said to you: “Come here right now!” or “When are you ever going to grow up?” Didn’t we hear them often when we young and naughty and growing up — at home, by our parents or in class, by our teachers?

I used to think these were harsh words. But as I grew up, I came to realise that they came out of hearts that cared me, and for all who heard similar words. In fact, they are heartfelt, concerned, even urgent, desires for someone to become better. Often, they are addressed to those we love or care for.

Like a parent or teacher, our Church cares that we grow up well and healthy as Christians. We hear this call through the Church's teachings and Mass readings and through the examples of saints. The Church always invites us to grow up to become better Christians.

Today's readings invite us to **“grow up” to better relate to God so that we can “get on with God's program” for our lives.**

The Old Testament prophets reminded and challenged Israel to grow in God's ways. This is what Jonah did in our first reading: he went through Nineveh calling everyone, from the king to the servant, to repentance and conversion because God wanted to punish them for their ungodly ways. He called them to make a radical change in their manner of living. The Ninevites heard and repented. They conformed their lives to God's ways. And God's heart softened: instead of punishing them, God mercifully embraced them in love again.

I wonder if we recognise that Jonah's call is also meant for us: do you and I have to make a radical change in how we live with God? Could God be demanding that we repent and convert, like the Ninevites, so that we can better experience God's mercy in forgiveness and God's love in reconciliation?

There is an urgency in God's call that we repent and change our ways. We hear this in our second reading when Paul says, “I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out.” Paul challenges us **to respond quickly to Jesus' call, not just to hear them, because God has come into our midst in Jesus to save us.**

**But God needs us our permission to save us.** God needs us to say, “yes, Lord.” Are you and I saying “yes” to God enough times and in the many situations of temptations? Do we let the grace of urgency shape our response to God daily?

Whether we respond immediately to God or we take our time to do this, or even if we ignore God's call to repent, the surprising truth Jesus proclaimed is that God will always come to us first—and always, even before we reach out to God. Isn't this true of how God keeps drawing us to the Sacrament of Reconciliation to forgive us, and of how God expresses love for us through the forgiveness of those we have hurt?

**In everything Jesus said and did on earth he revealed how true and alive God's mercy and love are in human life.** He proclaimed this good news at the very beginning of his public ministry that is our gospel reading today. He revealed this by calling all to repent and believe in the Good News because “the time of fulfilment is at hand” — at hand for he is God's saviour come for us all.

At the same time that Jesus did this, he called Simon, Andrew, James and John, and many more after them, to collaborate with him in his mission. “Be fishers of men”, he told them; “be my disciples”.

Today, we are reminded that Jesus' call to repent and be saved and his call to be his disciples to save all are meant for us too. For today is indeed the time of fulfilment and we are being called to collaborate with Jesus on his mission. Let us hear and respond.

There is however no other way to respond to Jesus and his calls to repent and believe in the gospel and to be his disciples than to first examine the state of our lives. Then, we have to choose to change. **Honest examination of our lives and choosing to change what we must in our lives are two simple but necessary ways we can make to become better Christians.** So, can we choose to stop gossiping, choose to manage our addictions, like pornography and gluttony, choose to care more charitably for others, and choose to love, to forgive and to care instead of to hate, to hurt, and to be selfish?

Jesus' demand to change is his way to help us know God's saving love. This knowledge should make us want to change in thanksgiving for a God who believes we can indeed become better for salvation.

Parents call children "time after time" to change and be better. Jesus does the same to us — he calls us repeatedly to follow Him in God's ways in order to live God's "good life". Jesus' call ought to wake us up to what truly matters in life: **being with God who wants to be with us always.**

May be you, like me, struggle to accept this life-giving truth because we know we sin, now and again. We thus feel unworthy to come close to God and to collaborate with Jesus to complete God's work to save all. Perhaps, we struggle with needing to be perfect to be called.

But Simon, Andrew, James and John were not perfect when Jesus called them. In fact they went on to make mistakes after being chosen. Yet, we honour them as great apostles. We do because we celebrate how they gave God permission to step into their lives, straighten their paths, and set things right for them to collaborate with Jesus on the mission.

Pope Francis sees God's action in their lives as the goodness of God's faithful labour in all our lives. This must give us hope, Francis declares: for the Lord, knowing our limitations, will still say to us, as He stayed with them, saying to all of us, "With eternal love, I have loved you, I have been thinking of you and I have been working for your salvation" (Homily, 14 January, 2014, Casa Marta Chapel).

What about us? Do we give God permission to do for us what He did for the

apostles?

God desires nothing more than to labor for our conversion. Jesus' call to repent invites us to do this. Jesus' call that we collaborate with him testifies to his trust that we can repent, believe in the gospel and be his disciples

The Ninevites heard the same call God through Jonah and they responded. The first disciples heard God's call through Jesus and they followed. Today, God comes to us in Jesus in our everyday life to show us how His love is gently pursuing us to live more in His ways, and so experience His bountiful life. This is why Jesus' call that we repent and change our lives today is not harsh, as it is loving and caring.

And when we do listen to Jesus' call, I believe, we will catch him saying these words we desire so much to hear as his disciples: "come, follow me".

*Preached at the Church of the Transfiguration, Singapore*

photo: [www.voiceofrevolution.com](http://www.voiceofrevolution.com)

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## **Boldly Catholic [at Boldly Catholic]**

*Stay with me Lord, for You are my light, and without you, I am in darkness.*

*Stay with me Lord, to show me Your will.*

*Stay with me Lord, so that I hear Your voice and follow You.*

*Stay with me Lord, for I desire to love you very much, and always be in Your Company.*

*Stay with me Lord, if You wish me to be faithful to You.*

*Stay with me Lord, for as poor as my soul is, I want it to be a place of consolation for You, a nest of Love.*

*Stay with me, Jesus, for it is getting late, and the day is coming to a close, and life passes, death, judgment, eternity approach. It is necessary to renew my strength, so that I will not stop along the way and for that, I need You. It is getting late and death approaches. I fear the darkness, the temptations, the dryness, the cross, the sorrows. O how I need You, my Jesus, in this night of exile.*

*Stay with me tonight, Jesus, in life with all its dangers, I need You.*

*Let me recognize You as Your disciples did at the breaking of bread, so that the Eucharistic Communion be the light which disperses the darkness, the force which sustains me, the unique joy of my heart.*

*Stay with me Lord, because at the hour of my death, I want to remain united to you, if not by Communion, at least by grace and love.*

*Stay with me Jesus, I do not ask for divine consolation because I do not merit it, but the gift of Your presence, oh yes, I ask this of You.*

*Stay with me Lord, for it is You alone I look for, Your Love, Your Grace, Your Will, Your Heart, Your Spirit, because I love You and ask no other reward but to love You more and more.*

*With a firm love, I will love You with all my heart while on earth and continue to love You perfectly during all eternity.*

*Amen.*

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| [Contents](#) |

## Emmanuel: the Entrance into Inadequacy [at CatholicSoup]



We are now a little over a week into the new year. What comes with that are new goals, new strivings and resolutions. Perhaps new jobs, new territories in our lives and careers, even new relationships. Energy levels are high, we might feel motivated to begin the trek toward those goals or excitement to start the new year, excitement to start the day. However, we all know that at some point, the honeymoon ends. Hopefully it's not on January 1st, but there does come a time when those feelings of excitement, motivation and confidence diminish and we're left with sadness, discouragement, lack of initiative, depression, Inadequacy and self-doubt. What these negative feelings do is prevent us from true encounter with the living God, who has come as a baby, to save the world.

I recently wrote a reflection during the Christmas season that I believe can give us hope and help even in the Ordinary Time that follows after Christmas.

During the Christmas season especially, if your a student your getting ready for finals week, mothers are doing shopping and preparing for guests, cleaning the house. Fathers are working, trying to make just a few extra bucks. All of this can be very exhausting and in a sense, it can allow us to discover our own limits very quickly. All of a sudden we realize that there are some things we just can't do on our own. What do we do at this point?

As a student in formation and full-time studies, it didn't take long before I realized my own limitations. I reached a stand-still moment where I felt like I had done everything I could do, I had used up all of my energy, all my strength and still, it was not enough. Tired and burned from all the work I had done, it was still not enough. My prayer was not good, and my academics weren't either. I was missing the mark, despite all the work I was putting in, I felt like everything about myself was a fraud. What I felt were feelings of inadequacy, I felt insufficient, weak and disappointed in myself.

But I later found out that what those feelings brought me was a realization of how much I need help, namely, from God. By reflecting on my own need, I was able to see our human nature as a whole, always needing help from the One who has held us in His hands since the very beginning. Without that divine assistance, our lives will always remain faulty, deficient and incomplete because what we really long for is that intimate reunion with God, whose nature is to Love. As much as we want to do things on our own, we soon will realize that we can only get so far. We need God and He wants us to allow Him into our lives just like He did at Bethlehem. You and I are not perfect beings, and as much as we try to be perfect we will always miss that mark, it's in our nature. Sin literally means to "miss the mark." That is not to say that we shouldn't strive for that mark, or perfection, but to desire perfection. Matthew tells us at the end of Chapter 5, "**Be perfect, just as your Heavenly Father is perfect.**" (Matt 5:48)

What that requires is a prayer that comes from each of our hearts. The one that

comes to Jesus in the crib, with full admittance of our weakness and our shortcomings, ready for healing, and with enough humility say to Him, “God, I can’t but You Can.” That’s the message of the Incarnation at Christmas. That our God who knows and understands our sinful nature, has humbled Himself so that He be born into our insufficient, weak and miss-the-mark humanity in order to live with us, and breathe with us. We have a God who enters into our brokenness and walks with us. In His birth, God gives us a message that I found to be very comforting for me in my studies, and I was able understand Christmas in a completely new way.

God speaks to us in His birth and says, “I know you are inadequate, I know you are weak and hurting, but so am I, and I am with you now.”

I think at the heart of this is recognizing that we each need a Savior, one who leads us, redeems us and points us to every good thing that our souls can ever want. That means Himself in which we are perfected, His presence and His love in which we are fulfilled. What we need in this ordinary time is still the reminder of Christmas, that the Emmanuel God who comes down to be with us even at our weakest, darkest state, not only comes to be with us, but comes to live among us in the form of a man. That is a relational God, who wants nothing more than for us to be close to Him, even in those times we feel we are not enough. It’s in those times that God is able to say to us, “You are enough, because I am enough.”

*“We have a Savior and we have a compassionate God, who does not make everything perfect with some magic wand, but instead He comes to us and says I am here, and I will suffer with you, I will hurt with you, I will cry with you and endure with you.” -Fr. Chris Gama OFM Cap*

[inadequacy.html](#)

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| [Contents](#) |

## When the Sun of Culture is Low on the Horizon, Even Dwarves Cast Long Shadows [at V for Victory!]

I recall hearing a priest say that once on Mother Angelica's show. The audience was at first stunned into silence, and then broke into applause. It captures our age perfectly.

Scripture has another way of putting it. Proverbs 27:7:

A soul that is full shall tread upon the honeycomb: and a soul that is hungry shall take even bitter for sweet.

When things are bad enough, and we are famished enough, our expectations plummet. We start sniffing and scrounging and scratching and foraging for comfort. Then, when we find even the tiniest crumb, we act as though we have stumbled upon the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The "pot of gold" is invariably something so meager and nasty that in better times we would have despised it as trash. But we have arrived at times so wretched that even trash looks like treasure.

Take the state of things in our beloved Catholic Church. Into what ecstasies are we launched on those rare occasions when a priest correctly states a Catholic teaching from the pulpit. Father actually said that marriage is between one man and one woman, and for life! Dare we to hope — we ask ourselves — that the tide is finally turning? But in better times, even the worst priests preached what the Church teaches. What's that? Pope Francis celebrated Mass facing east? It must be the dawn of a new era of reverence and Catholicity in the liturgy! But in better times, even the worst priests faced east as a matter of routine and did not dare to

*ad lib*

the Mass — at least those parts of the Mass that the people could see and hear. Pope Alexander VI, Rodrigo de Borgia, led a life that can be described only as scandalous; yet it is nowhere recorded that he tried to reinvent the divine truths

he flouted, or to remake the Mass or the Sacraments to suit his tastes. What an age we live in, when even the corrupt churchmen of the Renaissance look like saints!

But we in the pews cannot claim to be any better. The negligent, slothful and even subversive priests and bishops that plague us today come from within our own ranks. If we are off the rails, our shepherds will be off the rails. Bad clergy openly flaunt the evil habits that they once kept under wraps, because we in the pews can no longer rise to the level of being shocked. They get away with it, because we, being mired in our own evil habits, are too effete to do anything about it.

Let's face it: we are not in the springtime of renewal in the Catholic Church. We do ourselves and the Church a great disservice by denying this. The fact is that those who are not in the Church can see the true state of affairs for themselves, and we make ourselves and our Mother ridiculous by trying to deny it. But when that renewal does come, we will not need to ask ourselves whether it has in fact arrived. About the real renewal and revival, there will be no room for doubt.

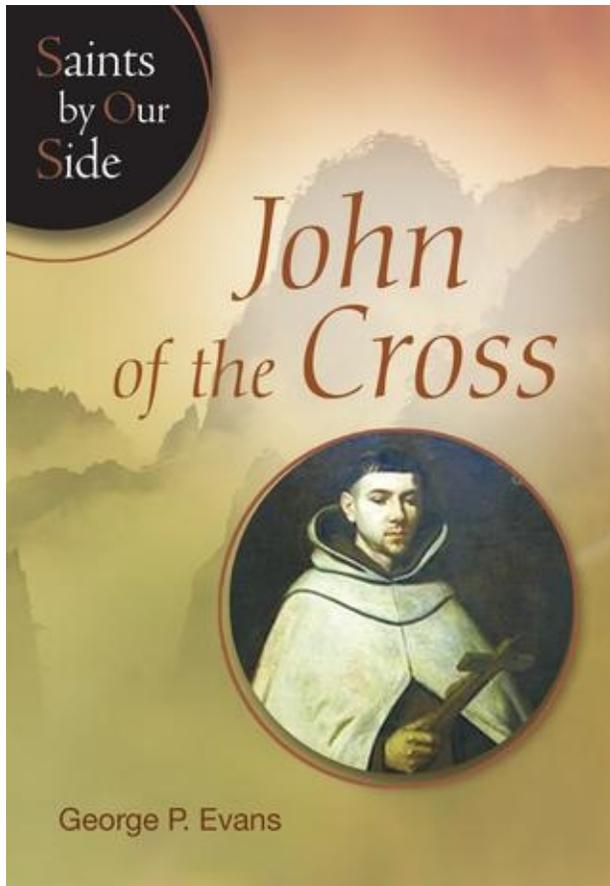
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| [Contents](#) |

# John of the Cross by George P. Evans [at The Koala Mom]



When [Joey didn't arrive on his due date](#), I looked up the saint days for the next week. The name of St. John of the Cross jumped off the list at me, as I'd just finished reading his biography. I didn't know much about this Spanish priest until reading this book, yet I found his story fascinating.

**By worldly standards, St. John of the Cross was a nobody.** He was born in poverty in Spain in 1542. His father and his younger brother died before John's tenth birthday. John attended a school run by nuns, then a Jesuit-run college, and then joined the Carmelites. While many in the Order loved John, others hated and persecuted him—he even spent almost a year in jail. He died in poverty, as he had lived, after a long and painful illness.

By spiritual standards, St. John of the Cross is a giant. He was good friends with St. Teresa of Avila, another great saint of the Catholic Church. Together, they worked to reform the Carmelite Order. The Reform movement split the Carmelites into two opposing camps, yet John always advocated balance and tried to reconcile the two groups. He also wrote “some of the most important pieces of religious poetry our world has known.”

**George P. Evans’ biography of this great saint is readable and enjoyable.** He brings St. John of the Cross to life, explaining historical events that affects St. John’s life and portraying St. John as a man of great faith, yet someone whom we can still relate to. I appreciated moments when he showed St. John’s humour. For example,

When a friend told John how much he was intrigued at John’s enjoyment of working with rocks and building materials, John humorously but tellingly replied: “Don’t be surprised, son, for when I am dealing with them I have fewer sins to confess than when I am dealing with men.”

If a giant of the faith can say something like that, then perhaps there is still hope for me! St. John certainly had his struggles with those in his order. While he desired a life of quiet contemplative prayer, he readily served his Order, as a confessor, priest, leader, teacher, and more. His ability to see God through all the hardships in his life impressed me.

John’s months in prison, in particular, led him to some of his deepest spiritual insights:

His deprivation and desolation could have depleted his spirit and embittered him. But, brought low, John opened himself to God’s power in his life. Detached from virtually all other supports, he disposed himself to being filled with God’s powerful presence. God strengthened and deepened John’s spirit. His confinement liberated him to know and love God even more. In his cell, John fell into deeper intimacy with his God, on whose friendship he so much needed to draw.

**At the [back of the book](#), Evans provides an Appendix** with a summary of St. John’s main teachings. This includes an overview of the poetic images drawn from John’s life experience. There’s also a prayer in honor of St. John of the Cross, reflection questions, and a chronology of important events from St. John’s

life.

*John of the Cross* is part of [the Saints by Our Side series from Pauline Media](#). Father George P. Evans has been a priest since 1977 and is currently the pastor of St. Julia Parish in Weston and Lincoln, Massachusetts. Holding a doctorate in theology from The Catholic University of America, he regularly teaches courses in theology and spirituality.

*I received this book for review courtesy of the publisher; all opinions expressed are my own.*



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| [Contents](#) |

## I am a political orphan [at A Drop in the Ocean]

As a young adult making my way in life, there are many things I've had to (and am continuing to) figure out through experience. Things like budgeting and insurance. Getting my oil changed regularly and apartment hunting. Filing taxes and all that fun stuff. Another part of life I've been reflecting on for some time is my political affiliation.

Current events are a topic I've enjoyed keeping up on for years. I have strong opinions, and don't tend to shy away from sharing them. I've been behind the keyboard for many a Facebook debate, usually having to do with the very calm and uncomplicated issues (I kid) such as abortion, same sex marriage, other life issues, and my faith. Don't worry, though, they're mostly a thing of the past.

I enjoy a lively discussion, and challenging bad logic, because I want to get to the **truth**. It's not enough to me to take what any media source says as the truth. I want facts, which are often hard to find among the opinion pieces passing as journalism nowadays. And it comes from both sides.

At first, I registered as a Republican. But over the last several years, I've become disillusioned by Republicans who sit on their rears and don't get things done. Some conservatives will stand with the party no matter what, since these are the people standing up, in their minds, to extreme liberals. Speaking of, I also have zero tolerance for the extremists currently representing the Democratic party. I find that their stances are often based on what is politically and personally convenient (\$ from Planned Parenthood and the like is a great motivator to vote against a 20 week abortion ban), and are often out of touch with what people in their own party believe. There's so much talk, but so little action. That's why I'm now a no party preference voter.

My point is: what I've found in this journey is that I don't really have a political home. In what seems like an extremely polarized country, I am a political orphan because I agree completely with neither side of our two party political system.

I am neither republican nor democrat, flaming liberal nor uber conservative.

I believe we are obligated to help our fellow human beings, but not that we are

entitled to getting things from our government.

I believe in material aid, but not in handouts.

I believe in free speech, but not in normalizing divergent behavior.

I believe in women's rights, but not a feminism that degrades men.

I believe life is precious at all stages, and that any unjust killing is unwarranted (whether it be abortion, doctor assisted suicide, euthanasia, unjust war, some cases of capital punishment, etc.).

I believe in small government, focused on people helping people most locally, but not that government is evil.

I believe in immigration, but that it should be done legally.

I believe in the triumph of the human spirit and not the allure of power, money, or Wall Street.

I believe taxes make sense, but not that our salaries should make us pay a higher or lower percentage. I also think tax dollars should be used properly.

I could go on, but you see the point. The two parties we have aren't working anymore, because many people don't fit into the box each party put itself into. It's turned into identity politics where your beliefs explode into an ideology and you don't just think for yourself because you go along with the party platform. **We're polarized by who you're with, not what you believe.**

And I don't think I'm alone in thinking that this two party system is utterly broken.

What are we to do with this?

I refuse to give in to the idea that we are all on opposing sides of political debates, that it's me vs. you in a competition to see whose party beats the other. I am interested in the truth, and right now that doesn't seem to be coming from either of our self-imposed sides of the political spectrum.

The thing is, no political party really defines who we are anyway. Our culture is overly concerned about who we identify with, and what labels we embrace. **But**

**my opinions are not my identity.** I have certain beliefs about many issues, which are informed by my Catholic faith. I am Catholic, but am otherwise not interested in labeling my beliefs. They're not defined by a broken political system. They are my own beliefs, that evolve, are challenged, and clarified as time goes on.

This makes me a political orphan of sorts, and that's alright. I don't want to be part of identity politics anyway, because that's not where my identity comes from. My identity is a daughter of God. I am created and loved by him, and that tells me all I need to know.

To Life,

*Laura*

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This contribution is available at <http://asingledropintheocean.com/2018/01/30/i-am-a-political-orphan/>

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| [Contents](#) |

## Attracted to Jesus [at Walking the Path]



### **FOLLOW THE LEADER**

I have been a leader much of my adult life taking upon positions such as coach, department chair, committee head, and so on. For whatever reason I am naturally drawn to those positions when I see that no one else desires to lead. This can be both a blessing and a curse as when all is well accolades abound and things go wrong the blame invariably falls on the one leading. I can't really pinpoint when the desire to lead started other than my last two years in high school. However, I know that as an adult, I have found that I don't follow well as I think I can always do better than the next person and I am not patient when people don't take the lead on issues.



Being a follower for me is better suited for following sports teams. I would like to think that I am not follower of anyone and I march to my own drum. Of course there is a lot of ego involved here. So what about following Christ? What is attractive in this?

I have not been called like Samuel who heard the Lord calling him and took on upon the role of prophet. My path is more circuitous growing up in a Catholic home, attending religious education classes and completing the sacraments, but then traveling along my own unfulfilling path of worldly and material attractions which only providing emptiness. It wasn't until I realized that I was looking for God in all of these ventures. Jesus did not call me out and if he did I wasn't listening anyway. Through a gradual reeducation of the teaching of Church and surrendering my life and worldly desires did I find the simplicity of following Christ. This is the same simplicity that John's Gospel reveals.

## **MAGNETIC ATTRACTION**

What is interesting about Jesus in today's gospel is that he is not looking for followers, but that John's disciples are attracted to him. There was certain magnetism that stirred the hearts of these men to follow the Lamb of God. Jesus was not and is not like leaders today who can be bombastic or draw on peoples emotions with appealing speeches and promises of a new beginning. In my morning guided meditation I was asked to visualize where Jesus was staying when replied, " Come and you will see."

### [JN 1:39](#)

. I could a picture a simple dwelling, perhaps he was staying at the home of

someone who he had cured of a sickness or someone labeled a sinner. This I found attractive. There are so many other qualities that bring me to become a follower and not a leader that I cannot list them all.

Perhaps finding so much emptiness in the pursuit of the so called dream brings me back to the simplicity of Jesus. Living with no more than what is needed was the call of Jesus disciples. I find that the more I desire to obtain the more stressed I become of the pursuit to the goal. For me following Jesus is not a maddening chase, but it is found in solitude of reading and prayer or attending Mass. Jesus is not the loud voice on television urging me to follow him nor is he the looming billboard on the freeway beckoning to buy a product or attend an event. He is as Paul says found in the temple of my body. (

### [1 COR 6:13](#)

) He is always there. He is always leading me on if I choose to follow. What can be attractive than that?



### **I WILL FOLLOW**

My favorite band U2 released the song I Will Follow in 1980. If one listens they just might find themselves in the song. The lead singer Bono is said that song was about a mother, but could easily be about God as well.

I was on the outside when you said  
You said you needed me  
I was looking at myself

I was blind, I could not see

A boy tries hard to be a man  
His mother takes him by his hand  
If he stops to think he starts to cry  
Oh why

If you walkaway, walkaway  
I walkaway, walkaway...I will follow

If you walkaway, walkaway  
I walkaway, walkaway...I will follow

I was on the inside  
When they pulled the four walls down  
I was looking through the window  
I was lost, I am found

Walkaway, walkaway  
I walkaway, walkaway...I will follow  
If you walkaway, walkaway,  
I walkaway, walkaway...I will follow  
I will follow

Your eyes make a circle  
I see you when I go in there  
Your eyes, your eyes...

If you walkaway, walkaway  
I walkaway, walkaway..I will follow

If you walkaway, walkaway  
I walkaway, walkaway...I will follow

I will follow  
I will follow...

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| [Contents](#) |

# Mistaken Papal Critics and History We Forget [at If I Might Interject]

## Preliminary Note

I have no intention of passing judgment on successors of the apostles like the "dubia cardinals" led by Cardinal Burke, or the Kazakh bishops. Just as anti-Francis Catholics have misrepresented the Holy Father to support their narrative of a "heretical" Pope, I find that these cardinals and bishops were also misrepresented, with anti-Francis critics making it sound as if these cardinals and bishops "supported" their schismatic behavior.

This article does not claim to say that these churchmen are guilty of the same wrongs Sts. Cyprian and Hippolytus committed. I merely write this article to show that misinterpretation and attacks on Popes were not limited to the pontificate of Pope Francis. Rather, I wish to point out these two cases where the Popes were misrepresented and attacked as a reminder that even men known for their holiness can go wrong if they put themselves in opposition to Popes using their teaching office.

## Introduction

One of the popular narratives in opposing Pope Francis is to point out some of his predecessors—such as Liberius, Honorius I, and John XXII who were suspected of privately holding error. The anti-Francis Catholics point out that these Popes are proof that a Pope can err. From that, we have a string of tortured logic arguing that because those Popes privately erred [a claim disputed among Church historians], Pope Francis can publicly err in his words and actions that sound unfamiliar to our own understanding of Church teaching.

These critics overlook a different part of Church teaching—where Popes have taught and certain bishops of the Church mistakenly thought the Popes were teaching error and publicly took a stand in denouncing them. I would like to briefly discuss the case of two papal critics from the Third Century AD.

## **Pope St. Stephen I vs. St. Cyprian**

One example of this took place in the Third Century AD. St. Cyprian held that the baptism of heretics was invalid, and if any of these heretics should convert to the Catholic Church, they needed to be rebaptized.

However, St. Stephen I taught differently. He held that if the heretic was baptized in the proper formula, the baptism was valid. If this heretic turned/returned to the Catholic faith, he did not need to be rebaptized, but merely perform penance. Instead of realizing he had misunderstood the nature of baptism and changing his views, St. Cyprian accused St. Stephen I of promoting heresy in a series of letters to his fellow African bishops. For example, in his Epistle LXXIII, to Pompey:

2. He [Pope Stephen I] forbade one coming from any heresy to be baptized in the Church; that is, he judged the baptism of all heretics to be just and lawful. And although special heresies have special baptisms and different sins, he, holding communion with the baptism of all, gathered up the sins of all, heaped together into his own bosom. And he charged that nothing should be innovated except what had been handed down; as if he were an innovator, who, holding the unity, claims for the one Church one baptism; and not manifestly he who, forgetful of unity, adopts the lies and the contagions of a profane washing.

Cyprian of Carthage, "The Epistles of Cyprian," in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian*, Appendix, ed. Alexander Roberts

Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appellix, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, vol. 5, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 386.

But the fact is, the Catholic Church followed the teaching of St. Stephen, not St. Cyprian. If a person who was validly baptized by a non-Catholic intending to do what the Church intends, we hold that baptism to be valid. Even an atheist can validly baptize. The Catholic Church holds it is wrong to rebaptize. If a person was never validly baptized, we baptize. If there is a question about whether a person was validly baptized, we give conditional baptism.

St. Cyprian's error was in assuming that his position was correct and that the Pope must be wrong. From that assumption, he drew the false conclusion that the Pope was doing damage to the Church from his "error," and had to be opposed. But since St. Cyprian was in the wrong about baptism, his condemnation of the Pope was simply wrong.

### **Pope St. Callistus [†] vs. St. Hippolytus**

Another example of a bishop wrongly accusing a Pope involved Pope Callistus. In a time when the Roman Empire held that slaves could not marry free citizens, the Pope decreed that such a marriage was valid.

St. Hippolytus thought the Pope was in error. In a denunciation, he declared that the Pope's action would lead to divorce, use of contraception, and attempted abortion on the part of a free woman who married a slave, writing [§]:

For even also he [Callistus] permitted females, if they were unwedded, and

burned with passion at an age at all events unbecoming, or if they were not disposed to overturn their own dignity through a legal marriage, that they might have whomsoever they would choose as a bedfellow, whether a slave or free, and that a woman, though not legally married, might consider such a companion as a husband. Whence women, reputed believers, began to resort to drugs for producing sterility, and to gird themselves round, so to expel what was being conceived on account of their not wishing to have a child either by a slave or by any paltry fellow, for the sake of their family and excessive wealth.<sup>9</sup> Behold, into how great impiety that lawless one has proceeded, by inculcating adultery and murder at the same time! And withal, after such audacious acts, they, lost to all shame, attempt to call themselves a Catholic Church!

Hippolytus of Rome, “The Refutation of All Heresies,” in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. J. H. MacMahon, vol. 5, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 131.

I find this remarkably similar to the statements of some Catholics who claim that what the Pope said in *Amoris Lætitia* would mean people in a state of mortal sin seeking to receive the Eucharist—assuming that the abuse was directly caused by the Pope’s action as opposed to being an abuse of his teaching.

Yes, a third century Catholic could think about becoming pregnant by a slave husband in that way, but that would be doing evil that was not in accord with the Pope’s teaching. This was a *post hoc* fallacy by St. Hippolytus which is similar to the one committed by Pope Francis’ critics.

## **Conclusion**

These cases are examples of members of the Church who confused their interpretation of what should follow from Church teaching with Church teaching

interpretation of what should follow from Church teaching with Church teaching itself. Because of this, they falsely accused Popes of promoting error, attributing worst case scenarios as directly caused by the Pope who declared the teaching. These cases also involved the accusers assuming the worst of the Popes, leading them to think they must support the worst abuses.

I believe that these are the proper historical counterparts to the opposition to Pope Francis, not the examples of “bad Popes” people try to cite. People who have assumed that all people who are divorced and remarried must be in a state of mortal sin cannot reconcile that assumption with the Pope correctly pointing out that assessing culpability must be done with remarriage as well as with every other grave sin.

Like the third century critics of Popes, the 21st century critics of this Pope have confused their view with Church teaching itself. The Pope has made a reasonable teaching, but some people, failing to understand it, assume their fears of negative consequences through abuse is the intended teaching.

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[†] Also known as Callixtus.

[§] This is commonly cited [correctly] as proof that the Church consistently condemned contraception and abortion. But I find it interesting that Hippolytus slandered Callistus in doing so just as some critics today slander Pope Francis. These critics are correct that the teaching they defend is true. But they err in thinking the Pope’s teaching contradicts it.

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This contribution is available at <http://www.ifimightinterject.com/2018/01/mistaken-papal-critics-and-history-we.html>

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| [Contents](#) |

## The Most Ridiculous Commandment [at Real Life Rosary]

Mark 2:23-28



Thou shalt rest. Thou shalt take it easy. Thou shalt relax, read, spend time with friends and family. Thou shalt spend time with Me for one day before going back to work.

How many of us have ever uttered these words or similar words? -

*I'm so busy, I need a break, If I only had some free time I would (insert favorite activity here).*

I always thought the third Commandment was sort of ridiculous. Who needs to be told to take a day off? Who needs to be told to not work? Most of us spend an inordinate amount of time trying to get out of work. Yet God, who knows His children best, saw fit to make one of the Ten Commandments tell us to take it easy.

Of course keeping Holy the Sabbath is not simply about being a couch potato. It is supposed to be a day of retreat. It is a day where we can duck out of the world and spend time with God and enjoy His gifts - creation, family, Scripture, etc.

I treasure my Sundays. That is my favorite day of the week. It is a day when we get up early, go to Mass, eat breakfast on the deck, go for a hike or go fishing, and end the day with a campfire or family rosary or both. When we can't get out and about, we institute an "electronics free day" and spend time reading, playing board games, or wrestling.

While some may live for the weekend I live for Sunday. I admit that it often does take some planning since we choose to refrain from shopping, dining out, etc. But I think that makes the day much more enjoyable. If we're going hiking at the state park we make sure our tank is filled on Saturday. If we're cooking out or entertaining we get the extras during the weekly grocery trip. Then, come Sunday, no worries. I love it! It's like a weekly retreat. It's recreation in the true sense, re-creation - a chance to be re-created in God's image and likeness. It's a chance to love Him and enjoy His love.

So what was the big deal with what Jesus' disciples were doing? The Pharisees had taken a basic list of things that shouldn't be done on the Sabbath and expanded it to a 39 item list. So a simple command (in its true sense and spirit) like "

*do not perform farm work on the Sabbath*

" becomes a ridiculous and anguish-filled command like "

*do not walk through a field of grain or even casually pick the grain to munch on for that is considered farm work.*

"

Jesus is teaching the Pharisees, His disciples, and us that the law of charity must trump all other rules. He uses a story that they were very familiar with to prove His point (1 Samuel 21). Man's basic needs must come before ceremonial rules. Jesus shows that it is better that man be fed by picking grain on the Sabbath than starving to death on the Sabbath in order to keep a ceremonial law.

Lord Jesus, help me to truly rest in Your presence this coming Sunday. Give me the strength to deny my worldly interests for one day and focus on You and the gifts You have given for my benefit. Help me to retreat for a day and be recreated so that I might better serve you in the days that follow.

## FROM THE SAINTS -

*"I have always seen rest as time set aside from daily tasks, never as days of idleness. Rest means recuperation: to gain strength, form ideals, and make plans. In other words it means a change of occupation, so that you can come back later with a new impetus to your daily job."*

- Saint

Josemaria Escriva

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This contribution is available at <http://real-life-rosary.myshopify.com/blogs/news/the-most-ridiculous-commandment>  
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| [Contents](#) |

## Laws of Life and the Road [at A Catholic Mom climbing the Pillars]

**"And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him."**

OK, so we all, or most of us....no wait, SOME of us abide by the traffic laws: Stopping at red lights, stop signs, and not passing on solid lines. Why we do obey these laws? We believe in them! We believe that they will save lives, prevent accidents, and is the right thing to do. Simple logic, yes?

So, those of us who obey God's commandments obey them because we believe in them. We believe in God and believe they save lives(souls), prevent bad decisions, and is basically the right thing to do. We believe in God, in Jesus Christ and his Word.



Have you ever known people that are not living according to the commandments? Are they happy people? Are they getting anywhere positive? Or do they seem to be simply turning in circles in no real direction?

Now let me show you the last verse in this reading:

1 John 2:11, "But he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

Those who chose to abide by the commandment to love God and thy neighbor can SEE clearly the truth. Those who ignore this live in a darkness that gives no love in return. They are blinded by their own decisions. They do not see God in their daily lives, they do not necessarily believe in Him. Perhaps they refuse to believe in him. But see their lives!

With God, there is hope, love, and goodness! With God there is joy! It's not always perfect living, health, and wealth, but without God, well, I don't want to know what life without God is like.

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| [Contents](#) |

Attendance at Mass, regular confession, spiritual exercises, fasting, and prayer are wonderful vehicles of grace but if we think pious activities alone will sanctify us, we will only appear holy on the outside like the Pharisees:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men's bones and every kind of filth. ([Matthew 23:27](#))

Now, the Pharisees were not evil men; they were earnestly striving to be good and to follow the Law. Their mistake was they thought they could perfect themselves through religious practices and man-made spirituality. However, man cannot transform himself into a holy being. As my Irish grandmother would say, "*You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.*" In other words, only Christ can transform sinful people into His image and draw them into the heart of His Father.

### **Man-Made Spirituality is Pharisaism**

After a few decades of dry spiritual exercises, Catholics either become just like the Pharisees who thought they were holy because they acted and looked holy on the outside or if they are honest with themselves, they become so frustrated they lose hope, believing communion with God is only for ancient saints or a few chosen ones. Most settle for a man-made spirituality when God offers all intimate communion with Him. The truth is a vibrant, joyful relationship with Christ is simply the normal Christian life when we learn how to surrender to God and let go of control.

For years, I did not understand the subtle difference between authentic and man-made spirituality. It is not an easy distinction to make; most of us remain in delusion until a spiritual director can shake some sense into us. For myself, I tried to force God to relate to me on my own terms. Since God refused to be manipulated, the harder I tried to grow closer to Him, the more I hit a wall. The experience often brought me to tears of frustration.

What I failed to grasp was with all my striving, I was actually centred completely on my own efforts to please God and win intimacy with Him like it was a prize I had to earn. Once I sought help, a priest teased me by noting that

although most people have a spiritual star chart, mine was simply larger than most.



### **An Egocentric Spirituality**

Father Henri Nouwen, S.J. explains the futility of egocentric, man-made spirituality:

For most of my life, I have struggled to find God, to know God, to love God. I have tried hard to follow the guidelines of the spiritual life—pray always, work for others, read the Scriptures—and to avoid the many temptations to dissipate myself. I have failed many times but always tried again, even when I was close to despair.

Now I wonder whether I have sufficiently realized that during all this time God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me. The question is not “How am I to find God?” but “How am I to let myself be found by him?” The question is not “How am I to know God?” but “How am I to let myself be known by God?” And, finally, the question is not “How am I to love God?” but “How am I to let myself be loved by God?” God is looking into the distance for

me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home. ([The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming](#))

Nouwen finally learned how to take his focus off himself and to look to God, responding and surrendering, rather than performing to earn the prize of intimacy with Christ.

My experience was similar because I was also raised in a society that equates the mere idea of surrender with losing. Society has never liked losers. It glorifies winners who are independent, hard workers. In fact, surrendering goes against our innate competitive natures. So naturally, when we begin our own spiritual journey in earnest, we bring all our worldly notions with us, striving to succeed, depending on our own strength to snatch the ultimate crown of holiness. Inevitably we fall into the trap of concocting our own version of spirituality and it becomes a man-made spirituality.

### **Stealing Christ's Job**

Although we don't really understand what we are doing when we tackle sanctity like a chore, we are basically trying to save ourselves with our religious works, with man-made spirituality. The truth is that God is the author of our salvation:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. ([Ephesians 2:8,9](#))

When religious practices are not motivated by love and humility but fueled by pride, they damage our intimacy with God. In fact, self-appointed spiritual disciplines that are *not* inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit are self-centered, not God-centered and can rightly be called man-made spirituality. To put this thought in more shocking terms, when we try to perfect ourselves we are stealing Christ's job of redemption and sanctification. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains:

Christ's whole life is a mystery of *redemption*. Redemption comes to us above all through the blood of his cross, but this mystery is at work throughout Christ's entire life. ...

When Christ became incarnate and was made man, he recapitulated in

himself the long history of mankind and procured for us a “short cut” to salvation, so that what we had lost in Adam, that is, being in the image and likeness of God, we might recover in Christ Jesus. For this reason Christ experienced all the stages of life, thereby giving communion with God to all men. ([CCC 517-518](#))

Even though the Church teaches us exactly how to be reconciled to God through Christ, it takes a long time to really understand how to assimilate these truths into our daily lives. It took challenging comments from my spiritual director to shake me out of my delusions, “You’re stealing Jesus’ job,” and “You’re working for Satan, not God.” I realized I still had not allowed Jesus to justify me. I was still relying on good works to earn God’s approval.



### **God Is Always The One Who Initiates**

The Father always is the one who initiates, He seeks out and invites the exhausted, the poor and the broken to His Heavenly Banquet. Those originally invited were too busy to attend the wedding feast:

Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’

“‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. ([Luke 14:21-23](#))

Our spiritual journey is not so much about our efforts to become perfect and connect with God with our man-made spirituality as it is about becoming aware and responding to God's efforts to connect with us. Our ego-centric viewpoint focuses on our efforts because we are self-centred, not God centred.

Pope Francis reminds us it is always God who acts first, we can only respond to Him. God is always the one who initiates communion with us but somehow we think we are the ones who set out to find God. [On Jan. 31, 2016. Pope Francis said:](#)

God comes to meet the men and women of all times and places, in their real life situations. He also comes to meet us. It is always he who takes the first step: he comes to visit us with his mercy, to lift us up from the dust of our sins; he comes to extend a hand to us in order to enable us to return from the abyss into which our pride made us fall, and he invites us to receive the comforting truth of the Gospel and to walk on the paths of good. He always comes to find us, to look for us.

The *Catechism* explains further:

Faith is man's response to God, who reveals himself and gives himself to man, at the same time bringing man a superabundant light as he searches for the ultimate meaning of his life. Thus we shall consider first that search ..., then the divine Revelation by which God comes to meet man .... ([CCC 26](#))

Thank goodness, I can depend on the fact that the desire for God is written in the human heart; man is created by God and for God, and God never ceases to draw man to himself.

connecting with [theology is a verb](#)



## **Published by melanie jean juneau**

Melanie Jean Juneau serves as the Editor in Chief of Catholic Stand. She is a mother of nine children who has edited her kid's university term papers for over

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| [Contents](#) |

## Michael Savage likens the Roman Catholic Church to Isis! [at The Shield of Faith]

Sadly Dr. Savage apparently buys into the discredited “Black Legend” of the Spanish Inquisition. In his newest best-selling book, *God, Faith, and Reason*,

the conservative commentator makes such outrageous statements as “. . . Either you believed in what Catholics believed in or they killed you . . . They were very similar to Isis.”

He writes the following on page 132 of his book:

“The Maranno Jews lived during the Inquisition, when the Catholics were killing anyone who didn't follow their way. They were very much like the radical Muslims today. Yes, there is a precedent for what the radical Muslims are doing today. Either you believed in what Catholics believed in or they killed you. They'd let you convert, but if you didn't they burned you at the stake or had you drawn and quartered. They were very similar to Isis.”

On the contrary, never has the Catholic religion taught or mandated that people must be forced to convert upon pain of death or torture. Dr. Savage's sensationalist rhetoric is entirely misleading and grossly exaggerated. During the 350 years the Inquisition lasted, of course there were abuses. But comparing them to the excesses of what “radical Muslims are doing today” is absurd. Excerpts from three sources are presented below in order to shed some truth and light on what really happened during that period of history. Like the Crusades, the Inquisition in its concept was essentially good and not evil.

“As the father of Christendom, Pope Gregory IX was anxious to correct the many errors of his time that were poisoning society spiritually and causing people to go astray from the Catholic Faith [Gregory IX reigned from 1227 to 1241.]”



“Like Moses in the Old Testament, Gregory IX desired to protect the children of God from error. Like Moses, he ordered an *Inquiry*, or *Inquisition*, to be made with all diligence, and he demanded the testimony of at least two witnesses. Like Moses, he insisted that crimes against God should not go unpunished. The parallel stops here. Moses, in much earlier times, had no interest in distinguishing between the penitent and the obstinate, the deceiver and the deceived. He simply commanded the guilty to be stoned to death. Gregory IX’s principal desire was to draw the heretic back into the grace of God. Only in the cases where he insisted on remaining an enemy of God - and, therefore, of society - was he to be cut off from the Church and handed over to the discretion of the State.” However, when abuses came to the attention of Pope Sixtus IV, he put an end of the Papacy’s role in the Inquisition. Thomas F. Madden writes in *Crisis Magazine*, in his article [“The Truth about the Spanish Inquisition](#), that the Inquisition then became an “. . . arm of the Spanish monarchy, separate from ecclesiastical authority. It is odd, then, that the Spanish Inquisition is so often today described as one of the Catholic Church’s great sins. The Catholic Church as an institution had almost nothing to do with it.”

“What about the dark dungeons and torture chambers? The Spanish Inquisition had jails, of course. But they were neither especially dark nor dungeon-like. Indeed, as far as prisons go, they were widely considered to be the best in Europe. There were even instances of criminals in Spain purposely blaspheming so as to be transferred to the Inquisition’s prisons. Like all courts in Europe, the Spanish Inquisition used torture. But it did so much less often than other courts. Modern researchers have discovered that the Spanish Inquisition applied torture in only 2 percent of its cases. Each instance of torture was limited to a maximum of 15 minutes. In only 1 percent of the cases was torture applied twice and never for a third time. The inescapable conclusion is that, by the standards of its time, the Spanish Inquisition was positively enlightened. That was the assessment of most Europeans until 1530. . .”

**“No major court in Europe executed fewer people than the Spanish Inquisition. This was a time, after all, when damaging shrubs in a public garden in London carried the death penalty. Across Europe, executions were everyday events. But not so with the Spanish Inquisition. In its 350-year lifespan only about 4,000 people were put to the stake [half of those occurred after the Spanish monarchy took control].”**

“Although the Spanish defeated Protestants on the battlefield, they would lose the propaganda war. These were the years when the famous “Black Legend” of Spain was forged. Innumerable books and pamphlets poured from northern presses accusing the Spanish Empire of inhuman depravity and horrible atrocities in the New World. Opulent Spain was cast as a place of darkness, ignorance, and evil. Although modern scholars have long ago discarded the Black Legend, it still remains very much alive today.”

“A new, fictional Spanish Inquisition had been constructed, designed by the enemies of Spain and the Catholic Church.”



“It is this Black Myth that continues to be spread by partisans of the French Revolution, Freemasons, and Hollywood film makers today. This is why to this day those initial falsities continue to live in the public’s mind.”

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This contribution is available at <http://divinefiat.blogspot.com/2018/01/michael-savage-likens-roman-catholic.html>

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| [Contents](#) |

## **Radicals Misrepresenting Traditionalists and Their Infection Within the Body Of Christ: 1 Peter 5 and My Brother in Christ [at Servimus unum Deum]**

**UPDATE as of 22/01/18 - Finally with a uncommon day off of work, I can update this story. The Vatican HAS spoken on this matter. [This article](#) in the National Catholic Register (affiliated with EWTN), a credible source, reports on the matter. Turns out that Ms. Ploumen got the award as part of a *delegation* with her country of the Netherlands, and it was a matter of political protocol between visitation of one entourage of state with another.**

**Personally, this was a political and institutional screw-up on the part of the Vatican *STATE* and likely, that of the Secretary of State in the Vatican. In addition, I cannot speak in the defense of Pope Francis' (possibly?) calumnious allegations in his recent jaunt in Chile, in defense of a South American Bishop buddy of his, which could be true if he has internal knowledge from witnesses/investigations, but is indefensible both as a head of state and as Vicar of Christ of the Catholic Church. Let me state that such statements in Chile had NOTHING to do with the defense or teaching of Faith or Morals as the Church`s earthly head, but rather a gross injustice of a grotesquely immoral action, and the failing of the *Institutional Church* at large (e.g. clergy, buildings/institution, heretics, liberal liars.) The beliefs and truths of the Church are still exactly those, regardless of what sinners do ministry and are ordained, and there are still thousands of decent Catholics around the world, living within it and adhering to the faith, despite the failings of its human, yet apostolic leader, who was born into this world in sinful flesh, with a will marred by**

concupiscence (inclination to be tempted to sin,) just like you and I.

Back to the awarding to Ms. Ploumen, this act does NOT have any direct trace to Pope Francis, who doesn't care for pomp and circumstance. I stand by what I wrote on how RMT tabloid junkets smearing gossip of the Devil, such as 1 Peter 5 with Skojec and The Lepanto Institute under Hitchborn, commit grievous sin against the Church, the Magisterium, the Pope, and the Body of Christ, poisoning the minds and souls like my brother Knight, who without people like myself or knowledgeable priests, have little to no defense against such filth disguised as "fighting for the faith." I have proven as such with a "Traditional Encyclical", *Mystici Corporis Christi*, though that has even not convinced some radical traditionalists to see the Satanic evil committed by RMT bodies and websites.

### **Radicals Misrepresenting Traditionalists and Their Infection Within the Body Of Christ: 1 Peter 5 and My Brother in Christ**

Hello everyone,

Happy new year to all my viewers and any curious onlookers.

For those who have actually viewed my site in past, you may have dismissed my warnings and my cautions against the infiltration of Radical Traditionalism and in the life of the Latin Mass in the Roman Catholic Church, as well as ordinary life of the Body of Christ, that is every single baptized Catholic under the church. Other prelates, or priests, who have given some attention to this increasingly warring factions in the church, have warned people to stay away from this faction such as reigning Canadian prelate, ++Marc Oullett,

[in his recent speech](#)

on

## [Amoris Laetitia](#)

to my Conference of Canadian Catholic Bishops' Plenary meeting.

However prelates today simply do not understand the power this faction yields, particularly against those who are more deeply invested in their faith including at the parish level. They are not the type to present their works to their bishops for Nihil Obstat and Impriatus for their works, and contain deep mistrust and antipathy towards the hierarchy of the Church, including its Magisterium. Further, prelates do NOT understand that this NOT something contained to those with possible mental/spiritual deficiencies, or even the Latin Mass. Even worse, such "fake news" or "literature" (to use the term loosely,)

*does*

tend to travel in said circles, and should NOT become a staple of media for such participants,

**especially the youth**

!. If you do NOT believe me, please reread

[my reflection on 10 Years of Summorum Pontificum](#)

, to see the effect it has had on one particular, "yute" under "deeper, darker concerns..." .

Examples of websites from this faction I mentioned, are: LifeSiteNews with its totally anti-Francis and anti-modern Church bias (of whom it views today's Pontificate and the modern "Church" as anti-family and life due to corrupt clergy and laity), Rorate Caeli which the very moment Francis was elected called him, "The Horror," and new to the gang in the last few years, a site I will be looking at in this post, is 1 Peter 5 (1P5), helmed or with heavy contributions from the ever increasingly, cynical layman named Steve Skojec, whose works have been rapidly deteriorating into hatred for the Church and the Magisterium. Sadly, 1P5's motto is "Rebuilding Catholic Culture. Restoring Catholic Tradition."

Being a Catholic apologist (that is, a defender of the Catholic Church,) one loyal to Christ's church, and Him as Holy King, including His Magisterium and the Pope, I must post upon something that has happened to me today to illustrate just how powerful the radical traditionalist faction is growing, and how it is infiltrating

now powerful the radical traditionalist faction is growing, and now in illustrating the normal life of those of the body of Christ in the every day parish life, sadly to their own understandable ignorance, yet attacking them whom have no meaningful defense.

*What's going on here?*

This morning, I received a message on Facebook(TM) from my fellow brother Knight, in my local Knight's Council, with an article from a website called 1 Peter 5 (I will not link to such Radical Misrepresenting Traditionalist (herein, RMT) garbage.). The article in question, from 1P5, is titled, "Pope Francis Awards Architect of Safe-Abortion Fund with Pontifical Honour." Below is a screenshot of the Facebook message, with his image and name edited out to protect his identity:



Being a pro-life advocate, and a good Catholic family man and my brother Knight, I can see why he would send something out to his friends, as it would be confusing for him. My wife informed me that he is such, so it now makes sense why this would end up in my Facebook Messenger today.

The summary of the article is (besides the usual hatred and venom laced notes,) is that, supposedly, Pope Francis, who is a ``spiritual head`` of sorts, of the Pontifical Equestrian Order of St. Gregory the Great which has been around since 1821, has given a prestigious award and entry into said order of the title of

since 1651, has given a prestigious award and entry into said order of the title of ``Commander,`` to Lilianne Ploumen, former Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation in the Netherlands. If one dares read the article, she has a laundry list of grievous offences against the dignity of life against her, meticulously compiled by Hitchborn in the 1P5 article. The article itself even questions just what Lilianne is receiving this award for, as it is supposed to be given for service to the Catholic Church.

### *The Dubious Article*

Taking apart the article, first, I look at the author, Michael Hitchborn, who heads the theo-politically "conservative" racket online called "The Lepanto Institute." When one does a general, cursory examination of Lepanto, one can see that the tone of the authors, the articles presented, and their stance towards the current pontificate and Church IS exactly the same as Skojec and 1P5, though Lepanto does cover areas politically/culturally that tie into the Church, though are not specific to it. Seeing who the author is and their sites' works, already, we have a bias present in the article: RMT type! The article originated from the Lepanto site, written by Michael. "Birds of a feather flock together they say."

Further, is there ANY supporting evidence, such as other videos on YouTube from legitimate or alternative sources, such as the official Vatican News sites like vaticannews.va or the Vatican's website with an announcement of the awarding? NONE. The only video being circulated is the ones on the sites such as 1P5 are reporting such news, as well as the article/reporting of the "incident." While there is no general website for the Pontifical order, none of the main Catholic news sites are reporting any of this. Hence, there must be doubt as to the legitimacy of the claim. Could the mainstream Catholic sites and the Vatican be so biased as to "media scrub" something like this under the radar? Possibly, but with no alternative evidence from them, one cannot attach legitimacy to this media hit piece to give it validity that said event is/has happened, nor to the claims of the article that Pope Francis is directly responsible.

Moreso, why would Pope Francis, just simply abuse a Papal award and give it to a known abortion and anti-culture/life advocate intentionally? He is NOT stupid. If anything, an argument can be made that if we were to stoop to the lowest level, believe in the very facts that enemies of the Holy Father are touting in their "literature" (loosely used) that: leading up to his Papacy he was a politician of sorts back in Argentina, formed in some sort of Machiavellian philosophy (e.g. upcoming "The Dictator Pope" and another e-novel by some pseudonamed

author ...) then it backfires in their faces and actually PROVES Jorge Maria Bergoglio, as the Pope, is clearly a SMART man, who would know of online spies or enemies, and wouldn't be so bold with the Internet watching as to stupidly make a bold statement in giving a Papal award to a known anti-life and anti-family advocate. It would be a disaster from a PR standpoint, and only increase division and doubt in the church, including in his followers, the lay Faithful. This would also backfire in his enemies faces because this is NOT his supposed usual tactic of subtle undermining of the Church via pastoral practice/his underlings. Why would he be so bold, NOW? It makes absolutely no sense at all to the average person with some intelligence and is Catholic.

The only, likely way he would do so, is if he had been misinformed by his subordinates, who would likely have delivered the award to Ms. Ploumen. Being a busy head of the Church/Vatican with little time to himself to do research, not to mention sit down and spend hours cruising blogs and other sites in between Papal Visits, conferences, and we must give the Holy Father the benefit of the doubt, that if he DID award this medal, he was highly misinformed of this woman.

*Posting that article, ironically, is violating the Teachings of a Prior Pope LOVED by RMTs, Pope Pius XII*

In posting bile like this online, which is meant with purpose to divide those in the Church against the Holy Father and the Magisterium, authors like Hitchborn, and purveyors of their works of similar mindset like Skojec and 1P5, are attacking the Communal AND Mystical Body of Christ in this way, via the Holy Father, and the dissemination of this information to souls like my brother Knight via the Internet. To explain this, I'll go Traditionalist for a moment and use a ``Trad`` encyclical of a Papal favourite to the Anti-Vatican II RMTs, Pope Pius XII.

Pius XII is a favourite to RMTs, as well as sedevacantists, who believe the Papal seat is vacant, usually stating this Pope was the last 'legitimate one' because all those involved with Vatican II such as Leo XXIII to Francis I today are "modernist Popes." In 1943, Pius XII penned an encyclical called

[\*Mystici Corporis Christi\*](#)

, "The Mystical Body of Christ."

To begin, Pius XII speaks once again, as many Popes, Saints, and Church Fathers have many a times, about the Pope's Primacy, and how Christ purposely gave us a visible head of the Church in the Holy Father, to govern the Church and yes, men, for we would absolutely need it as finite creatures:

" 40. But we must not think that He rules only in a hidden [59] or extraordinary manner. On the contrary, **our Redeemer also governs His Mystical Body in a visible and normal way through His Vicar on earth.** You know, Venerable Brethren, that after He had ruled the "little flock" [60] Himself during His mortal pilgrimage, Christ our Lord, when about to leave this world and return to the Father, entrusted to the Chief of the Apostles the visible government of the entire community He had founded. **Since He was all wise He could not leave the body of the Church He had founded as a human society without a visible head.** Nor against this may one argue that the primacy of jurisdiction established in the Church gives such a Mystical Body two heads. For Peter in view of his primacy is only Christ's Vicar; so that **there is only one chief Head of this Body**, namely Christ, who never ceases Himself **to guide the Church invisibly, though at the same time He rules it visibly, through him who is His representative on earth.** After His glorious Ascension into Heaven this Church rested not on Him alone, but on Peter, too, its visible foundation stone. That Christ and His Vicar constitute one only Head is the solemn teaching of Our predecessor of immortal memory Boniface VIII in the Apostolic Letter Unam Sanctam; [61] and his successors have never ceased to repeat the same. **(Mystici Corporis Christi (MCC), 40.)**

Pius XII, then also, gives this stinging, yet prominent note about giving lip service to Christ while intently denying fealty to His Holiness, living life in the Church on earth in paragraph 41:

**"41. They, therefore, walk in the path of dangerous error who believe that they can accept Christ as the Head of the Church, while not adhering loyally to His Vicar on earth. They have taken away the visible head, broken the visible bonds of unity and left the Mystical Body of the Redeemer so obscured and so maimed, that those who are seeking the haven of eternal salvation can neither see it nor find it. (MCC, 41)**

That very quote, should be part of every Catholic Traditionalist's prayers every day, repeated multiple times a day. Now, just what does the above have to do

with those as part of the Mystical and/or Communal body of Christ? Christ himself, is directly connected to His Body, the communal/Mystical Body of Christ in the Catholic Church. In fact, he PURPOSELY is intimately tied to it, and he WANTS and DESIRES perfectly to have His Body be a part of His Life and works. Most of all, he NEEDS it to cooperate with Him to achieve said goals. In paragraph 44, Pius XII pens this about the relation of Christ as Head of Church, needing his Body:

“44. Because Christ the Head holds such an eminent position, **one must not think that he does not require the help of the Body. What Paul said of the human organism is to be applied likewise to the Mystical Body: "The head cannot say to the feet: I have no need of you."**[69] ... every advance of this Mystical Body towards its perfection derives from Christ the Head.[71] Yet this, also, must be held, marvelous though it may seem: **Christ has need of His members.** First, because the person of Jesus Christ is represented by the Supreme Pontiff, who in turn must call on others to share much of his solicitude lest he be overwhelmed by the burden of his pastoral office, and must be helped daily by the prayers of the Church. **Moreover as our Savior does not rule the Church directly in a visible manner, He wills to be helped by the members of His Body in carrying out the work of redemption... He has so willed it for the greater glory of His spotless Spouse...**” (MCC, 44)

Hence, without the works of those members of the Mystical and/or Communal body of Christ, His will cannot be done, and the salvation of souls is abruptly halted. When people like Hitchborn and associated blogging outlets, leave this trash floating in the river of cyberspace, what are they doing?

They are:

1) Attacking the Holy Magisterium of the Church in a **public forum,**

whereby they set themselves up as an alternative magisterium to discern who is right and true in the Church and who is wrong, similar to separated Christian brethren who have their own "Churches" made of individual councils in churches or "Synods."

2) By doing what is said in No. 1, anyone who is looking in from outside the Church, will be appalled that Catholics from within (or those defending Catholic

teachings) are "smearing their own Faithful," which they will now consider as they reflect and see the same disgusting behaviour that is possibly being carried out in their own dysfunctional "churches." Talk about being "ecumenical." Does it occur to them that perhaps the Marks of APOSTOLIC authority with the Pope as the supreme Spiritual Vicar on Earth, is a big drawing point for them to consider maybe converting to the Faith? (as a related side note, that is part of why my council's current Grand Knight, a convert, became a Catholic. He saw that within the Church, unlike the opposite in his own prior church, of how individuals or 'councils' of humans, determine approach to moral situations and beliefs.)

3) Furthermore, this directly violates paragraph

#### **40 in MCC**

, when the attack is directly pointing the finger at the Holy Father or implicating him because it is his "Papacy," when the supposedly evil or doctrine-violating work is directly being done at the hand of a lesser prelate or others who are abusing Francis' name and the Church's name to commit said evils.

4) Even more wicked, by placing these articles in a public forum, to be picked up by said people, this attacks and erodes their Faith, by sowing initial seeds of doubt which will be further cemented with repeated attempts, and then said corrupted lay member or priest then consumes this media, not trusting the messages of (their parish or other) priests, bishops, and the Holy Father, leading to further abandonment of Christ and His Church from within, all the while NOT defecting to another "denomination" or out of the Church altogether. In doing so, Hitchborn et al. also violate

#### **paragraph 44 in MCC**

, because in corrupting that of Christ's faithful in the Church, they thus

**cut off the Body of Christ from it's head.**

Christ, so willingly dependent on His Mystical and/or Communal body of Christ to carry His work,

**as in MCC 44,**

...and because His body is constituted from His Church, which is

is unable to do so because HIS BODY is incapacitated from dissent. Cells, such as individual lay members and clergy, poisoned or mutated into dissenting cancerous cells. The only result of a cancerous body not starved of its cells ... is death. The "death" of the Body of Christ and His Bride, the Church.

*A concluding end-note, a Biblical Note on False Teachers.*

Should we be surprised that such drivel is being spewed online where anyone with Internet access can attach to such spiritual poison? No. As long as Christ's One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church exists, there will be false prophets, and we all should be aware. Christ Himself, tried to warn us, as well as his Holy Servant, St Paul in his OTHER letter to the first Pope, St. Peter himself, the one 1P5 ignores,

**2nd Peter 2 (NRSV CE, 1-3):**

*‘But false prophets also arose **among the people**, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, **even denying the Master** who brought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their licentiousness, and **because of them the way of truth will be reviled**. And in their greed they will exploit you **with false words**; from of old their condemnation has not been idle, and their destruction has not been asleep.’*

However, in what I have emphasized in bold and underlined, the destructive power they bring into the sheepfold, has also been acknowledged in Sacred Scripture and how they will do it: It will destroy the love of those for Christ and His Truth from reaching their hearts, and it is done with false words that repel the truth from them. Now, while we cannot control the actions of subordinates under the Holy Father, we nonetheless must be wary of those wielding such lies and power to deter people from expressing that Cardinal Virtue of Faith in Holy Mother Church.

Reading the passage above, this is exactly what these people and their blog sites do: Sow Satan`s division to entice the lay faithful to rebel against the Church and the Holy Father, no different from Satan`s rebellion over God, because they think their false ``truth`` is better than God`s TRUTH expressed through Jesus Christ, his Vicar Pope Francis, and the Magisterium of the Catholic Church.

With Scripture and MCC via Pius XII, this is exactly WHY we should NOT simply ignore these minority of bloggers, sites, etc. as lost causes to be ignored. Because the very acts they perform, reaches SUCH a broad audience in the Church today, an audience who is either NOT going to Mass, or even worse, an audience who is actually STILL committed to Christ but seeking more spiritual nourishment in our daily lives.

Of those people are the youth, the next generation of Christ`s workers in the vineyard, and of absolute necessity: our future priests who can perform the sacraments, our future religious sisters who aid the Bride of Christ and are joined to her, and our future laymen, who if they trust in the Church still, will marry and have families who will provide the next generation of vocations in the Church.

Further, of those people who are STILL in the Church, are good men like my brother Knight, striving through his daily work and in his marriage to remain faithful to Christ and to his family. Thankfully, I did reply immediately to his text and told him about the situation of the article and 1P5. I told him to consult me about future articles such as that of 1P5, as I am aware of a number of the major players spewing this fake news, and I know firsthand from my online and personal experience, encountering Radical Traditionalism in the Latin Mass environment, what form such spiritual poison comes in.

However, what about others like him, who have no trusted friend or family or spiritual superior to rely upon, or is not aware of apologetics sites, or is perhaps older and not technologically savvy? What defense does a layman or woman like him (or even, our pastors as priests) have to know to counter against such anti-Catholic propoganda that can sever their link to the Magisterium and the Head of the Church in the Pope?

It is for this reason, that we MUST not take lightly, articles like this, that have no legitimate journalistic credibility or supporting evidence from other legitimate sources, as viable and dangerous threats to the faithful in the Body of Christ. We must stand united together in protecting those spiritually vulnerable, or just trying to make their pilgrim journey home to Christ in Heaven, remaining on that treacherous, yet rewarding narrow path. Christ depends on His Earthly Body in us, the Mystical and/or Communal Body of Christ, to defend itself from such foreign invaders, and to expel them as its immune system. In Nomine Christi, Defende!

## Pax Tibi Christi, Julian Barkin.

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| [Contents](#) |

## Knowing Thy True Self [at Theologyisaverb]



“For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self.”

— *Thomas Merton*

New year’s resolutions and Lenten commitments have one important common thread, they are only as effective as they are intuitive about the strengths and weaknesses of the individual. For this reason, neither can be a one size fits all and both need to strike a balance between being challenging and in some degree feeling achievable. For instance, setting a goal of running a 5k would not be a worthy goal for a marathoner, and running a marathon would not be a realistic goal for someone who has never ran around the block. A primary difference, of course, rests in where we seek strength and desire to follow through with these commitments. For the Christian, there is a fundamental understanding that the path of discipleship and virtue is not a solitary one. Through Christ, however, there is both strength and guidance at the ready to lead us to God’s will to becoming the best version of ourselves.

In conversation with a friend of mine recently, a retired corporate HR director, the idea of personality and leadership traits came up. Many of us have taken personality assessments like the Myers Briggs, the Big 5 or emotional

inventories. While these assessments are far from perfect, they can give us a glimpse into how we perceive our strengths and weaknesses and react in various situations. This is not only beneficial for understanding ourselves but also in how to understand and work better with others in community.

I just so happen to be one who enjoys drawing out the introverted, sitting beside the wounded, communicating one on one or to a crowd, diplomatic but not afraid to stand up for what is right or see things through. Yet, on the flip side I have been known at times to spread myself too thin, be overly self-critical, and take on other people's problems as my own. Delays due to indecision, and multiple projects left incomplete can frustrated me. Self awareness has been invaluable in discerning God's will in my life, while also helping me to step back and reflect on how best to inspire others to learn and grow too.

As Catholics, the exercise of our faith is never separate from the larger community even when living a cloistered life. And the living out of our truest best self is always a choice. One that we can disguise, or utilize in our daily interactions with others. Though, as Merton would note, if we ignore who we are at our core we "cannot expect to find truth and reality whenever we happen to want them." Likewise, when we live indifferent to others and their inherent values, we fail as well to fully seek the truth about ourselves.

When we experience conflict, it not only speaks to the the behavior and inner self of others but to our own sense of identity. Conflict, therefore, has the potential to be interiorly revealing if we allow ourselves to ask two seemingly simple questions. Why it is this situation troubling in the first place and what would be necessary for interior or exterior balance? To this point, the saints were not considered so because they lived lives of perfect peace perfectly. But rather, in the midst of conflict the saints sought to know God, to know themselves and live their truest self in the world around them.

### **Reflect:**

In what situations in my life am I making the choice to be untrue to myself and in my relationships with others? What do the conflicts in my life reveal about myself and where might God be asking me to grow?

Peace,

*Elizabeth*

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| [Contents](#) |

## How the Homeschool Year is Going So Far! [at Veils and Vocations]

It's Friday, a cold day with snow everywhere. My two oldest are on their way down to DC for the March for Life. They left at 5AM from Cowgirl's godmother's home (a hour south of us where they spent the night to be there first thing in the morning) and will arrive back there after midnight. My two littles are still asleep.

So, I thought I would offer a little update on how the

[school year](#)



**#1 Free Video Classes are Amazing!** If [Virtual Homeschool Group](#) offered affiliate programs, I could be their biggest endorser. I tell everyone about it. I am here to tell you, after using it for half our school year it really is wonderful. I highly recommend using their classes and if you have the time, why not teach one, too! **#2 Geography Coloring Book is Working!** I really, really like geography. I would spend hours just looking through my atlas and spinning my globe, then returning to my atlas to learn more about my globe discovery. I have had a hard time getting my kids that excited about it, though. I was determined that this would be the year we made significant strides in geography. Now, they all have very good map skills and can name a few dozen animals that live on every continent. However, putting those two together was fuzzy at best. I spent months researching THE BEST geography curriculum. I didn't like what I found

or was overwhelmed by the price. Then my friend, Emily, suggested we just draw and color maps. Why didn't I think of that? Since she was schooled in Europe for a number of years, I went with her advice. I purchased a second hand book of blank geo-political maps. We have been very slowly working through first coloring each of the continents, labeling them, and discussing boundaries. Now we are getting down to color coding individual countries on the continents. I hope to do a map for each country, too, but don't think we will make it there this year at this pace. I am just so happy they are learning and have gotten very interested in maps and globes!! **#3 We Have Not Tamed the Pen and Pencil Eating Monster!** I don't know about your house, but our writing implements are ALWAYS missing!! We switched to only pen, as suggested by [Andrew Pudewa](#). I thought that might solve it, nope, I am still asked at least 54,863,925 times a week, "Do you know where my pen is?" If you have advice, please share it! I have tried every system known to man, short of tying them down like in the bank! **#4 Latin is So Much Fun!!** Who knew! My boys long to do Latin and are enjoying it so much. They walk through the house chanting conjugations and quotes by famous philosophers. **#5 I Should Have Been Using Saxon All Along!** I fought the tide of every recommendation to use Saxon Math. We tried all the rest. I wanted color and depth. I wanted fancy with drills and fancy workbooks. Then I wanted simple and easy. Then I wanted manipulatives upon manipulatives. Then I switched back to easy. In the end, all I really wanted was for them to learn math. Math always my least favorite subject. I thought I needed to make it something spectacular for my kids to overcome that. As it happens, they just need a solid textbook and a bit of guidance. We are now a Saxon family!

**#6 Having a School Calendar Makes Me Happy!** Our old way of running the school was start after Labor Day and finish at Memorial Day. We took no breaks other than minimal time for Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving. Typically we logged over 200 days even though we finished "a month early."

I am getting older and I realized that this amount of work load was not doing anyone good. So we are now on a trimester plan. We have 11 weeks on and then a "reading week." We also took off a week for Thanksgiving (kind of a reading week--I think), one for Christmas, and we will have off time for Easter. In February is our next reading week. Then we will finish by June 1st.

Having a plan, makes everything run smoother. I divided our workload by three semesters and now we can see exactly what needs to get done when. No more realizing in April we have miles to go before we sleep!

**#7 School Doesn't Need a Room!** I was bound and determined to make our school more efficient and official by having it in the "school room" every day

with everyone working around our big table and a clock to govern our time. It worked for the first 6 weeks, mostly.

However, Cowgirl needs her peace and solitude to work well. Even with everyone else working/playing and engaged, she was too distracted. In the end having her work in her room worked for everyone.

Having the boys downstairs and out of the kitchen, though, has led to far fewer snack breaks. I get much more accomplished for my job, life, etc. when I take whatever I need to get done and bring it down as well.

The little ones play instead of climbing on me and whining for my attention every 30 seconds and Buddy works on his school work. We have fallen a bit off this wagon with the allure of the living room fire on the cold winter days. I need to just push Buddy to light a fire downstairs and that would solve it. I just haven't wanted to have to keep two fires burning while I work.

Perhaps, February will change my mind. February is the hardest homeschool month. We need a little prodding to keep going. Fire and tea just might be it! I made it through all seven!!

**How is your homeschool year going? Have any tips or tricks to share?**

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This contribution is available at <http://veilsandvocations.blogspot.com/2018/01/how-homeschool-year-is-going-so-far-sqt.html>

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| [Contents](#) |