Beholding His Beauty – Psalm 27:4

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” – Matthew 5:8

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Living Bulwark is committed to fostering renewal of the whole Christian people: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. We especially want to give witness to the charismatic, ecumenical, evangelistic, and community dimensions of that renewal. Living Bulwark seeks to equip Christians to grow in holiness, to apply Christian teaching to their lives, and to respond with faith and generosity to the working of the Holy Spirit in our day.
Intro to This Issue

We give thanks to the Lord for the past twelve years of publishing Living Bulwark, the online magazine of the Sword of the Spirit. This is our 100th issue.

In October 2006 we launched Living Bulwark as an online magazine of the Sword of the Spirit, our network of some 75 Christian covenant communities worldwide and its related outreaches. Most of the work for Living Bulwark is done by volunteer contributors and part-time volunteer helpers from the Sword of the Spirit. Many of the articles are written by community members and members of Kairos student outreaches, as well as contributions from Sword of the Spirit leaders, teachers, and authors.

Statement of Purpose

Our Statement of Purpose expresses our aim to serve in fostering renewal of Christian life and mission:

Living Bulwark is committed to fostering renewal of the whole Christian people: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox. We especially want to give witness to the charismatic, ecumenical, evangelistic, and community dimensions of that renewal. Living Bulwark seeks to equip Christians to grow in holiness,
Purity of Heart, Joy in the Lord, and Living a Chaste Life in the Lord

This issue focuses on the theme of purity of heart, joy in the Lord, and the virtue of chastity. The three are related and aim to root us in a life of holiness and godly living and ongoing renewal through repentance, accountability, and the readiness to grow in Christian character and fruit of the Holy Spirit. All disciples of the Lord Jesus are called to live a life of the beatitudes - the fundamental teaching of Jesus given in his Sermon on the Mount discourse in Matthew 5 and Luke 6. Steve Clark gives a very insightful summary of Jesus' teaching on the beatitudes in this issue's lead article.

May this issue encourage you to strive for greater holiness and transformation in Christ-like character through the grace and work of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us and through the encouragement and example of faithful Christians who can support us on the way.

Sincerely in Christ,
Don Schwager
editor
Living the Beatitudes as Christ Has Taught Us

Jesus teaches us how to stake our lives on God and the coming of his reign on earth

by Steve Clark

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

At the time in Jewish history when Jesus spoke these words, one of the things that people were most concerned about was God’s coming to reign. About 20 years before this the rule of the last Jewish king in Palestine had ended, and Judea and Samaria were now under Roman government – under pagan rule. Jews believed that pagan rule in the land of Israel was an abomination. God was the one who was supposed to reign. The Jews at this time were looking for the rule or reign of God, and wanted God to come and establish the kingdom. So when Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is at hand,” he was announcing a piece of news that people were interested in. It meant something big was going to happen, and everything was going to change as a result of it.

This was Jesus’ message and the background for his teaching. If you believe my message, he was saying, you should repent: you should change your whole mentality. You should start to live a different kind of life.

This sets the context for the beatitudes—in fact, for the entire Sermon on the Mount. The crowds had gathered around Jesus, and, “seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came
to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them” (Matt. 5:1-2).

What we receive from Jesus in the beatitudes is a teaching about how somebody who believes that the kingdom is at hand, and who is staking his life on the kingdom of God, should live.

The Beatitudes in Matthew Chapter 5

1. Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down the disciples came to him.
2. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:
3. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
5. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
6. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.
7. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.
8. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
9. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.
10. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.
12. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.
13. You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.
14. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid.
15. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.
16. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 5:2-16).

Verses 3 through 12 are the beatitudes. The term comes from the Latin beatus, “blessed.” The beatitudes portray the character of a disciple of Jesus. Verses 13 to 16 describe the effect the disciple is supposed to have on the world around him, if his life conforms to the beatitudes.

There are eight beatitudes (taking verses 10 and 11 as one beatitude), and they can be grouped into two sets of four. The first set is concerned with the way the disciple relies on the Lord. The second set focuses on the disciple’s relationship to other people as a result of his reliance on the Lord. There is even a one-to-one correspondence between respective beatitudes in the two sets: verse three corresponds to verse seven, verse four corresponds to verse eight, and so on.
This is easier to see if we examine the meanings of some of the words and phrases involved. For example, “poor” in verse three corresponds to “merciful” in verse seven. The relationship may not seem obvious; however, “merciful” can also be translated “generous,” which fits with “poor.”

Again, “those who mourn” in verse four probably means “those who repent.” This fits well with “the pure in heart” in verse eight. It is easier to recognize the correspondence between “the meek” (verse five) and “the peacemakers” (verse nine), and between “those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (verse six) and “those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake” (verses 10 and 11).

Putting all this together, the beatitudes match up like this:

Blessed are the poor in spirit. . . . Blessed are the [generous].
Blessed are [the repentant]. . . . Blessed are the pure in heart.
Blessed are the meek. . . . Blessed are the peacemakers.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. . . . Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

Now let us look at each beatitude in greater detail in order to grasp the meaning of each one and relate it to the overall picture.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed” means fortunate, one to whom good things have been given. In this setting, we might take it to mean “truly fortunate” or “most fortunate of all.”

Truly fortunate, then, are the poor in spirit. The term “poor” here probably does not mean just materially poor; that is one reason why “in spirit” is added to

In the Old Testament, “the poor” often refers to people who rely on God to provide for them, who are faithful to God. When Psalm 9 says, “The needy shall not always be forgotten, and the hope of the poor shall not perish,” its meaning goes beyond simple lack of material goods. “The poor” are people who lack means to provide for themselves, so they rely on the Lord to provide for them.

The spiritually poor—the poor in spirit—are people who lack not so much material resources but a certain type of self-reliance. They don’t rely on their own gifts, skills, resources; they look to the Lord.

Theirs, says Jesus, is the kingdom of heaven. Note that the kingdom of heaven is the reward in both the first and the eighth beatitudes. That probably is meant to indicate that all the rewards that are mentioned are really the kingdom of heaven in one way or another. In other words, the beatitudes tell what kind of person we have to be in order to receive the kingdom of heaven, to dwell under the reign of God.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

The term “mourn” seems straightforward. But for most of us it actually isn’t, because in scripture mourning was not only something you did when you were unhappy. To be sure, you did mourn on certain occasions when you had been deprived of something, as when somebody died. But mourning customs were used in other ways as well.

For example, one of the ways of showing that you were seeking pardon, or turning to a person for help or
direction, was to use the mourning customs. That was a way of expressing submission, and also a way of expressing repentance. When you repented, you mourned. In that way you showed sorrow for your past action, but you also expressed that you were looking for a new way of life.

Jesus, then, is saying, blessed are those who submit their lives to God, who are repentant of their past disobedience, who seek a new way of life.

Such people, he says, shall be comforted. The word for comfort here is parakaleo. This has the same root as the word parakletos, or Paraclete, referring to the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Spirit is sometimes called the comforter. Parakaleo could also be translated “strengthened”: The Holy Spirit, the comforter, the strengthener, comes to provide the strength, the assistance, the comfort lacking to somebody on their own resources.

Another way to state the second beatitude, then, is, blessed are those who turn away from their old ways and submit to God, for they shall be given strength and comfort—quite likely by the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Being meek does not mean getting pushed around. Meekness means not always insisting on one’s own way, not always belligerently fighting for what one wants, but taking the attitude of a servant.

This beatitude is derived from Psalm 37: “Yet a little while and the wicked will be no more; though you look well at his place, he will not be there. But the meek shall possess the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity” (verses 10-11). The psalm is about people who are not in a position to overcome the power of the wicked and need to rely on God. It is a promise that God will establish them such that they will inherit the land. “The land” might mean the earth, or perhaps the land of Israel, but it at least means a place of resource and power.

Jesus is saying, blessed are those who don’t rely on their own devices, who don’t take matters into their own hands, but who rely on the Lord to establish them, for they shall inherit the land.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Righteousness here probably means the righteousness that Jesus is going to teach about in the course of the Sermon on the Mount. It is those who want to see this kind of righteousness in their own lives, and in the lives of others, who will be satisfied.

“Satisfied” is a word that occurs in other places in scripture. It commonly turns up in places where God feeds people, for example, in the account of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes: “And they all ate and were satisfied” (Matt. 14:20). As it was with loaves and fishes, says the beatitude, so will it be with righteousness. Those who truly seek it will be granted it in full measure.

Looking at the first four beatitudes, we see that they all refer to people who are deprived in some way: the poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst. All these are people who are in some way in need.

However, this has mainly to do with a certain attitude, a frame of mind they adopt voluntarily, not just a condition they have fallen into. It is an attitude of reliance on God. The poor, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst—all are people who don’t have what they want and who look to God to provide it for them: material resources, comfort and strength, power, righteousness.
These first four beatitudes say that those who look to God for these things will be provided for. They will be given the kingdom of heaven, they will be given comfort and strength (perhaps of the Holy Spirit), they will be given the land (the inheritance that God has for them), they will be satisfied with the righteousness they hunger and thirst for.

Thus the first four beatitudes deal primarily with how the disciples of Jesus, living in the hope of the kingdom of heaven, rely on the Lord for their needs. The second four, as we will now see in more detail, deal with how the disciples are to relate to others in light of this reliance on God.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Another translation of this is, blessed are the gracious, for they shall obtain grace, or favor. Those who are gracious, in the scriptural use of the term, are those who are generous, those who pardon, those who do favors for people.

In this case, the most apt meaning is generous. The Sermon on the Mount is very concerned about alms-giving, and in the original Greek the word for almsgiving is one of the words that can be translated “generosity.” Those who freely give what they have to other people not because it is an obligation but because they are the kind of people who want to give freely shall themselves be treated with generosity, probably by God.

Once we understand this meaning for the word merciful, that is, generous, we can see the correspondence between that and being poor in spirit. Those who lack resources look to God. God gives to them freely, which allows them to be generous; then, because of their generosity, they receive freely.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

The term “heart” probably means “intention.” The heart is the seat of the deepest thought and decision. “Pure” is a term that means that there is nothing that is incompatible with standing in the presence of God. For instance, Psalm 24 says, “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?” In other words, who shall go to the temple and gain God’s presence? “He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of his salvation” (verses 3-5).

The beatitude then becomes, blessed are those who do not do the things that are incompatible with going to the temple and worshiping God, whose lives are clean; they shall see God. They will be able to come into God’s presence, stand before him, see him.

Compare that with the second beatitude—blessed are those who mourn, or repent, for they shall be comforted, or strengthened. If they are repentant, God will strengthen them and enable them to be pure in heart. And if they are pure, then they can stand before God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God.

“Peacemaker” here probably means either those who try to make peace with those around them, that is, who try to live in such a way that they will be in a good relationship with other people, or those who try to make peace between people who are fighting. In this case it is more likely the former. As it says in Romans, “So far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all” (12:18). Peace means more than just not fighting; it means good relationships. Jesus is saying, blessed are those who live in such a way that they are at peace with all men.
They shall be called sons of God. When scripture calls someone a “son” of something or someone, frequently it means the two have the same character or nature. So those who are sons of God act like God. God seeks to be at peace with all men, with everything. He is a God who establishes peace; if you are a peacemaker, you are like your heavenly Father.

We can see the parallel with the third beatitude, blessed are the meek. If you are someone who does not insist on his own way, who does not use his own strength to get things to go the way he wants, you are in a good position to be a peacemaker, who establishes good relationships with those around you, and you share in God’s nature.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Righteousness is what Jesus teaches about. If you are really committed to live a life of righteousness, you are going to be persecuted. And that, he says, is a good sign that you will deserve to be in the future kingdom of God.

It is common to hear Christians say, “I’m a nice guy. Why would people persecute me for being Christian? Why would they talk against me?” Jesus is saying that that is exactly what we should expect. It’s normal. He is also saying, don’t complain about it. It’s a sign that you are fortunate, because your reward is great for suffering for the kingdom of heaven.

Note the comparison with the fourth beatitude. If you hunger and thirst for righteousness, and you are satisfied, you will then have righteousness in your life. That will lead to your being persecuted, which in turn will qualify you for the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

None of the beatitudes before this have mentioned Jesus himself. They refer to God the Father or to righteousness. But as Jesus expands on the last beatitude, it becomes clear that the issue is he himself, as the one who is bringing the kingdom of heaven, the one who is representing God the Father.

Verses 13 to 16 are about the effects of living the life of the disciple. It forms a conclusion to the beatitudes.

You are the salt of the earth.

There are a couple of possible meanings here. Salt does give taste to things, so Jesus could be saying, the earth doesn’t taste very good to God without Christians in it. A somewhat more likely possibility is that salt is seen as a preservative. Meat, for example, is salted to keep it from spoiling. The passage might then mean that Christians are the ones who keep the earth from spoiling.

An even better possibility derives from Leviticus, chapter 2: “You shall season all your cereal offerings with salt; you shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be lacking from your cereal offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt” (verse 13). Salt there is seen as an indication of the covenant with God.

Any of these three could be a reasonable interpretation of the passage. But what Jesus is basically saying is that if you don’t live the kind of life that you’re supposed to live, you’ll be like salt that has lost its flavor and can no longer do what salt does. Should that be the case, you would be totally worthless. It is very important for us to live the kind of life that Jesus has called us to.

http://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/october2018p2.htm (6 of 7) [20/10/2018 15:01:08]
You are the light of the world.

We are to let our light so shine before men that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father who is in heaven. If we live the life of a disciple, the kind of life Jesus has portrayed, we will be a beacon, a revelation of the reality of God and his coming kingdom, and we will lead men to give glory to God the Father in - heaven. That is what we are supposed to be.

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> See other articles by Steve Clark in Living Bulwark

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Painting above: Thomas the Doubting Apostle Meets the Risen Christ

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"Joy Unspeakable"

Greed and lust are obsessions, but Christian love frees us

by Peter Kreeft

*Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy* (1 Peter 1:8).

In reference to the human desire for joy Thomas Aquinas wrote the proposition that "**No one can live without joy. That is why a man (or woman) deprived of spiritual joy goes over to carnal pleasures.**" (*Summa Theologica* II-II, 35, 4 and 2)

Peter Kreeft comments on Aquinas's proposition that no one can live without joy.
We are designed for joy

We are designed for joy. Joy is our fuel, our food. When true fuel, true food, is missing, it becomes psychologically inevitable that we go after and are victimized by false fuel, false food, which cannot satisfy."

Why is it that "no man (or woman) can live without joy?" Because we are designed by Joy for joy: because "the serious business of heaven is joy" (C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm*, Ch. XVI). What we were created to do and experience eternally in heaven is the joy the saints anticipate here on earth.

The word "ecstasy" comes from the Greek *ek-stasis*, which means "standing outside yourself." The key to ecstatic joy is standing-outside yourself, a self-forgetfulness. All peak experiences have that feature. Once we turn around to look at ourselves, we spoil it. We want to lose ourselves in it, like swimming in an ocean. Eros is so powerful mainly because it is an image of that self-forgetfulness, that yielding bliss.

In self-forgetful joy we can accomplish things we could not accomplish before. This is true even physically. Saints, spies, and soldiers have gone without sleep or food for many days because they were passionately in love with some ideal, if only saving their lives. Every great act of intuitive discovery - every mental act that cannot be controlled by the conscious ego but comes from the deeper, larger world of our unconscious - is an act of self-forgetfulness."

*(Knowing the Truth of God's Love, Chapter 8, p. 171, Servant Books, 1993)*

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Searching for love in today's morally confused world

Everyone knows we are a sex-obsessed society, but not everyone knows the reason. Put simply, sex is for most people a search for love, or even a substitute for love rather than an expression of love. Most of the moral issues people feel deeply about today concern sex: abortion, divorce, premarital sex, family disintegration, homosexuality, and feminism.

Addicts cannot see clearly. Addicts have little sales resistance. These two facts explain (1) why the media which depend on advertising hate and fear traditional religion and (2) why greed and lust go together in our society.

Our society needs sexual obsession to sell its luxuries. Drop sex from advertising, advertising from capitalism, capitalism from economy, economy from politics, and politics from our society; and our society has nothing left. To obey either "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife" or "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods" would be the two most radical, destructive programs you could ever let loose in our society. Just as greed and lust are subversive to love, love is subversive to greed and lust.

Greed and lust are obsessions, but love frees. Love is not an obsession. You make sex free when you join it to love. Marriage does that. It sexualizes personal love and personalizes sexual love. Monogamous, lifelong marriage makes sex free.

Take heart, all you who prefer freedom to obsession. Our society will not last. Nature, like the body, rejects
alien organisms. Only love lasts (1 Corinthians 13). What we Christians are doing here is spy work, building a future supernatural kingdom in the middle of the present temporary one. Our citizenship is elsewhere. We are "strangers and exiles" here (Hebrews 11:13). Not only when we live in specifically Christian ways but even when we practice the old pagan virtues like self-control in a society which laughs at such quaint antiquities, we are the true revolutionaries and futurists and progressives. Remember: the kingdom we are building will last when this moribund one dies.

But if the body of sexual love is informed with this soul of agape, it too partakes of eternity. When sex is the servant of love, it comes into the kingdom. Perhaps one of the great developments of modern theology, and a witness to our age, which needs it so desperately, will be a glorious new theology of sex.

(Knowing the Truth of God's Love, Chapter 8, pp. 166-167, Servant Books, 1993)
The Glorifier and the Glorified

by C. S. Lewis

Heaven is, by definition, outside our experience, but all intelligible descriptions must be of things within our experience. The scriptural picture of heaven is therefore just as symbolical as the picture which our desire, unaided, invents for itself; heaven is not really full of jewellery any more than it is really the beauty of Nature, or a fine piece of music.

The difference is that the scriptural imagery has authority. It comes to us from writers who were closer to God than we, and it has stood the test of Christian experience down the centuries. The natural appeal of this authoritative imagery is to me, at first, very small. At first sight it chills, rather than awakes, my desire. And that is just what I ought to expect.

If Christianity could tell me no more of the far-off land than my own temperament led me to surmise already, then Christianity would be no higher than myself. If it has more to give me, I expect it to be less immediately attractive than “my own stuff”. Sophocles at first seems dull and cold to the boy who has only reached Shelley.
If our religion is something objective, then we must never avert our eyes from those elements in it which seem puzzling or repellent; for it will be precisely the puzzling or the repellent which conceals what we do not yet know and need to know.

"You show me the path of life - in your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures for evermore"

- Psalm 16:11

The promises of Scripture may very roughly be reduced to five heads. It is promised (1) that we shall be with Christ; (2) that we shall be like Him; (3) with an enormous wealth of imagery, that we shall have “glory”; (4) that we shall, in some sense, be fed or feasted or entertained; and (5) that we shall have some sort of official position in the universe - ruling cities, judging angels, being pillars of God’s temple.

The first question I ask about these promises is “Why any one of them except the first?” Can anything be added to the conception of being with Christ? For it must be true, as an old writer says, that he who has God and everything else has no more than he who has God only. I think the answer turns again on the nature of symbols. For though it may escape our notice at first glance, yet it is true that any conception of being with Christ which most of us can now form will be not very much less symbolical than the other promises; for it will smuggle in ideas of proximity in space and loving conversation as we now understand conversation, and it will probably concentrate on the humanity of Christ to the exclusion of His deity.

And, in fact, we find that those Christians who attend solely to this first promise always do fill it up with very earthly imagery indeed - in fact, with hymeneal or erotic imagery. I am not for a moment condemning such imagery. I heartily wish I could enter into it more deeply than I do, and pray that I yet shall. But my point is that this also is only a symbol, like the reality in some respects, but unlike it in others, and therefore needs correction from the different symbols in the other promises.

The variation of the promises does not mean that anything other than God will be our ultimate bliss; but because God is more than a Person, and lest we should imagine the joy of His presence too exclusively in terms of our present poor experience of personal love, with all its narrowness and strain and monotony, a dozen changing images, correcting and relieving each other, are supplied.

A weight of glory

I turn next to the idea of glory. There is no getting away from the fact that this idea is very prominent in the New Testament and in early Christian writings. Salvation is constantly associated with palms, crowns, white robes, thrones, and splendour like the sun and stars. All this makes no immediate appeal to me at all, and in that respect I fancy I am a typical modern.

Glory suggests two ideas to me, of which one seems wicked and the other ridiculous. Either glory means to me fame, or it means luminosity. As for the first, since to be famous means to be better known than other people, the desire for fame appears to me as a competitive passion and therefore of hell rather than heaven. As for the second, who wishes to become a kind of living electric light bulb?

When I began to look into this matter I was shocked to find such different Christians as Milton, Johnson, and Thomas Aquinas taking heavenly glory quite frankly in the sense of fame or good report. But not fame conferred by our fellow creatures - fame with God, approval or (I might say) “appreciation” by God. And then, when I had thought it over, I saw that this view was scriptural; nothing can eliminate from the parable the divine accolade, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” With that, a good deal of what I had been thinking all my life fell down like a house of cards. I suddenly remembered that no one can enter heaven
except as a child; and nothing is so obvious in a child - not in a conceited child, but in a good child - as its great and undisguised pleasure in being praised. Not only in a child, either, but even in a dog or a horse.

Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.

-Matt 25:23

Apparently what I had mistaken for humility had, all these years, prevented me from understanding what is in fact the humblest, the most childlike, the most creaturely of pleasures - nay, the specific pleasure of the inferior: the pleasure of a beast before men, a child before its father, a pupil before his teacher, a creature before its Creator. I am not forgetting how horribly this most innocent desire is parodied in our human ambitions, or how very quickly, in my own experience, the lawful pleasure of praise from those whom it was my duty to please turns into the deadly poison of self-admiration.

But I thought I could detect a moment - a very, very short moment - before this happened, during which the satisfaction of having pleased those whom I rightly loved and rightly feared was pure. And that is enough to raise our thoughts to what may happen when the redeemed soul, beyond all hope and nearly beyond belief, learns at last that she has pleased Him whom she was created to please. There will be no room for vanity then. She will be free from the miserable illusion that it is her doing.

With no taint of what we should now call self-approval she will most innocently rejoice in the thing that God has made her to be, and the moment which heals her old inferiority complex forever will also drown her pride deeper than Prospero’s book. Perfect humility dispenses with modesty.

If God is satisfied with the work, the work may be satisfied with itself; “it is not for her to bandy compliments with her Sovereign”. I can imagine someone saying that he dislikes my idea of heaven as a place where we are patted on the back. But proud misunderstanding is behind that dislike.

In the end that Face which is the delight or the terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or with the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be cured or disguised.

I read in a periodical the other day that the fundamental thing is how we think of God. By God Himself, it is not! How God thinks of us is not only more important, but infinitely more important. Indeed, how we think of
Him is of no importance except insofar as it is related to how He thinks of us. It is written that we shall “stand before” Him, shall appear, shall be inspected. The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God.

To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son - it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.

This article is excerpted from *The Weight of Glory*, which was first published as a single transcribed sermon, “The Weight of Glory” in 1941, appearing in the British journal, *Theology*, then in pamphlet form in 1942 by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London. It was published in book form in 1949, as a compilation of five addresses, in London by Geoffrey Bles under the title *Transposition and Other Addresses* and in the U.S. by the MacMillan Company under the title *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*. Copyright 1949, 1976 © C. S. Lewis Pte. Ltd.
Pleasure and Spiritual Fulfillment

from a homily by Gregory the Great (540-604 AD)

_O taste and see that the Lord is good! - Psalm 34:8_

We are aware of a difference between the pleasure we experience in our bodies and that we experience in our hearts. Physical pleasures, when we lack them, arouse in us an all-consuming desire for them. As soon as we possess and devour them, though, our satisfaction turns into distaste.

Pleasures of the spirit, on the other hand, seem distasteful when we do not possess them, but once they begin to be ours, our desire awakens. The more hungrily we seek them when we have begun to enjoy them, the more do we enjoy them even as we hunger for them. With our bodies it is the desire that gives us pleasure, not the gratification of our desires; with the spirit, as the desire is nothing, the fulfillment is all the more pleasing. Physical desire leads to satiety, and satiety leads to renewed desire.

The pleasure of the spirit increases our inner longing even while it satisfies us, since the more we savor it, the
more we perceive that there is something more to long for. When we do not possess it, however, we cannot love it, because its savor is unknown. Who can love what is unknown? Therefore the psalmist counsels us, *Taste and see that the Lord is good*. He means that we will not get to know the Lord's goodness unless we taste it. You must taste the food of life with your hearts, so that by trying it you can become capable of loving its goodness."...

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a treasure hidden in a field. Someone finds this treasure and hides it, and in the joy of discovery, goes and sell everything he or she possesses and buys that field... The treasure the Lord speaks of is the desire for heaven, and the field in which the treasure is hidden is our zeal in pursuing heaven. Those people truly sell everything and buy the field who renounce the pleasures of the flesh and conquer their desire for the things of the earth by the discipline of heaven. Then nothing their bodies value is agreeable to them any longer, and their spirits have no fear of physical death.

We must consider, my friends, why the Lord says that there is more joy in heaven over converted sinners than over the righteous who have stood firm. But is this not what we experience every day? We often see people who aren't oppressed by any burden of sin. They remain firm in the path of righteousness, they do nothing that is forbidden—but neither are they filled with eager longing for their heavenly home. They allow themselves all that is allowed, since they are aware that they have done nothing forbidden. Frequently they are reluctant to do the highest good because their consciences are blissfully untroubled.

On the other hand, sometimes those who remember that they have done something wrong feel the sting of conscience, and their sorrow sets them on fire with the love of God...

Let us enkindle our hearts, my friends, let our faith again grow warm in what it believes, let our desire for heavenly things take fire. So to love is to be already on the way. We should not let any adversity call us back from the joy of this inner festivity. No difficulty on their journey alters the desire of people wanting to reach some particular place. You must not let any seductive good fortune lead you astray: they are foolish travelers who see a pleasant meadow on their journey and forget where they are going.

We must let our hearts yearn for our heavenly home with all our desire; let them seek nothing in this world which they must leave quickly. If we are truly sheep of the heavenly Shepherd, and are not arrested by any delight along the way, we shall be satisfied with the eternal pastures on our arrival there.

(excerpt from *Be Friends of God: Spiritual Reading from Gregory the Great*, translated from the Latin by John Leinenweber, 1990, Cowley Publications, Cambridge, Massachusetts.)

Artwork credits: (c) https://sermonquotes.com/psalm-2/12157-taste-and-see-that-the-lord-is-good.html

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**Who was Gregory the Great?**

A few [highlights](http://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/october2018p5.htm) from his life written by editors of *Christianity Today Magazine*

**Noble beginning**

Gregory (540-604 AD) was descended from Roman nobles with a strong legacy of Christian faith. He was related to two previous popes (Felix III and Agapitus I), his aunts were nuns, and his parents joined cloisters in their later years. He was raised in Rome when it was only a shell of its former glory.

By the age of 30, he was the chief administrative official of the city, responsible for finances, police, provisioning, and public
works — an experience that helped him hone his administrative skills and, together with his personal wealth, gave him the opportunity to create six monasteries.

Yet Gregory remained dissatisfied, and upon his father's death in 574, he converted his house into a monastery and retired to a life of contemplation and prayer. During these years, the happiest in Gregory's life, he began a detailed study of the Scriptures. Here he also ruined his health with fasting, a sacrifice that would precipitate his early death.

**Called again to service**

His administrative skills did not remain unappreciated. In 577 Pope Benedict appointed Gregory one of the seven deacons of Rome, and Pope Pelagius II sent him to Constantinople in 578 as representative to the imperial court, then later recalled him to serve as his confidential adviser.

In 589 a flood destroyed the grain reserves of Rome, instigating a famine and then a plague that swept through Rome and killed Pope Pelagius. Gregory was elected to succeed him. Though he had tried to refuse the office, once elected, he went to work with vigor.

To deal with the famine, Gregory instituted a city-wide penance, fed people from the church's granaries, and organized systematic relief for the poor.

Gregory then set himself reforming the church. He removed high officials "for pride and misdeeds," enforced celibacy, replaced lay officers with monks, and initiated a reorganization of "the patrimony of Peter," the vast land holdings of the church. The efficient and humane management of these estates brought in the revenue necessary to run the church as well as perform tasks the imperial government was neglecting...

**Pastoral care**

Gregory also was actively concerned about the work of priests. He wrote a book of instruction for bishops, *On Pastoral Care*, in which he wrote, "Act in such a way that your humility may not be weakness, nor your authority be severity. Justice must be accompanied by humility, that humility may render justice lovable." It became a manual for holy life throughout the Middle Ages.

Gregory believed preaching was one of the clergy's primary duties, and he conducted a preaching tour of area churches. His Homilies on the Gospels was published in 591 and widely used for hundreds of years.

His interest in church music has been honored, as well: his name has been given to the plainsong ("Gregorian chant") that developed over the next few hundred years.

His frequent correspondence across the world shows him well aware of evangelistic opportunities in Britain. So it is not surprising that in 596 he sent Augustine, along with 40 monks, on a mission to "this far corner of the world."
From Glory to Glory: Transformation in Christ

A New Teaching Series by Dan Keating

We see in our lives some continued shortcomings or sin and wonder how the transformative power of Christ is actually being manifested. “From Glory to Glory: Transformation in Christ” is a four-part teaching series on God’s transformative work in our lives.

It is part of the same project that produced the “Crushing the Serpent’s Head: Christ’s Victory and Ours” series from earlier this year. “Leaven for Living” seeks to produce good teaching material and make it available online at a low cost.

This series will explore God’s action and ours in transforming us more into his image and likeness. It will also take a look at the roles of trials, testing, and suffering as well as faith, hope, and love.

Each week you will have access to a short (~15 minute), lively talk as well as a brief reading from classic and contemporary Christian sources. You will also receive questions to foster personal reflection and application of the teaching. These questions and the course content can be used individually, on the commute to work, or you may want to go through the material together in your small group.

This series will be given exclusively by Dan Keating. This series will begin in the fall. Precise dates will follow.

Registration price is set at $10 USD per user and it gives you access to the whole series and materials.

Find more information or sign up here.
If you have any questions, please contact Tim Ong.
Costly, Difficult, and Inconvenient Love for God

by Tom Caballes

"[Christ Jesus] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." - Philippians 2:6-8 ESV

We live in a world where love has been romanticized too much. We can see this fact in the movies and TV shows we watch. Why? Romantic love sells. There is a place for romantic love, especially in courtship and marriage, but if that kind of love is all we look for with God, then we become deluded. True love for God is far from romantic love. It is many times hidden, tedious, and unglamorous. It may seem unrewarded and unrecognized – at least here on earth.

At times, true love for God is not cheap, easy or comfortable; it may be costly, difficult, and inconvenient. Jesus becoming human to die for us is like you becoming a cockroach because you love those critters so much that you become one of them to die on their behalf. Think about that! If that is how Jesus loved us, should not
we be ready to love Him back in a similar way? It will not always be that way – but are you ready, when called, to love God that is costly, challenging, and inconvenient?

So How Do We Grow in Loving God in the Same Way He Loved Us?

1. Offer your life to God fully – no ifs and buts; no strings attached. Desire to love God come hell or high waters, no matter how much it would cost, no matter how hard it might be, and no matter how inconvenient it could get. Desire to love God with all of your life for the rest of your life. Live a sacrificial love for God daily.

2. Be formed by the word of God. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2 ESV) Let God transform your selfish love to one that is like God’s love for us – full, lavish, and unconditional.

3. Offer your heartaches, failures, and disappointments to God. Life on this side of eternity is not meant to be perfect; if it were perfect, why would we wait for our eternal hope in God? Some of our prayers will remain unanswered. Can we still love God even if our prayers do not go our way? Or would we act like spoiled brats who will throw a tantrum before God? Even at times of heartaches, confusion, and disappointments, we can still love God because we know everything will turn out good for those who love Him – see Romans 8:28.

4. Aim to live a martyrs’ life - not necessarily the one who will give his life fully to God once, but one who will offer everything he has to God daily in costly love. It may come in the form of forbearing a grumpy office mate daily or forgiving someone who has hurt you badly – these are all chances to offer a costly love for God. Practice denying yourself; since you belong to God, you are not your own anymore – see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

5. We can only love God based on how much understanding and appreciation we have of how much God loves us first – see Ephesians 3:14-19. Live a life of gratitude for God’s love for you. For those who are forgiven much, loves much. Streams of costly, difficult, and inconvenient love for God will overflow out of your heart naturally the more you know and draw closer to Him. Loving God will become a pleasure rather than a pain. And you cannot outdo God in His love for you! So dwell, bathe, and meditate on God’s love for you always.

Other Scripture passages:

1. “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:12-13 ESV)

2. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:16 ESV)

3. Other Bible verses: John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 13: 1-7; Ephesians 5:1-2; Galatians 2:20; and Romans 8:35.

For personal reflection or group sharing

- In what ways does your love for God cost you, inconvenience you, or difficult for you to do?
- How can you live a daily martyr’s life in your circumstances?
Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the Lamb of God, a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads Kairos New Zealand, an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.
Being Pruned and Bearing Fruit

by Tom Caballes

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

- John 15:1-2 ESV

Isn’t it easier if once we decided to follow and serve the Lord, everything else would fall into place? No more personal struggles, relationship issues, financial challenges, and so on. Sometimes, life is like a whack-a-mole arcade game - as time moves on, the challenges seem to increase in frequency and with greater difficulty, and we feel like giving up. But God uses those difficulties in life to mould us and shape to be more like Him – and therefore they increase our capacity to love and serve Him and His people. God is committed to continue and finish the work He began in you [see Philippians 1:6]. Are you ready to live a lifetime of pruning so you will continually bear fruit? He will not finish pruning you until you are like Christ’s image – that is God’s goal in you.

So How Do We Become More Open to Being Pruned So We Can Bear More Fruit?
1. Be realistic about your expectations in life. Do not assume perfection will ever come on this side of eternity; if things go well, then all is good. But more often than not, things go array in life – things you have not faced before. Be ready for a lifetime of pruning. Hope for the best, but be prepared when things go haywire in life.

2. Be a learner for a lifetime. Learning does not stop when we finish school or university; when we follow Jesus, we enter into a lifetime school of love. Jesus is our teacher by showing us how to act, think, and behave like Him. Like imperfect students, we fail at times by being selfish and sinning. Repent. Be open-minded to learn to be a better spouse, parent, worker, servant, and a brother or sister to your brothers and sisters. As you get older, circumstances change; you need to be open to learning to adapt to new ways or responding lovingly.

3. Live with a goal of pleasing and loving God in mind, not people. If our goal in life is to please someone other than God, we are not allowing God to prune us. No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. (Matthew 6:24a ESV)

4. Grow in the wisdom and knowledge of God. There are many ways we learn – including experiencing mistakes, learning from someone else’s mistakes, and by learning God’s Word for us. If we come to know God’s wisdom for us in different situations, we avoid the unnecessary errors we commit to getting through life. Immerse your mind primarily in God’s Word and in good spiritual books. Let your mind be held captive by God’s Word.

5. Remember that God is mainly concerned about forming your character, not your riches or success in life. When you said your yes to God, you began a lifetime of transformation in becoming more like Jesus day by day, little by little. When you start your day and look in a mirror, do you see Jesus’ reflection? If not yet, be ready for some pruning during the day – some ‘stretching’ here and there, some forgiveness needed, or some forbearance required. Great things can result from small actions done consistently day by day.

6. Never give up! We will only win the prize at the end of our journey. When times are challenging, and it seems like the mountain you are climbing is too high, look to Jesus. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith… (Hebrews 12:1-2a ESV) We might need to rest and pause for a while in our spiritual race, but we should never give up.

Other Scripture passages:

1. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? (Hebrews 12:6-7a ESV)

2. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:11 ESV)

3. Other Bible verses: Psalm 94:12-14; Proverbs 3:11-12; Revelations 3:19; and Deuteronomy 8:5.

For personal reflection or group sharing

- In what ways do you need to be pruned by God so you can bear more fruit?
- Are you ready to increase your capacity to love and serve God by being pruned daily?
Tom Caballes is the National Senior Administrator and a National Coordinator of the Lamb of God, a community of the Sword of the Spirit with 7 branches located throughout New Zealand. Tom also leads Kairos New Zealand, an outreach program for high school, university, and post-university aged people.

Tom and his wife Mhel and their two daughters live in Wellington, New Zealand.
Jesus the Good Shepherd Community celebrated its 22nd Anniversary with great joy. The community was established on 8 September 1996. From a small group of 4 couples, the community has now grown to nearly 45 adults, 11 youth and 25 children. Truly, here “the Lord has commanded his blessing: life forevermore.”

The celebrations started off with the Edwin Andrade, the Senior Coordinator, sharing a few remarks on how community began and how it has been a walk in faith with the Lord leading step by step. We then began the Lord’s Day Celebration interspersed with songs of joyous praise and thanks.

Each and every member had a heart filled with thanksgiving as most of us have immigrated from India and started life from scratch in Canada.

God’s generosity and blessings on every family could be seen in the many children and youth who were present.

We then had the ceremonial cutting of the cake which turned out to be a combination of an anniversary and 1st birthday cake of the twin boys born last year – Pablo and Mateo, born to Rolando and Denise. The 2 babies were born with many complications around their birth but the Lord’s hand was upon the mother in a special way during that time. Much prayer and help from the whole community carried their parents to the arrival of their precious boys. Their two sisters were ecstatic – now each had one to play with. It was a special moment in the evening.
We then had 5 of our children give their short testimonies of their recent trip to the People of God summer camp in Pittsburg. There was one thread among all the testimonies – they had so much fun and are all planning to go back next year. Our parent volunteer, Dylan, said it was the highlight of his summer and he learnt a lot from his experience.

A slide show presentation was done of all the events of the last year including our children’s March Break Camp, the Summer Jam, the Youth events, the annual family enrichment weekend at the cottage, the Life in the Spirit Seminars, Christmas celebrations, and many more. It brought back some good memories of loving fellowship and a lot of laughs.

If there is one thing that the members can do well is to have fun and enjoy good food.

All in all, it was an evening to remember and the verse that we have been receiving consistently over the years John 10:10, “I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly” is always a testament to his covenantal love and faithfulness to us as members of the community.

May, Jesus the Good Shepherd, continue to watch over and guide us. May he lead us in the path that He has shown and just as he laid down his life for his sheep, may we reflect his likeness and lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Anita Andrade is a member of the Jesus: the Good Shepherd community in Toronto, Canada.
Three Men from Three Different Countries
Make their Lifelong Commitment to the Servants of the Word

August 2018

At the end of August during the conclusion of the Servants of the Word Brotherhood Council Meetings in Chelsea, Michigan USA, Philip Morrison (Northern Ireland), Jean Pierre Fahd (Lebanon) and Jerome Quiring (Philippines), made their lifelong commitment to the Servants of the Word. Here is a brief introduction to each of these men:

Phil Morrison grew up on a dairy farm in rural County Down, Northern Ireland. At the age of 18 he took a GAP Year with Youth Initiatives in Belfast, which is where his journey with the Servants of the Word began, becoming an affiliate a year later. He studied Social Anthropology at the University of Edinburgh for four years, before beginning further discernment with the brothers.

His first experience of living with the Servants of the Word was in London, England where he served mainly doing youth work and some student ministry, before moving to Michigan, for two years of further formation. For the last three years Phil has lived in Belfast focusing on student ministry with UCO Belfast and also with the church he attends. Phil has a focus on discipleship and building community amongst students. Amongst other things he enjoys playing the saxophone and following rugby and...
Jean-Pierre (a.k.a. JP) is originally from Lebanon, where he grew up in a Christian family that is part of the People of God, a Sword of the Spirit community. He is the eldest of four children, followed by his sister Nadira, his brother Mark, and his sister Najat. He is not the first Fahd to make his lifelong commitment – his cousin Joe made his Lifelong Commitment four years ago!

JP studied Computer and Communications Engineering at the American University of Beirut. Right after graduating, he moved in to our house in Belfast for two years. Then he spent the two years in our International Formation Household in Ann Arbor, and after making his first temporary commitment to the brotherhood he moved to London where he has been living for the last three years. JP’s analytical abilities have allowed him to contribute greatly to the mission of the brotherhood. He serves in finances and IT and he is also the steward of our London house, which involves maintaining the house and overseeing the brothers there in their house service. In addition to all that, JP serves with the Antioch community youth group and with university students in Koinonia. His main role in Koinonia is caring pastorally for some of the men as well as caring for the worship environment and training students to lead prayer meetings. In his free time, he likes to hang out with people, read a good novel, go for a run, or play football (soccer).

Jerome “JR” Quiring had an unusual discernment process. When he first lived with us and was in training for two years, he discerned not to continue with the brotherhood. However, two years after that, he reconsidered. This time he heard God call him to serve him as part of the brotherhood. As of yesterday, he’s now a lifelong brother!

JR is not new to making “surprise” moves. His father is a doctor, and growing up he and his three older brothers were dead set on following suit. After graduating from the University of the Philippines with a degree in Public Health, many anticipated that he would be a successful medical doctor and practice in the small town where he grew up, Gubat. (Gubat is a coastal paradise south of Manila). But, this was not the case. Upon graduation he decided not to go to medical school and that decision led him two more important decisions. First, he decided to work full-time for Christ’s Youth in Action (CYA), the college outreach he was part of when he first met the
brotherhood. Secondly, he decided to join the Servants of the Word.

When he considers it, JR sometimes still finds himself in awe of how things have turned out, because the world has a million choices to offer. He could have pursued a hollywood dream but he is content with just “belting out” around the house or occasionally performing for his community. He could have jumped on to being a “legit” triathlete, but he is fine with just biking to his office once in a while, swimming twice a week in a (not-so-clean) pool nearby and running after college guys who need to encounter Christ. For a 30-year old guy, there’s still a lot more “could-have-beens”, but JR firmly believes that his surprise-filled life is not a surprise to God–but rather it’s in the hands of the sovereign God who has great plans for him!

> Visit the Servants of the Word website to see more about their life

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“38 years ago today (September 14) the **Brotherhood of Hope** was founded! We are eternally grateful to the Lord for His faithful love shown through the Triumph of the Cross! Grateful also for the faithful legacy of our founding brothers, Fr. Philip, Br. Stephen and Fr. Paul. Thank you brothers for your generous "YES!" over these many years!”

Source: [The Brotherhood of Hope Facebook page](https://www.brotherhoodofhope.org)

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**Brother Ken Appuzzo Reflects on the "Disappearing Vocation" to Religious Life and his Decision to Join the Brotherhood of Hope**

Brother Ken Apuzzo is the general superior of the Brotherhood of Hope, a new community of men who share the Catholic faith with students on secular college campuses. He ministers at the University of Minnesota.

Brother Ken is from the Bronx in New York City. While attending Rutgers University in New Jersey, he met the brothers, who had just begun doing campus ministry. He went on retreat with them, and his life was changed. He said, “I had been Catholic, but never had a personal encounter with the Lord. I had faith that God existed, but He was not part of my life.”

He was also impressed with the quality of men who were joining the Brotherhood of Hope. The community’s founder, Fr. Philip Merdinger, he continued, “had clear conviction and insight into collapse of celibacy in the..."
Church … in our sex-crazed age, lifelong religious celibacy had become an absurdity to many people.”

Brother Ken calls the vocation to become a brother a “disappearing vocation,” and believes that “the Lord is using the Brotherhood of Hope to bring about a religious renewal.”

Brother Ken and his fellow brothers follow a “daily rhythm of prayer,” which includes an hour of adoration. They then head out to their assigned college campuses, meeting and working with students. Many have been receptive to the brothers’ message, he said, “discovering God’s love, with many moving on to become leaders in the Church.”

This reflection was written by Jim Graves for the National Catholic Register Blog, dated September 1, 2018
Sexual Purity: Beyond Legalism

When people grasp God’s intentions in giving his commandments, they can put their whole hearts into obeying him

by Steve Clark

This article was originally published in Pastoral Renewal, a journal of the Sword of the Spirit, addressed to pastoral leaders across the various churches and traditions. It draws from wisdom that God is giving to leaders throughout the churches and it offers approaches that have been tested by experience. It speaks in loyalty to God's word, in concern for all of the Christian people, and in confidence that God is opening ways for a profound pastoral renewal in the churches. -ed.

As pastoral leaders, we should not simply tell people what God’s law forbids. We should teach them the principle that one ought to understand God’s intention in giving his commandments. When people grasp God’s intentions, they can put their whole hearts into obeying him, not just being satisfied with eliminating the serious violations of the commandments, but also shaping the way they live in every respect in order to arrive at his purposes.

Ideal of a well-ordered life
For instance, with regard to sex, it is particularly helpful for people to see that the Lord holds up for us the
ideal of a well-ordered life. When sex is properly ordered in marriage, it strengthens family life. That, in turn, strengthens the life of the church and society. Bringing sex into proper order involves individual self-control, mastery over our desires. From a Christian standpoint, this is a positive ideal.

In getting this ideal across, we are working against the modern view that any form of sex is okay as long as it is “fulfilling,” which generally means as long as it gives pleasure.

From a scriptural perspective, this is a degraded view of sex. It treats sex as something an animal does rather than as something that a human being does. Animals follow their instincts. Human beings use their minds to understand God’s purposes for life, and make their decisions in line with those purposes. The Lord is calling us to communicate this vision to the people we are leading.

Another important principle to teach is this: **That which shares in the nature of what is forbidden is likewise forbidden**. We need to do more than merely try to avoid the grossest violations of God’s law. We should also exclude behavior that goes part way to violating the law, even while not perhaps violating it in its fullness.

“Making out” (“necking,” petting) is an example. Many Christians today would say that, while fornication is out (or, as they would put it, “going all the way” is out), it is alright to make out for a little recreation, or for personal exploration, or to assuage our sexual desires. But the traditional Christian view is that making out constitutes engaging in fornication or adultery.

For one thing, it is only common sense that making out does not assuage sexual desires. God specifically designed it to arouse them, not assuage them.

For another, there is an integrity to the scriptural understanding of sexual relations, which includes all those initial activities which are a natural part of intercourse. Thus, Scripture often refers to the sexual act by simply mentioning the first stage of it: for instance, “uncovering nakedness” (see Leviticus 18). That phrase does not mean simply having no clothes on. It means the kind of unclothing that involves moving toward having sexual relations.

**Scripture teaches an appropriate distance between men and women**

Scripture also uses the expression, “approach a woman” (Leviticus 18:6,19). This implies that there is an appropriate distance between men and women, and that to violate it is already to enter on the process of fornication.

“Not touch a woman” is another biblical expression for sexual relations (1 Corinthians 7:1). It does not mean shaking hands, but the sort of touching that is the beginning of the process of sexual relations.

From this scriptural perspective, engaging in the initial stages may be less serious than doing everything one could possibly do in the act of fornication. But just because a person does not bring the sexual act to completion does not mean that he or she has not begun to commit fornication.

**Ignoring the spirit or purpose of the law**

It is interesting that many modern people who claim to abhor “legalism” actually take refuge in a kind of legalism when it comes to sexual morality. They seek to make space for everything that stops short of a full-scale violation of the letter of the law, and do not consider the spirit, or purpose of the law.

One of the clearest signs of this sort of thing is the question: “How far can I go and not sin?” It is already the wrong question, indicating that the person who asks it is not yet living the life of a disciple who puts his or her
mind, heart, spirit and strength into loving the Lord and accomplishing his purposes.

The right question is: “What can I do to be fully in the right place in this area? How can I live my life in all respects in a way that most corresponds to God’s purpose and God’s order for this area of my life?”

Avoiding situations and behavior that lead to violating God's law
A third principle is this: **What leads to violation of the commandment should be avoided if reasonably possible; what leads to keeping it should be done if reasonably possible.**

For example, we should avoid immodesty, uncontrolled thoughts, pornography, hanging out with the wrong people, going to the wrong places, and so on. Those things lead us and others into trouble.

Take immodest dress, for example. Dressing immodestly may or may not affect the person who is doing it, but it certainly affects some other people. We should lead people to be concerned not only for keeping themselves in the right place, but also for helping others to stay in the right place.

Developing a sound and positive pastoral approach to dating and courtship
The positive side of the principle means that we should build into our life together in the church things that will help us fulfill the purposes of God’s commandments. We want to further the right use of the sexual capability that God has put in us.

An example of a positive response would be to develop a sound pastoral approach to dating and courtship. First Thessalonians 4:3-8 instructs us to abstain from sexual immorality and to enter marriage in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathens who do not know God. How might we help the members of the church do just this?

Teaching the Christian view of marriage and qualities of character needed
A key element of a pastoral strategy would be to teach the Christian view of marriage, with its responsibilities – which is a model of marriage that many Christians today do not understand. On this basis, we can encourage singles to think about the qualities of character that they and their spouse would need.

In personal pastoral care, we can steer them away from making a decision to marry mainly on the basis of emotional attraction, and help them focus their attention on objective issues, such as personal readiness and common vision, that are crucial for a successful marriage.

And we can guide them through the courtship process in ways that abet sober, prayerful decision-making, and away form approaches that tend toward indulging emotional infatuation or sexual temptation.

We will treat the Christian view of marriage and what it needs in a later article.

> See related article: [Getting Free of Sexual Sin: Toward a spiritual solution to a spiritual problem](http://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/october2018p11.htm), by Ralph Martin


> See other articles by [Steve Clark](http://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/discovery) in *Living Bulwark*

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Is Chastity an Outdated Virtue?

an essay by C.S. Lewis

C.S. Lewis was one of the brightest Christian apologists of the 20th century. He had a uniquely practical approach to understanding God and his ways. His casual tone of writing and simple approach to big issues and fiercely-debated topics makes his works worthy of reading and re-reading.

In his classic Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis covers a myriad of topics related to the Christian faith. In his section on Christian morality, he deals with the subject of chastity. In this essay he responds to pervading cultural beliefs about sexuality, and finishes with a strong message to those who want to overcome temptation.

Lewis published Mere Christianity in 1952 and in this excerpt he refers to the lies about sex we’ve been fed “for the last twenty years.” Lewis has been dead for over 45 years, so we can only surmise what Lewis would say today about the cultural messages about sex:

Chastity is the most unpopular of the Christian virtues. There is no getting away from it: the old Christian rule is, “Either marriage, with complete faithfulness to your partner, or else total abstinence.” Now this is so
difficult and so contrary to our instincts, that obviously either Christianity is wrong or our sexual instinct, as it now is, has gone wrong. One or the other. Of course, being a Christian, I think it is the instinct which has gone wrong.

. . . You can get a large audience together for a strip-tease act—that is, to watch a girl undress on the stage. Now suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food? And would not anyone who had grown up in a different world think there was something equally queer about the state of the sex instinct among us?

. . . [Y]ou and I, for the last twenty years, have been fed all day long on good solid lies about sex. We have been told, till one is sick of hearing it, that sexual desire is in the same state as any of our other natural desires and that if only we abandon the silly old Victorian idea of hushing it up, everything in the garden will be lovely. It is not true. The moment you look at the facts, and away from the propaganda, you see that it is not.

They tell you sex has become a mess because it was hushed up. But for the last twenty years it has not been hushed up. It has been chattered about all day long. Yet it is still in a mess. If hushing up had been the cause of the trouble, ventilation would have set it right. But it has not. I think it is the other way round. I think the human race originally hushed it up because it had become such a mess. Modern people are always saying, “Sex is nothing to be ashamed of.” They may mean two things. They may mean “There is nothing to be ashamed of in the fact that the human race reproduces itself in a certain way, nor in the fact that it gives pleasure.” If they mean that, they are right. Christianity says the same. It is not the thing, nor the pleasure, that is the trouble. The old Christian teachers said that if man had never fallen, sexual pleasure, instead of being less than it is now, would actually have been greater. I know some muddle-headed Christians have talked as if Christianity thought that sex, or the body, or pleasure, were bad in themselves. But they were wrong. Christianity is almost the only one of the great religions which thoroughly approves of the body—which believes that matter is good, that God Himself once took on a human body, that some kind of body is going to be given to us even in Heaven and is going to be an essential part of our happiness, our beauty, and our energy. Christianity has glorified marriage more than any other religion: and nearly all the greatest love poetry in the world has been produced by Christians. If anyone says that sex, in itself, is bad, Christianity contradicts him at once. But, of course, when people say, “Sex is nothing to be ashamed of,” they may mean “the state into which the sexual instinct has now got is nothing to be ashamed of.”

If they mean that, I think they are wrong. I think it is everything to be ashamed of. There is nothing to be ashamed of in enjoying your food: there would be everything to be ashamed of if half the world made food the main interest of their lives and spent their time looking at pictures of food and dribbling and smacking their lips. I do not say you and I are individually responsible for the present situation. Our ancestors have handed over to us organisms which are warped in this respect: and we grow up surrounded by propaganda in favour of unchastity.

There are people who want to keep our sex instinct inflamed in order to make money out of us. Because, of course, a man with an obsession is a man who has very little sales-resistance. God knows our situation; He will not judge us as if we had no difficulties to overcome. What matters is the sincerity and perseverance of our will to overcome them.

Before we can be cured we must want to be cured. Those who really wish for help will get it; but for many modern people even the wish is difficult. It is easy to think that we want something when we do not really
A famous Christian long ago told us that when he was a young man he prayed constantly for chastity; but years later he realised that while his lips had been saying, “Oh Lord, make me chaste,” his heart had been secretly adding, “But please don’t do it just yet.” This may happen in prayers for other virtues too; but there are three reasons why it is now specially difficult for us to desire—let alone to achieve—complete chastity.

In the first place our warped natures, the devils who tempt us, and all the contemporary propaganda for lust, combine to make us feel that the desires we are resisting are so “natural,” so “healthy,” and so reasonable, that it is almost perverse and abnormal to resist them. Poster after poster, film after film, novel after novel, associate the idea of sexual indulgence with the ideas of health, normality, youth, frankness, and good humour. Now this association is a lie. Like all powerful lies, it is based on a truth—the truth, acknowledged above, that sex in itself (apart from the excesses and obsessions that have grown round it) is “normal” and “healthy,” and all the rest of it.

The lie consists in the suggestion that any sexual act to which you are tempted at the moment is also healthy and normal. Now this, on any conceivable view, and quite apart from Christianity, must be nonsense. Surrender to all our desires obviously leads to impotence, disease, jealousies, lies, concealment, and everything that is the reverse of health, good humour, and frankness.

For any happiness, even in this world, quite a lot of restraint is going to be necessary; so the claim made by every desire, when it is strong, to be healthy and reasonable, counts for nothing. Every sane and civilised man must have some set of principles by which he chooses to reject some of his desires and to permit others. One man does this on Christian principles, another on hygienic principles, another on sociological principles. The real conflict is not between Christianity and “nature,” but between Christian principle and other principles in the control of “nature.” For “nature” (in the sense of natural desire) will have to be controlled anyway, unless you are going to ruin your whole life. The Christian principles are, admittedly, stricter than the others; but then we think you will get help towards obeying them which you will not get towards obeying the others.

In the second place, many people are deterred from seriously attempting Christian chastity because they think (before trying) that it is impossible. But when a thing has to be attempted, one must never think about possibility or impossibility. Faced with an optional question in an examination paper, one considers whether one can do it or not: faced with a compulsory question, one must do the best one can. You may get some marks for a very imperfect answer: you will certainly get none for leaving the question alone. Not only in examinations but in war, in mountain climbing, in learning to skate, or swim, or ride a bicycle, even in fastening a stiff collar with cold fingers, people quite often do what seemed impossible before they did it. It is wonderful what you can do when you have to.

We may, indeed, be sure that perfect chastity—like perfect charity—will not be attained by any merely human efforts. You must ask for God’s help. Even when you have done so, it may seem to you for a long time that no help, or less help than you need, is being given. Never mind. After each failure, ask forgiveness, pick yourself up, and try again. Very often what God first helps us towards is not the virtue itself but just this power of always trying again. For however important chastity (or courage, or truthfulness, or any other virtue) may be, this process trains us in habits of the soul which are more important still. It cures our illusions about ourselves and teaches us to depend on God. We learn, on the one hand, that we cannot trust ourselves even in our best moments, and, on the other, that we need not despair even in our worst, for our failures are forgiven. The only fatal thing is to sit down content with anything less than perfection.

Thirdly, people often misunderstand what psychology teaches about “repressions.” It teaches us that “repressed” sex is dangerous. But “repressed” is here a technical term: it does not mean “suppressed” in the
sense of “denied” or “resisted.” A repressed desire or thought is one which has been thrust into the subconscious (usually at a very early age) and can now come before the mind only in a disguised and unrecognisable form. Repressed sexuality does not appear to the patient to be sexuality at all. When an adolescent or an adult is engaged in resisting a conscious desire, he is not dealing with a repression nor is he in the least danger of creating a repression. On the contrary, those who are seriously attempting chastity are more conscious, and soon know a great deal more about their own sexuality than anyone else. They come to know their desires as Wellington knew Napoleon, or as Sherlock Holmes knew Moriarty; as a rat-catcher knows rats or a plumber knows about leaky pipes. Virtue—even attempted virtue—brings light; indulgence brings fog.

Finally, though I have had to speak at some length about sex, I want to make it as clear as I possibly can that the centre of Christian morality is not here. If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as the supreme vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronising and spoiling sport, and back-biting; the pleasures of power, of hatred. For there are two things inside me, competing with the human self which I must try to become. They are the Animal self, and the Diabolical self. The Diabolical self is the worse of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither.

– *Mere Christianity*, Book 4, Chapter 3 "Time and Beyond Time"(Geoffrey Bles 1952, Macmillan, 1952)

Clive Staples Lewis (1898 – 1963), commonly referred to as C. S. Lewis and known to his friends and family as Jack, was an Irish-born British novelist, academic, medievalist, literary critic, essayist, lay theologian and Christian apologist. He is also known for his fiction, especially *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Space Trilogy*.

Lewis was a close friend of J. R. R. Tolkien, and both authors were leading figures in the English faculty at Oxford University and in the informal Oxford literary group known as the “Inklings”. According to his memoir *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis had been baptised in the Church of Ireland at birth, but fell away from his faith during his adolescence. Owing to the influence of Tolkien and other friends, at the age of 32 Lewis returned to Christianity, becoming “a very ordinary layman of the Church of England”. His conversion had a profound effect on his work, and his wartime radio broadcasts on the subject of Christianity brought him wide acclaim.

Top illustration of *The Pear of Great Price*, painting by Michael O'Brien

Return to Table of Contents or Archives • (c) copyright 2018 The Sword of the Spirit
The Full Body of Truth
An Interview with Nancy Pearcey
by Terrell Clemmons

Your latest book, *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, addresses the most pressing category of ideologies today, the sexual ones.

Every day in the media we are bombarded with moral issues like abortion, assisted suicide, homosexuality, transgenderism, and so on. Typically, we try to answer each issue separately. But I discovered that there is a common secular worldview that underlies them all, and if we master that, we will be much more effective. It's a worldview that reduces the body to a product of blind, material forces, and then draws the logical conclusion that the body has little value or worth. This devaluing of the body has wide-ranging consequences.

All the hot-button moral issues rest on your view of the body. For example, perhaps the most controversial issue over the past decades has been homosexuality. No one really denies that in terms of biology, physiology, and anatomy, males and females are counterparts to one another. If I adopt a same-sex identity, then, I contradict my own biology. Implicitly, I am saying, Why should I take any cues from my body in framing my sexual identity? Why should I give my body a voice in my moral choices? Queer theorists themselves talk about a "mismatch" between the body and sexual desire. Today it is widely accepted that when there is a disjunction between body and mind, the mind wins. But why? Why accept such a low view of the body?

Transgenderism gives an even clearer example. As a BBC documentary puts it, at the heart of that debate is the idea that "your mind can be at war with your body." I am currently reading a book by a Princeton professor
defending transgenderism, yet she admits that it involves "disjunction," "self-division," and "self-estrangement."

The solution is to show that the biblical ethic overcomes that self-division and self-estrangement. It grants the body the dignity of being an integral part of the person. It is one aspect of the image of God. What God creates has inherent dignity. Christians should be reaching out with a positive message that the Bible actually supports a higher view of the value and dignity of the body than any secular ethic.

What do you see as the greatest threat to the next generation?

The greatest threats are the issues covered in *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality* because they involve the family - and children who grow up without a secure, loving family do not do as well in any area of life, including their spiritual and intellectual lives. Practices like contraception, abortion, and artificial reproduction are already creating an attitude that having a child is merely a lifestyle choice, an accessory to enrich adult lives and meet adult needs. The hookup culture is destroying people's ability to form the secure, exclusive relationships they need to create stable, happy families. Porn is decimating a generation of young people who are literally being trained to objectify others for their own sexual gratification. When they marry, they are shocked - shocked - to discover that they are unable to experience a sexual response with a real live person. They are only able to respond to pornography. Homosexuality and transgenderism are both creating a gender-free society by denying the value and purpose of biological sex as the foundation for gender identity and marriage.

We are often told that these issues won't affect anyone else, but that is not true. As the law changes, we are all affected. In a free society, certain rights are honored as pre-political rights. That means the state does not create them but only recognizes them as a pre-existing fact. For example, the right to life used to be a pre-political right - something you had just because you were human. But the only way the state could legalize abortion was by first deciding that some *humans* are not *persons* with a right to legal protection. The state now decides who qualifies for human rights, apart from biology. That is a huge power grab by the state, and it means we are all at risk. No one has a right to life now by the sheer fact of being human, but only at the dispensation of the state.

In the same way, marriage used to be a pre-political right based on the fact that humans are a sexually reproducing species. But the only way the state could legalize same-sex marriage was by denying the biological basis of marriage and redefining it as a purely emotional commitment, which is what the Supreme Court did in its *Obergefell* decision. The state no longer merely recognizes marriage as a pre-political right but has claimed the right to decide what marriage is, apart from biology.

Gender used to follow from your biological sex. But the only way the state can treat a trans woman (born male) the same as a biological woman is by dismissing biology as irrelevant. That's why public schools are enforcing policies telling teachers whom they must call "he" and "she," regardless of the student's biological sex.

Same-sex activists say the next step is parenthood. In a same-sex couple, at least one parent is not biologically related to any children they have. So the only way the state can treat same-sex parents the same as opposite-sex parents is by dismissing biology as irrelevant and then substituting a new definition of "parent" (perhaps based on emotional bonds). You will be your child's parent only at the permission of the state.

And what the state gives, the state can take away. Human rights are no longer "unalienable." These issues are sold to the public as a way of expanding choice. But in reality, they hand over power to the state.
What's your greatest joy?

In recent years, one of the things that has been most exciting is that I discovered how to be absolutely certain that Christianity is true. Because I used to be an agnostic, I have always felt responsible to answer the questions and objections raised by agnostics and atheists. I was also concerned to stay intellectually honest myself, open to the possibility that someday I would encounter an objection to Christianity that I could not answer - something that would persuade me that Christianity might be false after all.

But in the course of writing *Finding Truth*, I came to see that any non-Christian worldview has to be false. Why? To think at all, you have to take something as the ultimate reality - the uncaused cause of everything else. And as Paul says in Romans 1, if you don't start with the transcendent Creator, you will start with something in creation. After all, what else is there? There's God and creation. So, if you reject God, you must propose some part of creation as the ultimate reality. And that something, Paul says, is your god substitute, your idol.

But because your surrogate god is something in creation, it will always be too "small" to explain all of reality. Why is that? Because it is part of creation, and a part is always too small to explain the whole. Only a transcendent God can give us a perspective on the whole.

This strategy can be used on any worldview. For example, the prevailing philosophy in the universities today is materialism, the claim that matter is all that exists. Is matter part of creation? Sure it is. So it fits the definition of idol in Romans 1. In materialism, matter is the god substitute - the ultimate explainer for everything that exists. The implication is that whatever is not material is not real - spirit, mind, free will, love, moral sense, aesthetic sense, and consciousness itself (yes, the cutting-edge scientists today deny that even consciousness is real). These things don't fit into the "box" of matter, so they are dismissed as illusions.

What that means, though, is that materialism cannot explain a good deal of what humans throughout history have experienced as real. (In *Finding Truth*, I give several surprising quotes from leading scientists who admit that their materialistic worldview does not explain reality as they themselves experience it.)

Every worldview proposes a "box" and then tries to fit all of reality into its box. But because its box is a part of the created order, it will always be too small. You can be absolutely sure of that. It is strictly logical. And that will give you the confidence that you will never encounter a worldview, philosophy, or system of thought that you cannot answer.

What do you encourage your students to do, given the culture in which we live?

Be intentional about your Christian faith. Make sure it's not something you just inherited from your parents or church. Think through for yourself why it is true. Work apologetics into every subject matter, so that you have a Christian worldview on science, politics, psychology, English - everything you study, everything you do. Your goal should be to know not only what a biblical worldview is, but also why it is true.

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This article is excerpted from *The Full Body of Truth*, in *Salvo Issue #45*, 2018.
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Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
Matthew 5:8

Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.
2 Corinthians 7:1

Søren Kierkegaard says that purity of heart is to will one thing. That one thing is God and his will. Apart from God, our hearts remain hopelessly divided. What is impurity, then? Impurity is separation from God. In the sexual sphere it is the misuse of sex, which occurs whenever sex is used in any way that is forbidden by him.

Impurity never pollutes us from without. It cannot be outwardly wiped away at will. Originating in our
imagination, it breaks out from inside us like an infected sore (Matt. 15:16–20). An impure heart is never satisfied, never whole: it always wants to steal something for itself, and even then lusts for still more. Impurity stains the soul, corrupts the conscience, destroys the coherence of life, and eventually leads to spiritual death.

An impure heart is neither satisfied nor free.

Whenever we allow our soul to be touched by impurity, we open it to a demonic force that has power to gain control over every sphere of our life, not only the sexual. Impurity can take the form of idolatrous passion for professional sports; it can be the ambitious craving for prestige or power over other people. If we are ruled by anything but Christ, we are living in impurity.

Impurity in the sexual sphere often consists in using another person, even when there is consent, solely in order to satisfy desire. It is there wherever people enter into situations of sexual intimacy with no intention of forming a lasting bond.

One of the starkest forms of impurity occurs when a person pays money for sex. A person who does this “becomes one with the prostitute,” as the Apostle Paul says, because he is using the body of another human being simply as a thing, a means of self-gratification. In doing this he commits a crime against the other person, but also against himself (1 Cor. 6:15–20). Even in marriage, sex for its own sake is sex separated from God. As Dietrich von Hildebrand writes, it possesses a poisonous sweetness that paralyzes and destroys.

It would be a grave mistake, however, to imagine that the opposite of impurity is the absence of sexual feeling. In fact, the lack of sexual awareness is not necessarily even fertile ground for purity. A person who has no sensitivity to sex is in actual fact an incomplete person: he or she lacks something not only in natural disposition, but in that which gives color to his or her whole being.

People who seek to live a pure life do not despise sex. They are simply free from prudish fear and hypocritical shows of disgust. But they never lose reverence for the mystery of sex, and they will keep a respectful distance from it until they are called by God to enter its territory through marriage.

For unmarried Christians, suppression of sexual feelings or simply avoiding the opposite sex is not the answer; only when they are surrendered completely to Christ will purity be found. In marriage, two people entrust the special holiness of the sexual area to each other. Yet in the deepest sense it is not they who give this gift to each other, but God, who created us all as sexual beings. Thus, whenever we give in to temptation—even if only in our thoughts—we are sinning against God, who created our sexuality for his purpose.

God wants to give inner harmony and decisive clarity to every heart. In this lies purity (James 4:8). As my grandfather, Eberhard Arnold, writes:

If the heart is not clear and undivided—“single,” as Jesus put it—then it is weak, flabby, and indolent, incapable of accepting God’s will, of making important decisions, or of taking strong action. That is the reason why Jesus attached the greatest significance to singleness of heart, simplicity, unity, solidarity, and decisiveness. Purity of heart is nothing else than absolute integrity, which can overcome desires that enervate and divide. Determined single-heartedness is what the heart needs in order to be receptive, truthful and upright, confident and brave, firm and strong.12

The key to purity is humility.
In the Beatitudes Jesus blesses the pure and the meek; he says that they shall inherit the earth and see God. Purity and meekness belong together, because they both arise from complete surrender to God. In fact, they depend on it. But purity and meekness are not inborn; they must be struggled for again and again. There are few things more wonderful a Christian can strive for.

The struggle against sexual impurity is not just a problem for young adults. For many people, it does not lessen as they grow older and more mature, but remains a serious struggle for life. Certainly a desire to live a pure life is good and necessary, yet it remains impossible for anyone to simply “resolve” never to give in to temptation again. Only through the experience of forgiveness can the gift of purity be given. And even then, our battle against temptations will continue. Still, we can take courage. No matter how often or how sorely we are tempted, Jesus will plead to God on our behalf if we ask him. In him we have the promise that we can find victory over every temptation (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Yet only the humble can experience God’s infinite goodness. The proud never can. Proud people open their hearts to all sorts of evil: impurity, lying, stealing, and the spirit of murder. Where there is one of these sins, the others will not be far behind. People who strive for purity in their own strength will always be stumbling. Seemingly self-confident, they fall into darkness and sin because they think they can handle their problems on their own.

Each of us faces temptations in the sexual area, and our only hope in overcoming them lies in our willingness to confess our struggle to someone we trust. When we do this, we discover that we are by no means unique.

Frank, a young man who has shared with me about his struggle for purity, writes:

Even as a small child, I considered myself to be a special and “spiritual” person. Once I established this image, I found it extremely difficult to share my problems with my parents or with anyone else. As I grew up, all my energy went into being a “good” boy. I would watch people I thought were “cool,” and I would try to imitate them. This self-obsession continued during my college years. I chose to follow the crowd and drift along wherever the stream of college life took me.

As I grew older, I saw my peers maturing into functional adults. Scared that I was being left behind, I refined my efforts to hide my deep insecurity, a problem that by now amounted to a mental disorder. Rather than look for suave role models, I turned to men who seemed to be spiritually gifted and tried to copy them.

As the years went by, my fear that something might be chronically wrong with my life increased. Because of my pride, I was tormented and plagued by mistrust, doubts, and hatred. At the same time I led a secret life of sexual impurity. But I suppressed all this and lived in constant fear of being found out.

Too often I have watched people who could have been helped early on lose hope and slide further into sexual sin. Like an avalanche, their problems mount. Some even fall into a life of crime, drugs, and alcohol abuse simply because they see no way out. Often all such a person needs is a friend or pastor to point him toward God and encourage him to work for the purity he actually craves. (Frank eventually confronted his desperate need and asked for help.) A person’s intense self-absorption, which is often camouflaged pride, shields him from the great promise that every temptation can be overcome—if only he is willing to admit his failings and turn away from himself.
Humble people, on the other hand, live in God’s strength. They may fall, but God will always lift them up and rescue them from a downward spiral.

Of course, not only our struggles but everything in our lives should be placed under Jesus. Jesus overcomes the desires that tear us apart and dissipate our strength. The more firmly we are gripped by his Spirit, the nearer we will come to finding our true character.

**Who is pure in heart?**

In the Sermon on the Mount we can see how seriously Jesus takes the daily fight for purity. He says that if we look at another person with a lustful glance, we have already committed adultery in our hearts (Matt. 5:27–30). The fact that Jesus warns so sharply against lustful thoughts—let alone lustful actions—should show us how important a decisive attitude of heart is in this fight.

Bonhoeffer writes, “Who is pure in heart? Only those who have surrendered their hearts completely to Jesus that he alone may remain in them; only those whose hearts are undefiled by their own evil—and by their own virtue as well.”

Pure men and women are able to discern both the good and the evil in the sexual sphere. They are awake to its intrinsic qualities and fully aware of its goodness and beauty as a gift from God. But they are also keenly aware that even the slightest misuse of this gift opens the door to evil spirits, and they know they cannot free themselves from these spirits in their own strength. That is why they avoid every situation, including images, that defiles the soul, and abhor the thought of leading others into sin.

It is of vital importance that in our fight for purity we reject everything that belongs to the domain of sexual immorality, including greed, vanity, and every other form of self-indulgence. Our attitude cannot be one of “partial” fascination with lust—only one of complete rejection. If our hearts are pure, we will react instinctively against anything that threatens to cloud this attitude.

Here the church community has a great responsibility to fight daily for an atmosphere of purity among all of its members (Ephesians 5:3–4). Accountability and mutual support are paramount. But the fight for purity must also go hand in hand with the fight for justice and the common good, because there is no true purity of heart without a feeling for the need and suffering of others (James 1:26–27). Purity is not just related to the sexual area; to know that a neighbor is hungry and to go to bed without giving him food is to defile one’s heart. That is why the early Christians pooled everything they possessed—their food and drink, their goods, their strength, even their intellectual and creative activity—and gave it up to God in service to others. Because they were of one heart and soul and held all things in common, they could battle evil in all its forms as one united fellowship.


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The Courage to Be Chaste

The Vocation of the Chaste Disciple

by Benedict Groeschel

Living a Chaste Single Life in Today's World

A few years ago a young religious sister shared the following experience. She was enrolled at a state university in a course entitled “Human Sexuality.” She attended class anonymously and was unrecognized as a [religious] sister. For reasons unknown (and probably unknowable), the students were required to share with the class the wildest sexual encounter they had experienced. Sister resolved to stand her ground and admit the awful truth—she had never had a sexual encounter.

As this exhibitionist's round-robin made its way to her, she disclosed her dreadful secret. The students thought they had been prepared for everything, but not for this! Chastity was just too far out. Between their gasps of incomprehension and guffaws of unbelief, she managed to explain that she was a religious sister. The response of the group completely reversed. Her classmates were delighted, awe-struck and deeply moved. They all agreed that she should stay right where she was and not have an encounter. Even the most jaded were impressed to know that someone, somewhere, had managed to preserve her humanity and yet be chaste for the Kingdom of God.

While this incident reveals the remarkable attraction for the ideal of chastity among those who are culturally conditioned to reject it, nevertheless, the young person, whether married or single, who attempts to lead a chaste Christian life is going to meet a withering amount of opposition. In thirty years, motion pictures and other forms of entertainment have gone from the avoidance of sexuality to the explicit exploitation of lust. Most Christian denominations which had clearly defined codes of sexual mores have adopted libertarian
attitudes that history is likely to judge as severely as it judges the seamy side of the Italian Renaissance or the French Enlightenment.

**A Working Definition of Chastity**

Single Christians, whether young or old, must live in opposition to the strong tide of contemporary decadence. I do not intend to confuse the issue for them by entering the debate over the meaning of chastity. There are aspects of this theological discussion which interest me, but perhaps only because they would give me dangerous opportunities to use sarcasm and irony in uncharitable ways. I will rely on the traditional Christian meaning of chastity accepted by an army of spiritual and moral writers (many of them canonized saints) up to the present time. This definition has been reiterated by Pope John Paul II and is clearly summarized in the pastoral reflection on morality of the American Catholic bishops, "To Live in Christ Jesus," a sadly forgotten but powerful document. It has been restated more recently in unambiguous terms by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education.

I use the terms chaste celibacy and chaste single life to mean the avoidance of all voluntary genital and pregenital sexual behavior. They also imply a decision to avoid personal relationships of human affection which are likely to be genitally expressed. This is an obligation for the vowed celibate and for the person who cannot validly enter marriage.

A Christian who decides to remain single has, in fact, opted for the same expression of chastity as that chosen by the vowed celibate. Chastity for all Christians means avoiding sexual satisfaction from auto-eroticism or from deviant behavior. It does not mean isolation, rejection of human love and friendship, or refraining from certain non-genital behavior related to the expression of one's sexuality. Chastity implies an heroic effort at times to confront the dark and self-centered aspects of one's inner being.

If you are not generally in agreement with the above definition, this book is not for you. If, on the other hand, you live by or would like to live by these Christian values, which are rooted in the Scriptures and tradition of your faith, you may find this book helpful.

Everyone knows that Christian marriage calls couples to a very challenging form of chastity. There are many similarities between the struggles of married and single believers. In this book we are limiting ourselves to a consideration of those who intend to remain unmarried. At times we may apply the word chastity to the single state but there is no implication that it is reserved to that state.

**Obstacles to a Chaste Life**

Twice in the past decade writers of satire in the *New York Times* Book Review have listed and reviewed imaginary books on chastity, written by imaginary authors, on one occasion by a mythical nun. On both occasions the book was a defense of or guide to celibate chastity. These imaginary titles were listed among other books entitled “Aboriginal Gourmet Cooking” and "How To Build Your Own Space Craft.”

It was all very funny in a sick way, but it also indicated the lack of sensitivity of our times. The authors of these satires were civilized men who, I am sure, never meant to be offensive. They should have realized, however, that a high proportion of religious read their book reviews. No doubt their grandmothers taught them, as mine taught me, that it is in poor taste to make fun of other people's religious practices. Perhaps it never occurred to these and other educated scorers of chastity that there are a fair number of people trying to lead the life that they had chosen to mock.

Mockers are simply part of a situation (I hesitate to call it a culture) that accepts misfortune as the only legitimate excuse for leading a celibate life. While those who belittle chastity might admire St. Francis or Mother Teresa, they never come to grips with religious chastity as an integral part of the dynamics and life
Living Bulwark

adjustment of such people. They might admire Gandhi, but they ignore his struggle to observe celibate religious chastity while his wife was still living and very dear to him. A celibate person without the mystique of Gandhi or St. Francis is likely to win only their scorn.

Misunderstanding and Mockery

The negative reactions that the celibate single person encounters are not always mocking; they range from pity to disbelief. In the case of a person who is young and not in a religious community, relatives and friends decide that there must be something psychologically wrong. Even religious and clerics of marriageable age may have a relative or friend suggest that it might be time “to get out and live a normal married life.” Young people intending to try a religious vocation experience various attitudes that range from compassion to ridicule. The one conclusion we can reach from all of this is that voluntary chastity is not a vocation for the faint-hearted.

Anyone who is determined as a result of a religious conversion to be chaste after a life of sexual indulgence, either heterosexual or homosexual, will find out where friendship has its roots. Deliberate attempts will be made to lure the newly converted back to the fleshpots. St. Augustine describes how he attempted to entice one of his boon companions from the Christian life when he was seventeen, and how terrible he felt when the young man died. This revealed to Augustine that he himself had not been a true friend.

What motivates so many to oppose celibate chastity? It may be a human concern that someone not miss an engaging part of life. I think of the sweet old Jewish lady who told her husband to take me for a walk “and explain things” when she found out I was going off to the monastery as a teenager. Or it may be the reaction of those who are conflicted themselves; they feel a call to chastity which they cannot or will not accept. Or it may be the old insane American fallacy that causes resentment toward anyone who disagrees with prevailing values because, the theory goes, if we all agree, we must be right. Or, God forbid, it may even be a very base impulse from the dark part of the human psyche which seeks to destroy that which is beautiful in another person.

I recall working with a man who was vowed to religious chastity. A woman friend literally pursued him. Her conscious motivation, I suspect, was to bring some love into what she perceived as his loveless life. He actually relinquished his calling and left in order to marry her. Incredibly, she refused to see him at all after he was released from his vows. While I do not accuse this young woman of malicious intent, I suspect that she was subconsciously motivated by a desire to destroy something she did not possess.

This strange case forcefully brought home to me what I have read in the works of great psychologists, namely, that much sexual motivation is unconscious and, consequently, can be dangerous and self-destructive. Anyone who chooses to make the struggle for celibate chastity must look beyond simple sexual need and pleasure to discover the real motivations. Pleasure or its deliberate renunciation is rarely an adequate explanation of either sexual indulgence or chastity.

Going beyond the superficial hedonism of everyday life, Dag Hammarskjöld, a single man, reveals in his diary, Markings, his struggle to be chaste and his religious motivation. He has this to say about the dark side of human nature:

_We can reach the point where_ it becomes possible for us to recognize and understand Original Sin, that dark counter-center of evil in our nature – that is to say, though it is not our nature, it is of it – that something within us which rejoices when disaster befalls the very cause we are trying to serve, or misfortune overtakes even those whom we love.

Life in God is not an escape from this, but the way to gain full insight concerning it.
It is when we stand in the righteous all-seeing light of love that we can dare to look at, admit, and consciously suffer under this something in us which wills disaster, misfortune, defeat to everything outside the sphere of our narrowest self-interest. So a living relation to God is the necessary precondition for the self-knowledge which enables us to follow a straight path, and so be victorious over ourselves, forgiven by ourselves.

*(Markings, 1966, pp 127-128)*

The Suspicion of Pathology

There are more subtle objections to chastity than those alluded to so far. Perhaps the most obvious is the belief that chastity is an impossible ideal. Contemporary psychology, especially in its "pop" forms, has created the illusion that sexual abstinence is impossible, except in the case of severe pathology.

There is no doubt that a human life without sexuality is impossible. Defining chastity as a life without sexuality is a denial of human nature. Indeed, some Catholics who ridicule chastity are, in fact, reacting to that past definition of chastity. If, however, we define chastity as a life without voluntary genital behaviour, we express a very different reality. Many people live such lives without any symptoms of serious pathology.

The inaccuracies of pop psychology and its need to cater to a large audience explain why popular writers rarely make a distinction in favour of sane celibacy. More thoughtful psychologists like Erik Erikson made such a distinction long ago. In his classic work *Childhood and Society* written in 1950, Erikson, while discussing generativity as the form of maturity, wrote:

Where philosophical and spiritual tradition suggests the renunciation of the right to procreation or to produce, such [persons] early turn to “ultimate concerns” whenever instituted into monastic movements; [this tradition] strives to settle at the same time the relationship to the care for the creatures of this world and to the Charity which is felt to transcend it.

Although many celibate single people have made significant contributions to human welfare while leading creative and happy lives, the prejudice remains that anyone whose life is without genital sexuality is either ill-informed or psychologically crippled. There is no doubt that in the normative human life, the mature individual exchanges love and affection faithfully with a partner of the other sex and shares most aspects of life, especially the great task of raising the next generation. Genital sexuality is an element in the lives of most human beings and surely it was meant to be so. But as Erikson has pointed out, one can direct much energy to the care of other people's children and to the search for God as the first object of desire. This must be the goal of the single Christian attempting to live the Gospel.

It is important to remember that some people pursuing such nonreligious goals as science or creative art have renounced marriage and, apparently, genital sexuality. While we are not concerned here with these people, they do provide another interesting example of persons being celibate and creative at the same time.

Sexual Bombardment

The single person, and indeed any Christian who is committed to chastity both before and during marriage, lives in a world of continuous sexual bombardment from advertising, media and entertainment. This undoubtedly makes a chaste life more difficult. Some people handle this by selective withdrawal from life, which is not the best way to adjust to the problem. It is far better to be on the offensive than on the defensive, to assert one's preferences firmly and let others know when something is personally offensive or distasteful.

Perhaps one of the most persistent and obviously invalid assumptions of our civilization is that sexual
behaviour brings happiness. The media trumpet the message, “Sex brings happiness.” If this were true, we would indeed live in an earthly paradise, and the world would be “Happy Valley.”

I suppose that half the people you meet on a bus, or in a shopping centre, or even at church on Sunday have had some genital sexual experience during the preceding few days. It is the observation of an old celibate from way back that they are not all so very happy. If sex brought happiness, the world would shine like the sun, at least half the time. Celibates need not try to convince themselves that chaste celibacy is the road to earthly bliss, but on the other hand they need not feel deprived of the key to happiness. If there is a single key to contentment, it cannot be sexual experience.

Loneliness
Loneliness – the painful awareness of the need for companionship and support – is probably the greatest obstacle to chastity in the single life. Obviously, the single person has to value aloneness, the state of being on one's own. He or she must also have learned to overcome loneliness, that is, aloneness when it becomes a burden.

Yet the better things of life are often organized for couples – even parish and religious activities. Parties, entertainment, time off and vacations often accentuate loneliness for the single. We will consider later how a single person must energetically organize his or her life, so that loneliness does not become an occasion for unwanted sexual desire or even sexual compulsion.

The Stigma of Being Single
We have already seen that poorly-applied pop psychology may leave the single person feeling like a cripple. This adds to the special burden of those who are unmarried by reason of apparent misfortune, or against their own choice. This group usually does not include clergy and religious, although I have noted this sentiment among religious who wish they could live their lives again.

No doubt many single people would prefer to have married, but the opportunity never came their way or, if it did, it did not seem appropriate for them. Others are widowed or divorced and not inclined to marry again. In the case of the divorced, remarriage may not be possible because of moral principles and Church teaching. Other single people do not consider marriage an option for them because they recognize their lack of psycho-sexual development, or because they realize their strong homosexual inclinations. Certain people suffer very quietly with deviant sexual desires and do not want to jeopardize another person's happiness with their problem. Many others just like to be independent.

Some years ago I met an attractive young woman who was very active in the charismatic renewal. We shall call her Maryanne. She has a deep and well-informed commitment to the spiritual life. Maryanne had accepted peacefully, even joyfully, the knowledge that she would have to lead a chaste single life. Far from being reluctant about her decision, she embraced the chaste Christian life gratefully.

For some years before her conversion to an intense Christian life, Maryanne had been actively involved in a series of homosexual relationships. She had lived on the quiet, respectable edge of "the gay scene." No one meeting this young woman now would think of her as unhappy or frustrated. Determination, a positive self-image replete with self-acceptance and a real concern for others emanate from her personality. This is no mask. Maryanne proves to many that a chaste life can be a fulfilling, creative and joyful experience.

The Vocation of the Chaste Disciple
Whatever their original motives, many single people we have been speaking of are sincere Christians and want to make their lives chaste. In the past they may have taken the edge off temptation by indulging in auto-eroticism, or by "affairs" with no notion of permanent commitment, or by other unsatisfactory and morally
conflicted behaviour. Choosing to be celibate will bring them not only peace with God but also a sense of integrity and nobility of life. It will also teach (as nothing else can) a great reliance on the grace of Christ and the need to be saved from themselves. A single life led unwillingly and marred by unchaste behaviour is indeed a pitiful thing. A life of chastity led with prayerful love of God and neighbour is a most worthy form of discipleship, regardless of the personal factors that prompted the individual to be single.

There is an obvious difference between the life of a married Christian and a chaste single life. A marriage can become a noble Christian discipleship, even if it did not begin with a mature decision. Spouses can be converted together and grow together in Christ. Sexuality which may be little more than an expression of need or dependency can grow to be the profound expression of the sacramental presence of Christ in a relationship of human love. Even if the couple does not arrive at these lofty heights, their relationship may be a genuine struggle for discipleship with joys and sorrows, failures and successes experienced together. Repentance shared by a couple can be a beautiful experience.

In the same way, when opting for the single life, a person may not have considered it a form of discipleship. I have met clergy and religious who gave the vow of chastity little thought before they took it; it was simply part of the price of admission to their vocation. The single person, lay or religious, may suddenly find his or her attempt at chastity threatened, or in ruins. This is an opportunity for real conversion and commitment. But it takes insight, self-knowledge, energetic planning, and a great reliance on the grace of God to do anything as worthwhile and complex as leading a well-balanced chaste life. In a word, a chaste life – like a solid Christian marriage – calls for discipleship.

In writing this book I have drawn on the experience of many people who are trying to lead chaste lives despite the obstacles enumerated above; I have also drawn on my own experience with this struggle. For all Christians, married, single or religious, chastity is not simply a struggle with physical urges and drives. It is part of the greater effort to seek God above and through all things. Chastity is an aspect of purity of mind and heart, of thought and desire. Like every worthwhile thing in life, chastity is a struggle which has its rewards. They are summed up in the Beatitude, “How blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God.”

[excerpt from The Courage to Be Chaste, Chapter 1, by Benedict J. Groeschel C.F.R., (c) 1985 by Province of St. Mary, Capuchin Order, published by Paulist Press, New Jersey.]

Fr. Benedict Joseph Groeschel, C.F.R. (1933-2014) was the founder of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, Catholic priest, retreat master, author, psychologist, a leading anti-abortion figure, and for more than 30 years a television host with Mother Angelica’s Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN). His greatest joy was serving the poor and underprivileged in New York City. Founder of St. Francis House and Good Counsel Homes, he also served as chaplain at Children’s Village in Dobbs Ferry for 14 years. Always deeply concerned with the welfare of others, he tirelessly provided food, clothing, and assistance to people in need—people he always considered his friends. At the time of his death in October 2014 (age 81) the order had grown to 115 brothers and priests and 35 sisters in nine friaries in the U.S., four in Europe and two convents in Central America.

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Purity as a Positive Virtue

The Mystery of Christian Sexuality

by Dietrich von Hildebrand

The Attitude of the Pure

The pure man (and woman) perceives the mystery of sex. He perceives its depth, its seriousness, its intimacy - whether because, temperamentally awake to these qualities, he apprehends intuitively the character of sex, or because, temperamentally unaware of them, he knows it rather from the outside. He understands implicitly the sublime purpose and fundamental significance of sex, and perceives the fearful profanation which every abuse of sex represents, the deadly poison, defiling the soul and separating it from God, which sexual pleasure generates when treated as its own end. He is marked by a profound shrinking from any contact with sex as soon as it is thus isolated and rendered poisonous. He possesses a deep reverence for the mystery of which he is here in presence. Sex as such in no aspect seems to him contemptible or base. Bearing no repugnance to the fact of sex, free from all prudish and hysterical disgust, whether of sex as such or of the act of marriage, he remains at a respectful distance from it so long as he is not called by the disposition of God to enter its domain.

Reverence is a fundamental component of purity. The pure man (and woman) always lives in an attitude of reverence for God and His creation, and therefore reveres sex, its profundity and its sublime and divinely ordained meaning. Indeed, and we have now reached the factor which is decisive both for purity and for the character of sex, the pure man understands that sex belongs in a special manner to God, and that he may only make such use of it as is explicitly sanctioned by Him. Only with God’s express permission may he eat of the
fruit of this tree. Nothing reveals more plainly the presence of a mystery than this need of a special sanction from God to enter the sexual domain. In contrast to the innocuous sphere of eating and drinking, or that of intellectual activity, the domain of sex belongs in a unique fashion to God. To be sure, in his employment of all earthly goods man must regard himself as God's steward, not as his own master. Here, however, an entirely new factor comes into play.

This sphere, in virtue of its depth and mystery, is reserved in an altogether special fashion to God, and man, even within the permitted bounds, is not simply free, as in other spheres, to do whatever seems good to him. Moreover, this mystery which attaches to sex, even as an objective reality, results from its quality as revealed in experience, even if we leave out of account the fact that it is the mysterious seat of propagation, though the latter sets the mystery of sex in a particularly vivid light, and stands in a profound intrinsic connection with it.

Man must feel for sex an awe which no other sphere demands - an awe which permits his access only if God in a special fashion should give him leave, as He gives it in the sacrament of matrimony. For the truly pure man the bond with wedded love and the intention of a common life to last till death are not sufficient; he requires further the specific consciousness of God's express sanction, the knowledge that it is only by divine permission that he lifts the veil from this mystery, an attitude which can be paralleled elsewhere in the religious sphere. And even when he may lift the veil, he will never abandon himself without restraint to the pleasure of sex. To be sure he may - indeed, he should - surrender himself without reserve to the beloved; but not to the specific quality of sex. The latter always demands, even when it is entirely positive, a reverent awe; and demands it to be "formed" by being brought into explicit relation to God.

The pure man (and woman) guards his secret, never lifts the veil unbidden. He is always modest. But his modesty has nothing that savours of self-importance, whether of conduct or feeling. He does not guard the secret by simply concealing it from others while he revels in it himself and in so doing feels himself somehow important. That is the attitude of the prude. With the pure you never breathe this oppressive atmosphere. Simple and open, he is distinguished by a limpid radiance of soul. He remains at a distance from his secret so long as God does not call upon him to unveil it. With spirit serene and bright and in an attitude of humility he leaves it in God's hand. We are here brought face to face with an absolutely essential element of purity.

In a special sense the pure man (and woman) walks with God. He never departs from the divine presence. He does not hide himself from God, like Adam after the fall. He will never consent to anything incompatible in its quality with the light of holiness which shines upon us from the countenance of Jesus. Within his soul an indefinable "something" always abides in unclouded light; his spirit is neither corroded by the intoxicating poison of sex as its own end, nor infected by the oppressive sultriness which distinguishes the zone of evil lust. His soul is steeped in a peculiar light, radiant and clear; there is in him no twilight or dusk; he is surrounded by no atmosphere heavy with poisonous perfume and in which it is impossible to breathe freely. No cloud darkens his spirit as it "shines" before God.

As we have already seen, the pure is distinguished by the rich plenty of his spiritual endowment. The specific beauty attaching to the unclouded lustre of a soul which has come from God's hand, has been redeemed by Christ, and is the likeness of God - the beauty, that is, of the spiritual person - shines out upon us from the pure. The pure man remains a vessel in which the light which flows forth from God can unfold without obscurcation; his soul shines before God, because it reflects His glory. Moreover, a peculiar peace has possession of his entire being; not inwardly alone, but outwardly to the world his soul reflects something of His peace who is called "our peace and our reconciliation." But only the soul that is filled with love can be pure in this positive sense; the cold and proud spirit can never possess this unclouded light.

Purity is further characterized by a humble sincerity. The pure man feels himself a sinner capable, but for the
help of God's grace, of being submerged at any moment by the flesh. With the heathen poet he confesses "Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto." He does not shrink from looking the dangers which surround him full in the face. He never forgets that "the devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." He does not imagine himself made of other material than flesh and blood and inaccessible to the weakness of the flesh. Remote from him, too, is the false modesty of the prude, who refuses to admit the existence of these dangers for himself or others. And his attitude continues the same even if he has never experienced sexual temptations. For simplicity, sincerity, and humility are almost as essential to true purity as is reverence.

**Brief biographical background on Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1997),**
from Ignatius Press:

Hitler feared him and Pope Pius XII called him a “twentieth century Doctor of the Catholic Church.” For more than six decades, Dietrich von Hildebrand – philosopher, spiritual writer, and anti-Nazi crusader – led philosophical, religious, and political groups, lectured throughout Europe and the Americas, and published more than 30 books and many more articles. His influence was widespread and endures to this day...

Soon after the end of World War I, Nazism began to threaten von Hildebrand’s beloved southern Germany. With his characteristic clear-sightedness, von Hildebrand immediately discerned its intrinsic evil. From its earliest days, he vociferously denounced Nazism in articles and speeches throughout Germany and the rest of Europe.

Declaring himself unwilling to continue to live in a country ruled by a criminal, von Hildebrand regretfully left his native Germany for Austria, where he continued teaching philosophy (now at the University of Vienna) and fought the Nazis with even greater vigor, founding and editing a prominent anti-Nazi newspaper, *Christliche Ständestaat.*

This angered both Heinrich Himmler and Adolf Hitler, who were determined to silence von Hildebrand and to close his anti-Nazi newspaper. Orders were given to have von Hildebrand killed in Austria. Although his friend and patron, Austrian Premier Engelbert Dollfuss, was murdered by the Nazis, von Hildebrand evaded their hit-squads and fled the country just as it fell to the Nazis.

It is characteristic of von Hildebrand that even while he was engaged in this dangerous life-and-death struggle against the Nazis, he maintained his deep spiritual life, and managed to write during this period his greatest work, the sublime and highly-acclaimed spiritual classic, *Transformation in Christ* (Cf. pp. xiv-xvii).

Fleeing from Austria, von Hildebrand was pursued through many countries, ultimately arriving on the shores of America in 1940 by way of France, Switzerland, Portugal, and Brazil.


top illustration: Jesus at Cana Wedding, painting by Michael O'Brien

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Prayer of Augustine

lyrics and music by Ed Conlin

Click to listen to an MP3 audio clip

O Beauty ancient, O Beauty so new
Late have I loved Thee and feebly yet do.
Then You shone Your face and I was blind no more

Chorus:
My heart searches restlessly and finds no rest ‘till it rests in Thee.
O Seeker You sought for me, Your love has found me;
I am taken by thee.

I sought this world and chased its finer things,
Yet were these not in You, they would not have been.
My ceaseless longing hid the deeper truth,
In all my desirings, I was desiring You.
Living Bulwark

Lord, in my deafness You cried out to me.
I drew my breath and now Your fragrance I breathe
O Fount of Life, You are forever the same;
O Fire of Love, come set me aflame.

Our hearts are restless until they rest in thee"
- St. Augustine of Hippo

Ed's reflection on Augustine's prayer....

"While reading Augustine's "Confessions", I was deeply moved by this conversion prayer (one of the most beautiful prayers I've ever heard)...wouldn't this be wonderful if the spirit of this prayer could be enhanced by holy music!

I remember asking God if he would just frame this prayer with the right melody. Eventually, this came out. Praise God!"

There is a space formed by the particular shape of our life. It is meant for God himself to indwell. This must be felt as a lack... and it comes about through daily circumstances. It may be caused by the cavern of a lonely heart, the ache of a lost one, the yearning that comes from "not yet being home." In truth we are to glory in this emptiness -- for it is the price we pay for such an immense dignity. To wait in courage for God to fill our particular emptiness is one of the most profound of love's acts.

The song Prayer of Augustine is included in a Music CD entitled, Taken by Love, produced by In His Presence. The CD and sheet music can be ordered from In His Presence. See online order page, or order form, click on Taken by Love CD. Individual can purchase the album or the mp3 as a download from I-Tunes or Rhapsody or any mp3 distributor.

Ed Conlin is a member of the Servants of the Word, a missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He lives in community in the inner city of Detroit, Michigan, USA, and works as a licensed substance abuse counselor and chaplain with the Capuchin Franciscan Ministries in Detroit.

Top photo by Chiang Mai, Thailand

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The Unknown

A reflection and poem

by Mary McCarthy

I was very distracted while trying to pray one morning in May. I opened a blank page on my computer and this poem was in front of me within a few minutes.

It summed up exactly what I was thinking and feeling at that time.

I was living in Belfast, Northern Ireland, close to completing a year working as a student missionary with University Christian Outreach (UCO). Although I was going to be moving back home to Dublin, Ireland, I knew that a path of change and uncertainty lay ahead of me.

There was so much I did not know and could not control amid the internal and external chaos. I needed to remind myself of God - above all a loving Father, steadfast and unwavering regardless of earthly circumstances, and the promise of eternal life.

Look at your life through heaven's eyes!

The Unknown
I cautiously step towards the unknown
yet hold fast to what I know

My heart flutters, uncertain, unsteady

Yet I hear a voice commanding my soul to cling to the truth

I do not know what lies ahead
When I will next cry with laughter or wrestle with tears of pain

Yet the undercurrent of my life is unchanged

Remain steadfast dear child

Remain in my love

The horizon of my tomorrow is hazy yet my eternity is certain

Today, blessings and curses come in the one package

Yet when the day of restoration comes I will have no questions

There is one hope

one truth

one faith

One God who desires to be fully known and made known

And He calls me His daughter
That I know

This article first appeared in The Lovely Commission, a publishing venture and brand of Kairos North America. It is run by Molly Kilpatrick and Mary Rose Jordan and a team of contributors from various Christian communities in North America and beyond. Together they are working to build a culture of radical love, femininity, modesty of heart, mind, and body amongst young women.

Their aim is to inspire and equip young women to embrace and promote a culture of Godly femininity in which we live out our rich identity as daughters of God and disciples of Jesus Christ.
Call and Challenge of Growing Up in Community

Intro by Alina Garcia Hernandez

God has blessed the Sword of the Spirit abundantly and in many ways. It was his idea that our communities would exist and live in such a distinctive way. In our communities we seek to live radically our call together with other brothers and sisters in a covenant relationship.

Our communities have families and single people. However, many young people who are living in community today have been chosen in a very singular way – a way not even our founders could experience.

Many of us came to community life without anyone “checking with” us, we simply were born or grew up here. I am certain that God wants that to happen for a reason and I trust that we have been chosen that way to do and to be something special for God.

I have taken the task on to discover the perspective of many brothers and sisters who have experienced this and I will publish one story at a time. This is the story for this week:

Nobody Checked With Me
To me, being chosen by God has been a constant surrender of every area and every stage of my life. I experienced ‘being chosen’ since my teenage years where he protected me and guided me in good environments and kept me away from certain types of people (who could have been a bad influence for me).

Later in my teenage years I had some doubts about this call. Mainly because of my bad relationship with my peers. Having close relationships with whom to walk towards God in community was always a challenge.

For many years, I felt like the “weirdo” and not for being a bad person, on the contrary, for trying to do things well and open the door for community in my life.

Honestly, I don’t know if I would have arrived or chosen community on my own. It truly is difficult to embrace all that this call entails, especially when I disagree with other people’s attitudes or actions. But this is my home. God would have brought me here one way or another, although, the zeal and love I now have would have developed very differently.

God’s will is perfect and he has a perfect plan for my life, even though I don’t always like it, or it isn’t always easy. Being born into the community was God’s way of telling me that I am special to him, that he was careful when he created me, that he loves me and that this calling is my home – that I need to embrace and forgive in every circumstance.

My view of happiness is based upon Christ. During a prayer session when parents were praying with their children, He told me that this is the place where he wanted me to be, that he knew how much I had suffered and that he wanted me to embrace the call because he needed me to be a pillar in the bulwark.

I cannot deny that his plan that I be born in community was perfect. I am happy of being a child of God and if he wants me to be in community, I happily embrace that. I have given myself in everything: service, commitment, love, loyalty. I have allowed God to confirm his call to me in every retreat, every conference, every mission trip and every event that I have been to. I am willing to live and give my life away for this call, because I believe in the call and in the him who makes it.

I truly encourage every young person who has been invited by God by being born into this people, to give themselves the chance to discover – through services, activities, prayer and other people – that it is worth it.

It is not easy, it wasn’t for me and it is still not easy. But living this life has given me freedom, love, strength, character maturity and mercy. Those things are not easy to find nowadays.

I invite you to give God an opportunity to reveal himself into your lives by giving all of your time, commitment, attention and dedication. It really is worth it.

I love that nobody checked with me! I thank God for the blessing of giving us that special gift for this life that he thought for us, to live it, to love it and to defend it as Christ’s work. I am a community child and a child of God.

- Alina García
Alina García Hernandez is a member of the Verbum Dei community in Mexicali, México. Sarahi Anleu is a member of Jésed community in Monterrey, México.
Youth On Fire - Fiji Conference

Some 85-90 young people, 20 of whom were from Samabula Gospel Chapel gathered for a 3-day conference at Albert Park, Suva, Fiji organised by the Patmos Christian Community in partnership with the Lamb of God Christian Community, New Zealand.

The theme of the conference was Youth on Fire and it included the choice between the narrow and wide roads as well as teaching on sin and forgiveness.

The conference was a great success. At the end of the conference, some young people stood up and shared about, apart from other things, how God dealt with the area of unforgiveness in their lives.

Praise God for all the youth who turned up for Youth on Fire Christian Conference.

The Patmos Christian Community is comprised of people from different Christian church denominations meeting at least twice a month for a time of worship, teaching and fellowship in Suva, Fiji.
I attended a magnet high school in Detroit, Michigan. Cass Tech was a university preparatory school that emphasized science and the arts. One night before an art showing, a vandal broke in, defaced multiple paintings, and took a hammer to dozens of sculptures.

Imagine the angry anguish of the victims: the lost hours of creativity, the shattered dreams of masterpieces. But the hours and dreams weren’t the victim’s greatest griefs. As one vandalized friend said to me, “It was as if the thugs had sledgehammered me!”

Because all art is made in the image of its creator.

In that sense, all of creation reflects God: the beauty of the sunset and the glory of a half moon, snowcapped mountains and whitecapped oceans, all mirror the glory of God.

However, it was only after God made all of nature that he said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” The deepest reflection of God involves more than mere creation.

**Simple or Profound**
The Hebrew word for “image” (when God talks of creating humanity) originally meant shadow or reflection. It required the sun. It means that God is the sun and we are moons. To image God, we need the brightness of God to shine on us, and then ultimately through us.

In the simplest sense of imaging God, cabbages and clams—as well as Mother Theresa and Judas Iscariot—belong to general creation: all reflect the great Artist, to some degree.

But in the profoundest sense, God lets us choose to image him or not; to decide to be moons rather than suns. Adam and Eve chose personal glory; they wanted to be the light not the mirror.

**Deism**

Many thought leaders of the Enlightenment believed in a theology called deism. Deism says God created the world, set it spinning like a child’s toy top, and he sat back to watch what would happen. It says God refuses to intervene in the affairs of the world.

It’s why Thomas Jefferson cut out the supernatural from the Bible, because he believed God no longer acts today. Jefferson liked the morals of Jesus, but he didn’t like the miracles of Jesus.

Simple imaging of God can be like deism. We don’t need him anymore. He made us—so we’re in his likeness—and we continue to reflect him, without his help. Just ask any snail.

But the profoundest meaning requires God’s activity in us today. It requires a humanity who will accept our need for God himself to do his work through us. It means we choose his glory over ours, to say, “Unless the Lord builds the house, its workers labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

**The Humility of Imaging God**

King Saul lost his kingdom when he “builds a monument in his own honor.” God says to him, “You started out thinking little of yourself, and that was good; but now you are grabbing for your own honor.” King Saul wanted to be the painter not the painting.

The profoundest reflection of God requires humility: we no longer live to create our own legacy—like Adam and Saul. But that is hard to do. Our sinful flesh wants others to respect us, accept our ideas, and like our Facebook posts. We crave a monument in our honor.

We grasp for all the glory we can get. And in the very act of grabbing, we vandalize the profoundest likeness of God. In our quest for stardom, we deface God’s paintings and hammer his sculptures.

Let’s abandon our pursuit of personal legacy: it’s more glorious to be the moon than a snail.

Sam

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What’s Wrong with the World:

On the Madness of Modern Ideals

by G.K. Chesterton

**The madness of modern sophists**

Numbers of readers will expect me, when I propound an ideal, to propound a new ideal. Now I have no notion at all of propounding a new ideal. There is no new ideal imaginable by the madness of modern sophists, which will be anything like so startling as fulfilling any one of the old ones.

“Men have not got tired of Christianity; they have never found enough Christianity to get tired of.”

Christ knew that it would be a more stunning thunderbolt to fulfill the law than to destroy it. It is true of both the cases I have quoted, and of every case. The pagans had always adored purity: Athena, Artemis, Vesta. It was when the virgin martyrs began defiantly to practice purity that they rent them with wild beasts, and rolled them on red-hot coals. The world had always loved the notion of the poor man uppermost; it can be proved by
every legend from Cinderella to Whittington, by every poem from the Magnificat to the Marseillaise. The kings went mad against France not because she idealized this ideal, but because she realized it. Joseph of Austria and Catherine of Russia quite agreed that the people should rule; what horrified them was that the people did. The French Revolution, therefore, is the type of all true revolutions, because its ideal is as old as the Old Adam, but its fulfillment almost as fresh, as miraculous, and as new as the New Jerusalem.

But in the modern world we are primarily confronted with the extraordinary spectacle of people turning to new ideals because they have not tried the old. Men have not got tired of Christianity; they have never found enough Christianity to get tired of. Men have never wearied of political justice; they have wearied of waiting for it.

**The principle of domesticity**

Now, for the purpose of this book, I propose to take only one of these old ideals, but one that is perhaps the oldest. I take the principle of domesticity: the ideal house, the happy family, the holy family of history. For the moment it is only necessary to remark that it is like the church and like the republic, now chiefly assailed by those who have never known it, or by those who have failed to fulfill it. Numberless modern women have rebelled against domesticity in theory because they have never known it in practice. Hosts of the poor are driven to the workhouse without ever having known the house. Generally speaking, the cultured class is shrieking to be let out of the decent home, just as the working class is shouting to be let into it.

**Hacking a sonnet out of a rock**

Now if we take this house or home as a test, we may very generally lay the simple spiritual foundations of the idea. God is that which can make something out of nothing. Man (it may truly be said) is that which can make something out of anything. In other words, while the joy of God be unlimited creation, the special joy of man is limited creation, the combination of creation with limits.

Man's pleasure, therefore, is to possess conditions, but also to be partly possessed by them; to be half-controlled by the flute he plays or by the field he digs. The excitement is to get the utmost out of given conditions; the conditions will stretch, but not indefinitely. A man can write an immortal sonnet on an old envelope, or hack a hero out of a lump of rock. But hacking a sonnet out of a rock would be a laborious business, and making a hero out of an envelope is almost out of the sphere of practical politics.

**The idea of artistic expression**

This fruitful strife with limitations, when it concerns some airy entertainment of an educated class, goes by the name of Art. But the mass of men have neither time nor aptitude for the invention of invisible or abstract beauty. For the mass of men the idea of artistic creation can only be expressed by an idea unpopular in present discussions – the idea of property.

The average man cannot cut clay into the shape of a man; but he can cut earth into the shape of a garden; and though he arranges it with red geraniums and blue potatoes in alternate straight lines, he is still an artist; because he has chosen. The average man cannot paint the sunset whose colors he admires; but he can paint his own house with what color he chooses, and though he paints it pea green with pink spots, he is still an artist; because that is his choice.

Property is merely the art of the democracy. It means that every man should have something that he can shape in his own image, as he is shaped in the image of heaven. But because he is not God, but only a graven image of God, his self-expression must deal with limits; properly with limits that are strict and even small.
I am well aware that the word “property” has been defied in our time by the corruption of the great capitalists. One would think, to hear people talk, that the Rothchilds and the Rockefellers were on the side of property. But obviously they are the enemies of property; because they are enemies of their own limitations. They do not want their own land; but other people's. When they remove their neighbor's landmark, they also remove their own.

A man who loves a little triangular field ought to love it because it is triangular; anyone who destroys the shape, by giving him more land, is a thief who has stolen a triangle. A man with the true poetry of possession wishes to see the wall where his garden meets Smith's garden; the hedge where his farm touches Brown's. He cannot see the shape of his own land unless he sees the edges of his neighbor's. It is the negation of property that the Duke of Sutherland should have all the farms in one estate; just as it would be the negation of marriage if he had all our wives in one harem.


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Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874–1936) was an English writer. His prolific and diverse output included philosophy, ontology, poetry, play writing, journalism, public lecturing and debating, biography, Christian apologetics, fantasy and detective fiction. Chesterton has been called the "prince of paradox" (1). *Time* magazine, in a review of a biography of Chesterton, observed of his writing style: "Whenever possible Chesterton made his points with popular sayings, proverbs, allegories – first carefully turning them inside out" (2).
There are three things that will never die: truth, goodness, and beauty. These are the three things we all need, and need absolutely, and know we need, and know we need absolutely. Our minds want not only some truth and some falsehood, but all truth, without limit. Our wills want not only some good and some evil, but all good, without limit. Our desires, imaginations, feelings or hearts want not just some beauty and some ugliness, but all beauty, without limit.

Three Attributes of God
For these are the only three things that we never got bored with, and never will, for all eternity, because they are three attributes of God, and therefore all God’s creation: three transcendental or absolutely universal properties of all reality. All that exists is true, the proper object of the mind. All that exists is good, the proper object of the will. All that exists is beautiful, the proper object of the heart, or feelings, or desires, or sensibilities, or imagination. (This third area is more difficult to define than the first two.) ...
of God. Each of us is one person with three distinct powers.

**Image of the Holy Trinity**

God is one God, but in three distinct persons. The Son, the Logos, is the mind of the Father and performs his good will in redeeming the world. The Spirit is the poet, who composes and choreographs the operatic love between the Father and the Son in both creating and redeeming, and so is the Sanctifier, the saint-maker – and the saint is the most beautiful thing on Earth.

As the Spirit proceeds from Father and Son, children proceed from husband and wife, the holy family on Earth manifesting the holy Trinitarian family of heaven, though very imperfectly and obscurely, through a glass darkly. As the Son, though equal to the Father in all things, willingly and lovingly submits to the Father’s good will, the loving wife lovingly submits to the loving husband’s loving good will, though she is equal to him in all things. For this is not politics, but music; not equality, but harmony; not justice, but love…

**Beauty derived from truth and goodness**

According to Aquinas, beauty is “that which, being seen, pleases.” Though beauty is derived from truth and goodness, it has the greatest power over our souls. This is why most addictions come from something that appears beautiful, whether Gollum’s ring, a false “precious” (*The Lord of the Rings* trilogy), or a drug or alcohol high, which is a false mystical experience, or a false love that apes married love but lacks its truth. And therefore the only effective cure for addiction must come from something that appears even more beautiful than the addiction. As Aquinas says, the only thing strong enough to overcome evil passion is a more powerful good passion.

The beauty of a sober saint, to which the alcoholic aspires, is a powerful cure for alcoholism. The beauty of the bloody love of Christ can overcome the beauty of the forbidden love of a beautiful body.

Augustine in his *Soliloquies* imagines God asking him, “What do you want to know?” And Augustine replies, “Only two things: Yourself and myself.” That is not narrow; that is broad. For a self, or person, involves all three of the things we need and want infinitely: truth, goodness and beauty. So there really are six things we want to know in knowing these two, but the six are really three, since our three are reflections of God’s three.


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Peter Kreeft, Ph.D., is a professor of philosophy at Boston College and also at the King's College (Empire State Building), in New York City. He is a regular contributor to several Christian publications, is in wide demand as a speaker at conferences, and is the author of over 55 books including: *Back to Virtue; The God Who Loves You; Heaven, The Heart's Deepest Longing; Everything You wanted to Know About Heaven; Your Questions - God's Answers; How To Win The Culture War*. See more of his work at his [online website](http://www.swordofthespirit.net/peterkreeft.html).

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“Let there be Light”

Part 1: Reflections on Light, Color & Our Relationship with God

by Ros Yates

Genesis 1.1-3

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

The story of creation begins with darkness - the absence of light.

Without light there is no colour, nothing for our eyes to respond to, no information, no energy, no life on earth.

3 And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light ‘day’, and the darkness he called ‘night’. And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day.

White light contains all the colours of the rainbow – and more beyond our eyes’ capacity to see. When white light hits something it reflects back light of different wavelengths. The colour of the reflected light is determined according to the nature of the object.
Other colours are absorbed by the object’s surface and so what we see is what is given back.

I have been struck by this physics lesson as a metaphor for our lives lived in the light of God. Each of us reflect God’s light differently – our absorption and refection spectrums are unique, everyone giving off light differently according to who we are and how we respond to God’s light.

So God shines his perfect light on each of us – in our lives and worship we seek to give back all we are – to love the Lord our God with all our heart mind soul and strength, with every colour of our being, every creative quantum of energy.

So we all emanate a wonderful variety of light; of personality, ideas, gifts, offerings of love, but also weak spots, needs, and opportunities to be interdependent in community. None of us fully reflect God’s light and that’s why we
need each other to complete the picture, the body of Christ.

Colour theory includes the notion of complimentary colours – those which are on the opposite side of the colour wheel; red and green, yellow and purple, orange and blue. These colour combinations used in a painting enhance one another;

Think about the red and green of Christmas……

‘Holly and shadows’ Ros Yates artwork 2012

……or the purple and gold of royalty.
God’s light is complete, white, pure, without gaps, no colours missing or under-represented. White speaks to us of purity, holiness, glory, splendour, and revelation. But we have stains, imperfections, mistakes, dirt, flaws.
Isaiah 1v18
18 ‘Come now, let us settle the matter,’ says the LORD.
‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.

-Think of laundry detergent adverts, or those for stain removers.
- Think of snow – it makes everything look clean and bright at first – till muddied and trodden.
- Think of a blank canvas or piece of paper – I choose one without marks, undamaged, unused by others, ‘virgin’ – kept clean WHITE and fresh for me.
- and think of what things make us impure, spoil; as individuals, or as a community, and our need for forgiveness.
- but our destiny is to be the bride of Christ – pure and spotless, made clean, amazingly, by His blood shed for us.

Revelation 21. 1-5
Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

I shared this vision with a school group of 11-14 year olds I work with at a local High School. We talked about being brides (it was almost all girls!) and how we would prepare for our wedding day.

We played that game where one person is dressed like a bride by the rest of the group in toilet roll paper and white bin liners – we laughed, we celebrated. The imperfections of the dress design and the outcome didn’t matter too much in the fun of the moment – and so our imperfections will be obliterated by the work of Christ our bridegroom who laid down his life for us and is coming to take us for his own.
So one day we will be robed in white and reflect all God’s glory – but how do we get there? How can the darkness be dispelled?
The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1.14

‘The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1.5

It is darkness that is associated with evil in the Bible— not the colour black itself. Black things are not evil or sinful. The beloved in the Song of Solomon describes herself … ”I am black and beautiful” (Songs 1.5) Things that are black and shiny can be brighter than white things hidden in shadow. It’s all about how much light we reflect.
Black is never really totally black. Even the darkest black paint reflects some light – and if you dilute black paint you will see that different blacks have a colour to them. Paynes Grey is a blueish black, others dilute to a shade of brown, green or purple.
So with us, even the soul that sits in darkness is capable of reflection when God’s light and God’s water of life come to show up our true colours.

However, there IS a black invented by scientists call VantaBlack. It is not a paint as such, but a coating of miniscule tubes of carbon so small that most light just cannot escape it. A wave of light gets almost entirely trapped within it. Vanta Black looks entirely matt and completely flat like a black hole even if the surface is crumpled. A 3D object coated with it loses all appearance of form, depth, and texture. This could be a symbol of the soul that takes and takes and take but gives nothing back - and that is dark indeed.
But that is not how we were created.

We were not created black in the sense of being unable to reflect God’s glory - In our creatureliness we are gloriously brown – formed from the dust of the earth. We are of the earth; which is what the name Adam means.

But we are more than earth’s dust; more even, than the stardust that formed the earth.

   Genesis 2.7
   Then the LORD God formed a man[c] from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.
We acknowledge our creatureliness – our debt to our creator who formed us in love and wisdom. It keeps us humble to know we share this materialism with the rest of creation. Yet we are also spiritual and created for a spiritual relationship with God our Creator. His breath brings life to us as children so clay shall take form and live.

Isaiah 64:8 ” O Lord you are our father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.

As the work of God’s hands we were created to be creative; made in His image we put our imaginations to work.
Humans have always had that capacity – the first paintings used the colours of the earth – ochre – iron oxide – in shades of brown, red, orange and yellow, and the white of chalk or the black of ashes. Then came the colours of natural minerals and organic matter such as berries and other plant dyes, or even blood. We have taken the colours of the world that surround us and brought them into our language as powerful symbols, even before words and writing came into being.

I will explore the language of colour in the second part of my article, and especially how colour is used in the Bible and in our worship as well enriching our daily lives – a walk through the spectrum with Scripture.

Ros Yates is a member of the Antioch ecumenical Christian community in London. She has been painting and drawing from an early age. Having studied Biology and Theology she is now an ordained Deacon in the Church of England, a self-taught artist, and mother of four children. Not surprising then that themes of creativity, spirituality and the natural world are constantly interwoven in her life and art.

She uses art and crafts in prayer and Bible study workshops with adults and children. The natural world is a constant course of inspiration. She loves gardening and spending time at The Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in London, the London Wetland Centre, and holidays in Purbeck on the English South Coast. All these find their way into her art, as do the word-images and parables of the Bible.

> See other articles by Ros Yates in Living Bulwark