



**Christ's Compelling Love**

**The love of Christ compels us...to live for him who died for our sake** –2 Cor. 5

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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.

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## To Love Him and to Make Him Loved

The [Servants of the Word](#) have as their motto "*To Love Him and to Make Him Loved.*" It was love that motivated the Lord Jesus to suffer and die on the cross for our sake as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He died and rose again to give us abundant life and freedom to live as the redeemed sons and daughters of God. Our love for Christ is a response to his exceeding love and mercy towards us. We can never repay the debt we owe to God. It is pure grace - the free gift and favor of God's love which has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:5).

As Paul the Apostle states,

"The love of Christ compels us because we are convinced that one has died for all - therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no long for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

Christ has loved us without reserve. We want to love him with all that we have and are. Christ's love poured out for us on the cross is the reason we make it our aim to love him and to make him loved. Making the Lord Jesus known and loved through word and deed is the mission of the whole Christian people - the mission which Christ invites each one of us to undertake as his ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20).

May this issue inspire you to love Christ more and to make him loved by those you serve and reach out to with mercy, compassion, and conviction that Christ died for all to bring us new life and salvation.

[In this issue](#)

[Tadhg Lynch](#) and [Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa](#) explore what it means to know the love of Jesus Christ and to love him in return through lives of conversion, repentance, sacrificial love, and proclaiming the Gospel - the good news of Jesus Christ - to others.

[Bob Tedesco](#), [Bruce Yocum](#), [Carlos Mantica](#), and [John Keating](#) focus on the readiness to change in order to follow the Lord Jesus more closely and to love and forgive others as Christ has loved us.

And don't miss some fresh sharings from young people who are [serving on mission](#) throughout Europe. May their stories inspire all of us to be missionaries in our homes, schools, work places, and neighborhoods as well.

Sincerely in Christ,  
Don Schwager  
editor

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## Controlled by the Love of Christ

by Tadhg Lynch

***For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.***

*- 2 Corinthians 5:14-15*

The call of the Lord as expressed by the apostle Paul in Second Corinthians is straightforward. He writes that “we are convinced that one has died for all”.

Through our lives in Christian community we are called to follow this teaching. We teach about service; about the necessity of finding a place in the body where we are not merely “contributing” and “expressing” but where we are really (in a small way) experiencing some cost. We teach about embracing humility, lowliness and suffering as a means to cultivate the desire to “lay down [our]...life for one’s friends” and to encourage a life where we “honor one another above yourselves”. We also teach the call to imitate Christ in his life of personal sacrifice and death on the cross.

As the church moves forward in her mission today, we may often be discouraged by what we see around us. Christians in many parts of the world, and some of our own brothers and sisters in the Middle East and elsewhere, experience intimidation, harassment, and persecution for their faith and the life of Christian discipleship they seek to live. Many of our church traditions grapple with public scandal over past and present

sins or suffer their moral and doctrinal teaching to conform to the standards of the world, seemingly incapable of presenting the truth through the ever more capricious lens of the media. The politicians of my own country – the Republic of Ireland – have recently voted to legalize abortion and take the lives of those most needing protection in our society.

As I meet fellow Christians across this world, I see a similar pattern in disciples from all different churches, denominations, cultures and countries. Some have embraced the call of discipleship and have paid the cost. Some have not embraced it or have turned away.

### **"Half-crucified Christians"**

In our Kairos evangelistic work with university students and other young people, I meet more and more who know something of Christ, and may even have a desire to live a life like his, but they seek to live it their way for themselves. Some days, this is the life that I live – a life that is controlled by the love of me and what I want. When I live life this way, Christ may be on my lips, he may be around my neck, or on my t-shirt, but he is not in my heart, mind, and soul. I meet more and more disciples like myself – we half crucified Christians – who know the cost we must pay, and willingly stand in line at the register, but gladly encourage those behind us to approach.

And then I meet Christians who are controlled by the love of Christ. They may look, act, and pray somewhat differently from one another, but they are united by the conviction that “one has died for us all; therefore all have died.” In this present world which has been described as “a culture of death,” they have chosen to live a Christ-centered life that is a kind of *living death* – praying, working, serving to bring the kingdom of God – gladly awaiting the time when they can lay down their own life and go to be with the Master for whom they have died a long time ago. Some days this is me – would that it were more and more.

I have not spent sufficient time in this present world to know whether our society is getting objectively worse. I grew up in an age where governments often seemed to pass laws which weakened traditional Christian morality and where a good sermon was something to be noted and commented on rather than expected. Those whose opinion and grey hairs I trust however, tell me that it is so, and I accept their wisdom and judgment.

### **Dying and living for Christ crucified**

One thing I do recognize, is that it is becoming easier and easier to spot the Christians who are *dying*, to see the men and women who live no longer for themselves but for him - the crucified and risen one. I believe that we who are called to covenant community, as well as all Christians, are faced with this same choice once. Most blindingly, terrifyingly, concretely, and ordinarily once – and (if we choose right) every day thereafter. To be part of a community, to attend a small group, or serve in an outreach is no guarantee that I have died and that Christ now continually lives in me. It is a help for sure, but no guarantee. I meet those in this world (many thankfully within our community movement) who are convinced, that one has died for them and that therefore they must die. They are often raising children, working in tax law, cleaning the fridge, and painting houses - and you can tell that they are dying all the same. You can tell because they look so alive. They don't seem like they're trying to talk to you about Christ but they do. You don't see the sacrifice of their difficult decisions about them, but you see the life of Christ that they are living.

This is our mission. To daily pick up our cross and walk as Christ has walked, and to bring his light and life to the world. As the world that does not know Christ darkens around us, we will find the call of discipleship quicker and easier to do if we have really died. But it will be slower, longer, and harder if we wish to postpone the cost or tarry in the darkness.



## **No fear for those who follow Christ**

If we have died with Christ, we have no fear of what the world may do. Our only desire will be to save those in it who hear and accept the message of eternal life. We have no real affinity with this present world, for it is passing away and our time here is fleeting. That it turns against us should neither surprise nor dismay. It can encourage us to redouble our efforts, knowing that each relationship we have built, each trust won, each testimony shared is not a wild hopeless shot into the darkness of a void but a blow with a hammer to a wall which will – through God’s good work – eventually shatter to reveal the world which will never pass away.

We may lament the current state of this present world and its decline, but we must remember that this is not where we are supposed to finally live. The man who fights behind enemy lines gives no thought to the plants he tramples in pursuit of victory. He knows there is a garden kept for him to enjoy at home when the battle is won.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor, theologian and martyr wrote simply in his spiritual classic – *The Cost of Discipleship* “*When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.*” Make it so in us, Lord Jesus.

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Tadhg Lynch is a member of the [Servants of the Word](#), a missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord, and a Mission Director for Kairos, an international outreach to young people. Tadhg is originally from Nazareth Community, Dublin, Ireland.

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## The Fire of Christ's Love

by Raniero Cantalamessa

***God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit  
Romans 5:5***

**The fire of Christ's love on the cross has not burnt out.** It is not something of the past, of two thousand years ago, of which only the memory lives on. It exists now; it is alive. If it were necessary, Christ would die again for us because the love for which he died continues unchanged.

"I am more a friend to you than such and such a one," Christ tells us as once he told the great mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal. "I have done for you more than they; they would not have suffered what I have suffered from you, and they would not have died for you as I have done in the time of your infidelities and cruelties, and as I am ready to do, and do, among my elect" (*Pensées*, 553).

Jesus has run out of signs for his love. There is nothing more he can do to show his love, for there is no greater sign than to give one's life. But he has run out of signs for his love, not of love itself.

Now his love is entrusted to a special sign, a different one, a sign that is real, a Person: the Holy Spirit.

“God’s love”—the love we now know—“has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5). It is therefore a living and real love, just as the Holy Spirit is living and real.

Where the other Evangelists say that Jesus “uttered a loud cry and breathed his last” (Mark 15:37; cf. Matthew 27:50), John says that Jesus “bowed his head and gave up his spirit” (John 19:30). That is, he not only breathed his last, but he gave the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, his Spirit. Now we know what was in the loud cry that Jesus gave us as he was dying. Its mystery has finally been revealed!

## Why did Jesus die for your sins?

Why did Jesus die for our sins? The answer was like a flash of sunlight illuminating the faith of the Church: because he loved us!

“Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (Ephesians 5:2); “the Son of God . . . loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20); “Christ loved the church and gave himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

It is an indisputable primordial truth pervading everything, and it applies both to the Church as a whole and to every individual. St. John the Evangelist, the last to write his gospel, dates this revelation back to Christ when he was on earth: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends” (John 15:13-14).

This answer to the “why” of Christ’s passion is really final and allows no further questions. He loved us because he loved us—that’s all there is to it! In fact, there is no “why” to God’s love; it is a free gift. It is the only love in the world that is truly and totally free, that asks nothing for itself (he already has everything!) but only gives. Or rather, he gives himself. “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us. . . . We love, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:10, 19).

Jesus, then, suffered and died freely, out of love. Not by chance, not from necessity, not because of any obscure forces or historical reasons overwhelming him without his knowledge or against his will. If anyone asserts this, they are nullifying the gospel, removing its soul, because the gospel is nothing other than the good news of God’s love in Christ Jesus. Not only the gospel, but the entire Bible is nothing other than the news of God’s mysterious, incomprehensible love for people.

If the whole of Scripture were to start talking at once, if by some miracle the written words were transformed into speech, that voice would be more powerful than the waves of the sea, and it would cry out: “God loves you!”

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Excerpt from *The Fire of Christ’s Love: Meditations on the Cross*, © 2013 Raniero Cantalamessa, published by The Word Among Us Press. Used with permission.





Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, O.F.M. Cap. (born July 22, 1934) is an Italian Catholic priest in the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin. He has devoted his ministry to preaching and writing. He is a Scripture scholar, theologian, and noted author of numerous books. Since 1980 he has served as the Preacher to the Papal Household under Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis. He is a noted ecumenist and frequent worldwide speaker, and a member of the Catholic Delegation for the Dialogue with the Pentecostal Churches.

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## The Spark of Divine Love within You

by Basil the Great (330-379 AD)

Love of God is not something that can be taught. We did not learn from someone else how to rejoice in light or want to live, or to love our parents or guardians. It is the same – perhaps even more so – with our love for God: it does not come by another's teaching. As soon as the living creature (that is, man) comes to be, a power of reason is implanted in us like a seed, containing with it the ability and the need to love. When the school of God's law admits this power of reason, it cultivates it diligently, skillfully nurtures it, and with God's help brings it to perfection.

For this reason, as by God's gift, I find you with the zeal necessary to attain this end, and you on your part help me with your prayers. I will try to fan into flame the spark of divine love that is hidden within you, as far as I am able through the power of the Holy Spirit.

First, let me say that we have already received from God the ability to fulfill all his commands. We have then no reason to resent them, as if something beyond our capacity were being asked of us. We have no reason

either to be angry, as if we had to pay back more than we had received. When we use this ability in a right and fitting way, we lead a life of virtue and holiness. But if we misuse it, we fall into sin.

This is the definition of sin: the misuse of powers given us by God for doing good, a use contrary to God's commandments. On the other hand, the virtue that God asks of us is the use of the same powers based on a good conscience in accordance with God's command.

Since this is so, we can say the same about love. Since we received a command to love God, we possess from the first moment of our existence an innate power and ability to love. The proof of this is not to be sought outside ourselves, but each one can learn this from himself and in himself. It is natural for us to want things that are good and pleasing to the eye, even though at first different things seem beautiful and good to different people. In the same way, we love what is related to us or near to us, though we have not been taught to do so, and we spontaneously feel well disposed to our benefactors.

What, I ask, is more wonderful than the beauty of God? What thought is more pleasing and satisfying than God's majesty? What desire is as urgent and overpowering as the desire implanted by God in a soul that is completely purified of sin and cries out in its love: *I am wounded by love*? The radiance of the divine beauty is altogether beyond the power of words to describe.

[Article excerpted from the *Longer Rules of Basil the Great*]

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# LIVING BULWARK sources of strength and renewal for Christian life and mission

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## Make your Love as Big as the World

by Augustine of Hippo (185-254 AD)

Augustine said:

It is by running along the road of true love that we can reach our heavenly homeland.

Without love, everything we do is useless. We are wasting our energies if we do not have love, which is God.

Human beings only become perfect when they are overflowing with love.

One can believe in the right way, but without love one cannot attain eternal happiness.

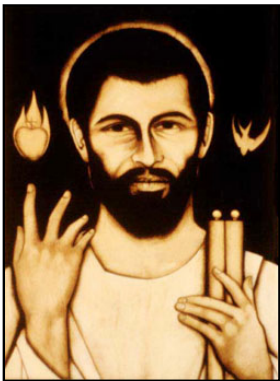
Love is so strong that without it neither prophecy nor martyrdom avail.

Love is the sweet and saving food without which the rich are poor, thanks to which the poor become rich.

Enlarge your love to the size of the world if you want to love Christ, since the members of Christ are to be found all over the world.

Only those who have the perfection of Christ's love are able to live together. Those who are without it continually upset one another and their anxiety is a misery to the others.

[Quotes from the writings of Augustine compiled by Defensor Grammaticus (after 600 AD) in his *Book of Sparkling Sayings*, I, 5ff. (SC77 pp.58ff.). Also quoted in *Drinking from the Hidden Fountain: A Patristic Breviary*, Cistercian Publications. English translation by Paul Drake.]



Aurelius Augustine was born in 345 in the town of Tagaste, in Roman North Africa, in what is today Algeria. His mother was Monica, a very devout Christian who had a significant influence on her son's life. His father, named Patricius, was a pagan of significant status in society. Patricius became a Christian shortly before his death.

Augustine was educated at Carthage where he enjoyed academic success. He also enjoyed the party life, and at the age of 17 fell in love with a woman whom he never named. They lived together unmarried for 13 years and had a son whom Augustine named Adeodatus, meaning "gift from God." His son died in his youth.



At the age of 19, after reading Cicero's *Hortensius*, Augustine fell in love with philosophy. He later wrote, "It gave me different values and priorities. Suddenly every vain hope became empty to me, and I longed for the immortality of wisdom with an incredible ardour in my heart." While he pursued Platonic philosophy and the theology of the Manichaens, a Christian heretical sect, he became restless for truth and virtue. Shortly before his 30th birthday, Augustine encountered Ambrose, the saintly bishop of Milan. Augustine was moved by Ambrose's example and his inspired teaching and preaching of the gospel. At the age of 32 Augustine found peace with God and was baptized by Ambrose during the Easter liturgy in 387. Augustine returned to North Africa and formed a monastic community with a group of friends. He was ordained a priest in 391 and became a noted preacher. In 396 he reluctantly became a bishop and remained the bishop of Hippo until his death in 430. He left his monastic community, but continued to lead a monastic life with the parish priests of Hippo in his episcopal residence. Augustine died on August 28, 430, during the siege of Hippo by the Vandals.

Augustine was a prolific writer and original thinker. His numerous writings, including theological treatises, sermons, scripture commentaries, and philosophical dialogues, number into the hundreds. His autobiography, the *Confessions*, was considered the first Western autobiography. It was highly read among his contemporaries and has continued as a classic throughout the ages.

Augustine is one of the most important figures in the development of Western Christianity. He is esteemed as a great Latin church father and a Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church. Many Protestants consider him to be one of the theological fathers of Reformation teaching. Among Orthodox he is called St. Augustine the Blessed.

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## Is Your Life Christ-Centered or Self-Centered?

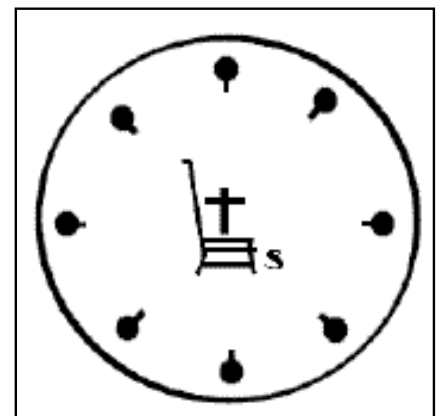
Wisdom for overcoming cultural traps that make us miss the mark

by Bob Tedesco

### Missing the mark

The Greek word *hamartia*, which is frequently used in Scripture and is translated “sin,” is a derivative of the word *hamartano* which means “to miss the mark.” In our efforts to live the Christian life we can get caught in certain cultural traps that cause us to lose focus and “miss the mark.”

The throne diagram, used in the Life in the Spirit Seminars, illustrates the centrality of Christ in the life of the Christian. The diagram is a cross placed on the throne of a person’s heart. The throne is surrounded by the types of things which can occupy one’s life, such as education, family, career, pleasure, any number of which could easily usurp the place of Christ on the throne. This diagram is a way of examining and situating our life’s priorities.



### Cultural influences

Most of us have been formed by our secular culture to give “conditioned responses.” Sometimes we don’t recognize the underlying value sets, including pressure from society, friends, and relatives, and the internal orientations that condition us for a certain response. We can be culturally driven, culturally responsive. We can be deceived, claiming

to be and actually desiring to be Christ-centered, but find ourselves on a path that goes far from the heart of God.

Many things get put in place in us by the culture around us – for example, fear-based living. There is the fear of rejection, fear of disease, fear of kidnapping or terrorism, to name a few. Another is the need for approval, which is connected to the fear of rejection. We want approval from friends and relatives, preferring not to be seen as abnormal. But if we live a Christ-centered Christian life we just won't look normal.

Some of us are driven by a competitive spirit: a drive to win. Or we can be influenced by the entitlement mentality, believing we “deserve” certain things as individuals and families. On a personal level we can be oriented by greed, orderliness, perfectionism, pleasure, fear, guilt, accomplishment, security, success, education.

## The “culture of self”

Many of us are familiar with the comparison, “the culture of death and the culture of life.” I suggest that the culture of death is really subordinate to and a subset of the “culture of self.” We need to see that we're living in a culture of self whose orientation embraces the culture of death. The kingdom of God, the culture of Christ, embraces life.

There are other subsets, or “isms”. Relativism, narcissism – and hedonism in certain ways – all describe this “culture of self” because they all put “me” at the center of the universe. We can work on fighting all the “isms” but if we don't deal with the stuff inside of us that tries to put us first, the “culture of self,” all of our fighting is a waste of time. Our real war is in dealing with “me” at the center rather than Christ. “I,” “me,” and “mine” are not the approach of the Kingdom of God. Christ and his kingdom have got to be at the center. If I keep pulling myself into the center, it pushes him out!

## Christ-centered living

A personal conversion to Christ, spiritual growth and formation, being baptized in the Holy Spirit, and ongoing decisions are needed for Christ-centered living, not just for individuals but for groupings as well. From many years of pastoral work with individuals, couples, and families in Christian community, I have learned that it is possible for two Christ-centered people to enter into marriage that itself is not Christ-centered at its core. The same is true for families. It is possible for Christ-centered parents to lead a family lifestyle or culture that does not have Christ at the center.

Marriages need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. Our marriages and families need to be converted to Christ. And once we decide to submit them to his lordship, we need to find out how to do that. It requires education and knowledge in order to avoid the secular cultural drift. I am suggesting that not only individuals, but marriages, family, and communities should have an “examination of conscience” – taking a hard look at our behavior, our practices, our priorities, our decision-making as a group, as a marriage, as a family, and as a community.

The congregation that started the WWJD (What would Jesus do?) movement has been a bit misrepresented. The actual approach was more like, “We will do what Jesus would do.” WWDWJWD! That's the approach we need to take. “I will do” and “we will do” what Jesus would do. The Lord wants Christ-centered individuals, Christ-centered families, Christ-centered communities. And that's going to require taking some steps.

## What We Can Do

1. Read Scripture a lot, even if you think you have it memorized. It challenges the world's input constantly. Get the children to read and memorize it. Get them to be able to answer questions from a Scriptural perspective. In Scripture we should look for antidotes to the world, the flesh, and the devil, but especially the flesh. The

world and Satan have less influence over a person whose flesh is broken. Reading Scripture is a genuine defense against the flesh.

2. Insist on “everything that is lovely and good” (Philippians 4:8). Think on these things.
3. Do a heart check. If your heart is polluted or poisoned, you will have trouble seeing and hearing things that the Lord wants you to see or hear. If your heart is not postured correctly, you won’t be able to respond. If your marriage or family needs to be consecrated or dedicated to the Lord, get a pastor or a pastoral leader to lead a prayer for the family. Communities could even have retreats dedicated to such re-centering.
4. Always suspect the “self” when you are making decisions or desiring something. It’s worth suspecting, asking ourselves, “Is this really from the Lord and his will for me or is it fueled by something down inside of me that is apart from what God wills?”
5. Pray for protection - from ourselves being blind or selfish, for our spouses, for our children, for our community, that as a people we would not be selfish in our orientation.
6. Rekindle fear of the Lord. If you distort or exclude any aspect of God’s nature, you get a distorted view of who God is. An over-emphasis on God’s mercy while under-emphasizing his justice will lead to an unbalanced perspective. Sin has consequences. We need to learn that and to teach it to our children.

## Summary

“If you live what I have taught you, you are my disciple and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31). Let’s not forget the beginning of the sentence. Jesus is saying, “Live in my Word, live what I have taught you, then the truth will set you free.” It is a promise of freedom and it’s worth celebrating. If we live according to the Lord’s plan, we will see the fruit of the Christian life and the power of the Holy Spirit revealed!

See also > [It's Not About You](#), by Bob Tedesco



Bob Tedesco is past President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit. He is a founder of the [People of God](#) community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 40 years.

> [See other articles by Bob Tedesco](#)

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## A Disciple's Yoke

***We need not fear a clear statement of the requirements of the gospel.***

by Bruce Yocum

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”

(Matthew 11:28-29).

### **What a freeing and delightful passage!**

Jesus tells us that to follow him is restful, easy, and not burdensome. When I was growing up, I understood this passage to mean that Jesus was offering us a life without restrictions, a life without demands or the commandments of the past. Jesus is a God of love and graciousness and gentleness; we are relieved that we no longer have to fear him as the people of Israel feared God under the old covenant.

That is the “gospel” I heard as a teenager. What tremendous news, I thought, that to follow Jesus frees me from the need for discipline and obedience.

Since then, I have come to agree with a close friend, named Helmut Niklaus, who passed away recently. He



saw things a bit differently. For several decades he had been a leader of YMCA-Munich, a major outreach to youth. During those years he had met thousands upon thousands of young people, many of whom have grown up in Christian homes. But surveying the condition of modern Western youth as he met them day by day, Helmut said, “One of the greatest problems today among Christian youth is a lack of proper fear of the Lord.”

### **What does it actually mean to fear the Lord?**

Too often we equate it with living under a tyrannical God, with obeying his laws and rules out of fear of punishment.

In reality, this understanding is distorted. In Helmut’s view — and in mine — young people today suffer enormously from being left in a state of false freedom that knows no laws or restrictions, no obedience or discipline. That is not the “rest for the heavy laden” that Jesus speaks about in Matthew, chapter 11.

Jesus is speaking of entering into his way of life and becoming his disciple. The yoke is the yoke of his word and his teaching. It is “easy” and “light” not because there is no obedience or discipline, but because it is the teaching and the way of life designed by God for human beings. People have a choice either to follow in God’s way or to become slaves to their own passions and desires and to the prince of this world.

### **The way of Jesus, the yoke of his teaching, the discipline of obedience to God — these bring life and rest and refreshment.**

My friend Helmut had seen the sorrow, the pain, and the suffering of those who have been “set free” from obedience to God’s law. We have all seen the fruit of promiscuity, of rebellion, of the pursuit of pleasure in the lives of those around us, both the young and the old.

This tragedy is sometimes assisted by those who ought to be teaching the way of God. John Paul II once said, “We can say that Europe today... with the collaboration of many students of theology, and above all of moral theology, defends itself very effectively against the necessity of conversion. Formerly the task of theology . . . was how to follow, how to proceed side by side with the process of conversion. Now it seeks to free the human person in the name of the dignity of that person from the necessity of conversion.”

But there can be no “freedom from the necessity of conversion.” Jesus, in calling us to make him our Lord, also calls us as well to live our lives entirely according to his word. This is the call to conversion.

Many of us today, whether teachers, parents, pastors, or youth workers, are afraid to teach the need for a full conversion of the lives of those who belong to the Lord. In failing to firmly and clearly preach the necessity of that conversion, we keep those who hear us from humbly submitting to the yoke of Jesus’ teaching and finding in it life and refreshment.

Read the passage again. The yoke of discipleship is easy; the burden of Jesus’ teaching is light. We have nothing to fear from the gospel, and neither do those who listen to us.

[Bruce Yocum is President of Christ the King Association and a member of the International Executive Council of The Sword of the Spirit. This article was originally published in New Covenant Magazine, February 1989.]

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publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

email: [living.bulwark@yahoo.com](mailto:living.bulwark@yahoo.com)



## Going Against the Tide

Lessons in faith and courage – Daniel and his friends in Babylon – Part I

Adapted from a presentation by John Keating given during the Adelante Conference

Daniel, a key Old Testament prophet, is one of my favorite young heroes. He lived in the time of Israel's greatest disaster – during the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple, and the Babylonian exile of many of its people.

In the Book of Daniel we read the firsthand account of Daniel being deported from Jerusalem to Babylon, along with three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. When Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, conquered Jerusalem in 606 B.C., he decided to bring back some of the best and the brightest of the youth of Israel to become his servants, to be taught the culture and language of Babylon, and to be assimilated into what he considered to be the vastly superior Babylonian culture.

### From the Book of Daniel *Chapter 1*

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoi'akim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. 2 And the Lord gave Jehoi'akim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god.

3 Then the king commanded Ash'penaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of

How did Daniel and his three companions react to their deportation and new life in Babylon?

They could have chosen to be resentful towards their captors, and in anger rant against them: “These are the rats who destroyed our nation, wrecked our city, tore down the house of God and stole the holy things, blinded our king and took us off into captivity.” Like an underground resistance movement, seeking to undermine both culture and society, they could have chosen to act as “God’s terrorists” and try to take it down.

Did they experience shame and insecurity before the apparently stronger victorious culture they were now immersed in? They could have reasoned that the safest thing to do was to simply to huddle in a corner, keep their head down, and hope that their captives would just leave them alone. But that would amount to living like a coward.

Another option they might have considered was to assimilate to the new culture with open-arms and open-heart. “If you can’t lick ‘em, join ‘em...” That would have required a readiness to forget who I really am, and just jump right into living like everyone else around me. A decision to simply accept the prevailing culture, go along with it, be shaped by its values and its customs, and look as much as possible just like everyone else. A lot of the Jews in exile probably did this. You know what happened to them? They disappeared. Their lives proved relatively meaningless for God’s greater purpose for his people and for the world.

Daniel and his three friends chose none of these options. They chose instead the course which the prophet Jeremiah gave:

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:4-7).

Jeremiah’s instruction was very simple. Know who you are in God. Love who you are in God. Be who you are wherever God places you. Live in great hope, and grow as a people of God. Live for him and with him, and love those around you with his heart.

## Models for today

Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, 4 youths without blemish, handsome and skilful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to serve in the king's palace, and to teach them the letters and language of the Chalde'ans.

5 The king assigned them a daily portion of the rich food which the king ate, and of the wine which he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. 6 Among these were Daniel, Hanani'ah, Mish'a-el, and Azari'ah of the tribe of Judah. 7 And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshaz'zar, Hanani'ah he called Shadrach, Mish'a-el he called Meshach, and Azari'ah he called Abed'nego.

8 But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food, or with the wine which he drank; therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. 9 And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs; 10 and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear lest my lord the king, who appointed your food and your drink, should see that you were in poorer condition than the youths who are of your own age. So you would endanger my head with the king."

11 Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had appointed over Daniel, Hanani'ah, Mish'a-el, and Azari'ah; 12 "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's rich food be observed by you, and according to what you see deal with your servants."

14 So he hearkened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's rich food.



In a number of ways I think that Daniel and his friends are excellent models for young Christians today:

- Daniel and his friends were young.
- They found themselves living in a foreign culture, which generally paid no attention to their faith, and when it did, was relatively hostile to it.
- Furthermore, they found themselves in circumstances in which they were being taught the wisdom of this foreign and unbelieving culture, and they had face the strength of this culture directly, on their own.
- Their own people were passing through a very bad time during the Babylonian exile. They did not enjoy a good reputation, or much honor. It wasn't a big advantage to be associated with the people of God, and the temptation for these young people to be ashamed of their own people, and to avoid being associated with them, must have been considerable.

Daniel and his friends were all naturally very bright, talented, and good-looking (you can read the description in the first chapter of the Book of Daniel). However, Daniel and his friends did not rely upon their natural benefits for their success in life. Nor did they allow the low reputation of their people to be a reason to evade identification with them, or to call into question their fidelity to God.



### Faith, courage, boldness, and humility

Somehow, and for some reason known only to God, these young people were chosen by the Lord for a particular mission. God's hand was upon them; his grace was with them; and they knew it. What was their response to the challenges of this situation? They chose to stand

16 So the steward took away their rich food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

17 As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all letters and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

18 At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 And the king spoke with them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hanani'ah, Mish'a-el, and Azari'ah; therefore they stood before the king.

20 And in every matter of wisdom and understanding concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. 21 And Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.

together in the Lord and to act with faith, courage, boldness, and humility. And God was able to do a great work through these young people – far beyond what they could have expected or even hoped for.

As we can see from these verses, Daniel obviously had a lot going for him, and it would have been a strong temptation for him to do his best to look like the “winners”, the “beautiful people” of the society around him, to assimilate as much as he could, to make his background very low profile, to become practically indistinguishable from the other promising and gifted young people around him. Many of the other young Jews who were deported to Babylon probably did just that. They are not mentioned here in the book of Daniel, or anywhere else, because their lives proved meaningless. They didn’t make a difference with their lives. They had no impact for the Lord of any great weight, and they have been utterly forgotten.

### Standing out from the crowd

Daniel and his three friends stand out from the crowd. Not because they were more handsome, nor more naturally gifted with grace, charm, intelligence, or anything else. Rather, because they were faithful to the Lord and to their people, and to the covenant which God had established with them. They knew who they were, and they were not ashamed of it. They knew who the Lord was, and they were true to him.

Their fidelity was costly. It required faith, courage, and boldness on their part, and put them at various points in mortal danger. It also put them in a place to be blessed and used by the Lord in extraordinary ways that resulted in their being placed in ever higher roles of influence and of authority in the society/culture that they were called upon to live in. This in turn required of them even greater care, vigilance, and fidelity. It made them even more the target of enemies who feared their influence and authority; the accusations and attacks of enemies only increased the need to respond to their circumstances in faith, in righteousness, with boldness, courage, and humility.

### Daniel’s dedication

In Chapter 1 in the Book of Daniel (verses 8-16) we read how Daniel decided firmly in his own heart that he would not defile himself by partaking of a number of the pleasant and desirable things that were offered to him in his favored role. They were things that were forbidden by the Law, but hey, everyone was eating them and enjoying them, and besides, he had to eat something and this was what was available. Even from the point of view of being prudent and reasonable, you could make a good case that it could have been acceptable for Daniel to take part in what was being given to everyone.

But in his zeal for the Lord and for the covenant which his people had



with the Lord, Daniel not only didn't wimp out, he decided that he wouldn't settle for normal prudence. Rather, he would boldly go out on a limb, and in faith he would give the Lord the chance to do something extraordinary for him and in him.



First Daniel went to the chief eunuch and asked for special consideration (see verse 8, Chapter 1). This was already rocking the boat, and could have been asking for trouble. He risked the possible displeasure, anger, and rejection of the chief eunuch – on the one hand, trusting that the Lord would give him favor in his eyes, but on the other hand, also being ready to face the consequences if the Lord chose not to do so. As it turned out, the Lord did give him favor and compassion in the eyes of the chief eunuch. However, the man was (reasonably enough) afraid for his own skin (because it was the king himself who had decided what the young people would eat), and was reluctant to make the kind of exception that Daniel and his friends were requesting.

### Radical plunge in faith

Daniel and his friends took a deeper and more radical plunge in faith (see verses 11-13, Chapter 1). Running the risk of getting into serious trouble with the chief eunuch, they went to the eunuch's steward to propose a test that relied completely upon the sovereign intervention of God in his life. Putting themselves completely in the Lord's hands, they proposed that the results of the test would be so clear and apparent that the steward himself could make his own decision after observing those results. They also found favor in the steward's eyes, and he agreed to the test. Daniel and his friends went onto a very strict vegetarian diet that would be safely keep them within the dietary demands of the Law, hoping in the Lord for results that were totally beyond their control.

The steward must have been blown away by their request: healthy young men asking to not have to eat the meat, the deserts, or to drink the wine, so that they could live on vegetables and water? This is a serious sacrifice of love in itself on the part of Daniel and his friends – a three year special fast!

### Anointing for greatness

God acted in these young men of faith, courage, boldness, and humility, anointing them in a special way (see verses 14-16, Chapter 1). They had shown themselves capable of standing firm for the Lord, of going against the current around them. This opened the way for the Lord to give them extraordinary grace, and to cause them to stand out – again, not merely on the basis of their personal merits, but on the basis of an anointing for greatness that the Lord himself was giving them.

It was manifested in two different ways: First, they end up with better color, health, and physical vitality than any of the others around them, who supposedly were eating much better. The 10-day test became a three year program, and the Lord sustained and strengthened them supernaturally.

Second, they were granted by God a degree of wisdom and insight so far above that of the other youths that they became standouts even among the established wise men and magicians of the realm (see verses 17-20, Chapter 1). God wanted them to stand out, so that he could glorify himself through them. Beyond this, Daniel was given a spiritual gift of understanding visions and dreams. It is this gift which makes him famous in the kingdom, and which makes him one of the four great prophets of the Old Testament. God also gave them favor in the eyes of king Nebachudnezzar, who gave them a special place before him, and throughout his reign the king found their wisdom and counsel 10 times better than that of anyone else among his wise men, enchanter, and magicians.



## Lessons for today

I think we should examine Daniel's example very deeply. This is not just a nice story. It is instruction from the word of God about how to live as young people in an alien culture in a way that is faithful to God, and available for the mission that he is entrusting to us. It would have been so normal, so easy, so obvious for Daniel and his friends to take the safe way, to follow the crowd, to not rock the boat, to not do something in their faithfulness to God that would make them look strange and different.

- They didn't take the easy way, nor the coward's way.
- They didn't allow themselves to be seduced by the offer of wealth, power, and pleasures.
- They also didn't take the hostile and aggressive way that would see their surrounding culture as the enemy.

They recognized that, even in a situation of many challenges and difficulties, they had a special identity, a call from the Lord. They pursued fidelity to the Lord with a humble boldness that won them the favor of those whose favor they needed. They went out on a limb in their trust that God would intervene on their behalf, that the Lord would use them where he had placed them, and that their best response in every circumstance would be faith and faithfulness, with a blending of boldness and humility which allowed lots of room for grace to do its work.

Let's choose to follow their example and allow the Lord to strengthen us in faith, courage, boldness, and humility.

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> See related article: [Faithfulness and Courage Under Fire](#)  
– Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

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John Keating is Vice-President of the [Sword of the Spirit](#) and a frequent speaker for Kairos and Sword of the Spirit conferences and retreats. He is an elder in the [Servants of the Word](#), a missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He currently lives in Manila, Philippines.

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email: [living.bulwark@yahoo.com](mailto:living.bulwark@yahoo.com)



Zugspitze, the highest mountain of Germany, is nearly 3000 meters (9718 feet) tall

## The Call and Fruit of Perseverance

by Bernhard G. Stock

Note: This article is adapted from a talk given a few years ago for members from [Sword of the Spirit](#) communities in Europe and the Middle East who were on holiday together in Exeter, UK. Bernhard's exhortation on the Lord's call for Christian communities, families, and individuals to persevere together is a timely and important message for Christians today. - ed.

Perseverance is essential for everyone who seeks to do God's will and receive his promises. The author to the Letter to the Hebrews writes:

“You have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what he has promised.” – Hebrews 10:36

### **A long-distance race**

Individuals, families, and communities must learn to persevere, not just for a season, but for a life-time and for generations to come. Christianity is a long-distance-race, not a sprint. In Germany we have a saying: “God's mills grind slowly.”

### **“Quick and easy” versus “real and good”**



Really good things don't come effortlessly or quickly. If you want a quick and easy meal you can go to a "fast food" restaurant like McDonald's and be served instantly. But is fast food the real thing – like the kind of delicious meal made from fresh ingredients prepared at home? A really good and healthy meal takes time, effort, and preparation. My mother used to regularly enjoy making potato dumplings for Sunday lunch. She began the process of peeling the potatoes on Saturday afternoon, and putting them into a pan of water to sit overnight, and then scraping them on Sunday morning. And then shortly before lunch she would form them into dumplings and cook them in some boiling water. Now you can make quick and easy dumplings within 10 minutes out of an instant package, but they can't compare with the dumplings made from fresh potatoes. If you ever tasted my mother's, you would know the difference!



Several years ago, I climbed up the Zugspitze, the highest mountain of Germany. It is about three thousand meters high (9718 feet). After walking for five hours we reached a hut where we camped overnight. Then we got up very early at 4 a.m. because we knew it would take the whole day to reach the top. We had to climb for another 8 hours to reach the top.

Now, for the person who doesn't like to climb, there is a quick and easy option of taking a cable car ride to the top. When the car stops near the top, the people enter a huge building which looks like a crowded railway station. The impression is similar to being in a packed McDonalds restaurant at a shopping center. There are lots of people walking around and standing on the same mountain top where you are standing.



The people who took the cable car ride to the top looked fresh and relaxed, and I looked and felt totally exhausted, even to the point of vomiting. But believe me - not one of those cable car riders standing on the Zugspitze had the slightest idea of the "mountain top experience" I had! It was the same mountain, the same beautiful sight, but there was a big difference: the endurance I had to bear to reach the summit, and the reward I got as a result of achieving my goal through physical and mental effort!

### **Joy and reward in persevering**

Things which don't cost us are often experienced as cheap or of little value or worth. There is a joy in going through real effort and hardship, and learning to not quit or give up but to persevere and endure until the goal is achieved. Konrad Lorenz, a German behavioral scientist (not a Christian!), called the lack of perseverance and the "instant-mentality" which results from that ("I want it all – and I want it now") one of the "eight deadly sins of mankind" (the title of a book he wrote).

Perseverance is something we can train our children in as well. So don't deprive your children of this joy! Don't always make it too easy for them! How can they learn to become missionaries, saints, and martyrs if they have not even learned to cope with washing the dishes, or eating some strange food, or three days of camping or hiking in the rain?

### **God is persevering**

Let's consider God's perspective on perseverance. God himself is persevering! He has unending patience with us and an enduring faith in us! We realize this, if we look at his history with humankind. How often did his people fail and break covenant with him through their disobedience and rebellion, and how often did he renew his commitment to them!

Paul the Apostle writes In 2 Timothy 2:11-13:

“If we have died with him, we shall also live with him;  
if we endure, we shall also reign with him;  
if we deny him, he will also deny us;  
if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

Note the change in the last verse: he remains faithful, even if we are faithless!

### **Avoid the quick and easy mentality**

There is a way of thinking in us that go against God's character, the way he thinks and acts: we want everything to be easy, and we want to have it quickly. Perseverance, by contrast, has to do with things that do

not come easily, such as enduring adversities and difficulties to obtain a goal, and with things that require time and sustained effort or patient waiting.

### **Facing adversities with a spiritual perspective**

Perseverance has to do with adversities. There is a famous character in the Bible who is an example for that: Job. What we can see in his story is: It doesn't always work like we would like it to. It doesn't often even work according to our ideas about justice! Job's friends had their idea of God's justice: If you behave well, God will bless you in a visible way; if he doesn't bless you, it is because you made mistakes.

But it is not always our fault or even our sin or our shortcomings when things don't look so glorious! In Job's case, there was something more important behind the scenes, which he wasn't aware of: a dispute going on between God and Satan! Job's story was only the tip of the iceberg! It is the same with Jesus: From a human point of view, his life was a complete failure! And yet he won the greatest victory in history through his death and resurrection! If you are experiencing trouble or affliction, it might well be that there is something going on behind the scenes which is much more important than you can imagine. Job wasn't aware of the bigger picture behind his ordeal. It was invisible yet spiritually real!

God very often uses ordinary men and woman to change the course of world history. And very often these people don't recognize how God is using them to change the course of events. They only know that they are going through a painful and difficult struggle, or some kind of ridiculous situation in which they have to persevere with faith and patience. This has happened time and again with whole communities, nations, and groups of Christians.



The pilgrim fathers who settled in Plymouth on the coast of North America in the eighteenth century may have had some inkling that they were laying the foundations of a "new world," but first and foremost, they wanted a place for themselves and for their families to settle down and live peacefully as Christians.

Do you think the first Christians who left Jerusalem for other cities and nations did that with the intention of spreading the Gospel over all the world? No - they did it because they were fleeing persecution!

We will only know the full picture on the last day of judgment when the Lord Jesus opens his big book and reveals the deeds and hearts of all who lived. Then will we have the definitive answer that explains the times and struggles we had to endure and the obstacles we had to overcome through faith and perseverance. In this



present time we move forward with faith "looking through" the curtain to catch a glimpse of the great and wonderful things which God is accomplishing. Then we can say like Job: "[Lord] I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eyes can see!" (Job 42:5).

### **God's timing is perfect**

A second factor which has to do with God's purposes is time.

Time means that we cannot see everything that is going on in a situation, especially what is unfolding for the future. Again, this is a very natural principle. "The farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth" (James 5:7). The fruit takes time to grow. Oftentimes, it isn't even the same person who does the sowing at spring time and the reaping at harvest time. Have you ever noticed that other people will tell you how friendly and well-educated your children behaved when they have been with them, and you think, why can't they behave like that at home? Now that becomes easy to explain: You do the sowing business - others do the reaping! Rejoice! There is fruit!

Many of the Old Testament prophets did not see the fulfillment of their prophecies. And none of them saw the fulfillment of the greatest prophecy: the coming of the Messiah!

Before Jesus began his public ministry, he had to live 30 years in an ordinary household in Nazareth. Thirty years of preparation for only three years of preaching the gospel, and for three days in which he fulfilled the work of salvation through his death and resurrection. But his preaching was the most effective ever heard!

It really takes time for us to be prepared and to bear fruit for the task the Lord gives us, and he has a perfect time table for each one of us!

### **Forty years and three generations**

Years ago I had the opportunity to speak with a famous theologian and Scripture scholar in Germany. He had left his professorship at a German University some 30 years previously to join a Christian renewal group in Munich which is pretty much like our own network of covenant communities in the Sword of the Spirit. While we were sharing about our experiences in building Christian community, he shared the observation that his Christian renewal group had still not finished their most important and basic task. Even though the group had been living and serving together for some 30 years then, it would take a full 40 years to complete a foundation of community life – that is, when three generations are living together: the "founding generation" passing on their faith and way of life to their children, and the first and second generations together passing on their faith and way of life to the third generation.

When three generations live together a truly Christian way of life, helping and supporting one another, then this becomes a sign of the "messianic age" being fulfilled. The words of Malachi in the last book of Old Testament prophets speak for the Lord, saying: "Then I will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6).

Thanks be to God, we can already see at least half of this prophecy fulfilled here in our communities! It is a fact which astonishes many people in this world, because they have never seen something like that. In this age, children, beginning even in their early years, will go their own way, and parents will go their own way - but it often leaves them with a deep feeling of discontent.

I think it takes some forty years till there are three generations living together in a common way of life. This may be a key reason for the 40 years the people of Israel had to wander through the wilderness. Starting with the covenant and the Ten Commandments, God had to form a people out of this group of Hebrew slaves from Egypt, and he had to give them a common identity and way of life as his own people.



God is restoring a vision of inter-generational Christian community among us. And in order for that vision to come to full fruition, we have to stay together in community for at least forty years – and for most of us that means for the rest of our lives! And that is the simple reason why we need a covenant - a commitment to stay. (Of course you could chose another path or a 40 year walk through the desert like Israel!) I'm clear which path the Lord has called me to take, and I'm convinced it is easier and better, despite all the challenges which community life entails! But we can only reap the fruits - and experience the promised land - which God offers us, if we persevere and stay committed for a lifetime!

### **Overcoming obstacles**

Let me now give you some thoughts on obstacles, misunderstandings, or traps that can keep us from persevering and finishing well.

#### ***The “instant change” mentality produces impatience***

I think there are two obvious attitudes which work against perseverance: the first one is the "instant mentality." We want everything, even success in our Christian life, and we want it now: big signs and wonders, the great renewal, people around us being convicted of sin and converted, healing and great awakening. If it doesn't happen, we get impatient. And we are in danger of imposing our impatience on other people, even on our brothers and sisters. We then think we must change them, convince them. Have you ever noticed that you cannot even change yourself? How can you think of changing someone else? It's only by the grace of God that people change, and often God wants to change us first.

#### ***Getting discouraged or cynical leads to giving up***

The second danger is getting tired and discouraged, or even cynical. If you don't see the great plans fulfilled, or the great promises we believe God gave us, we can begin to be content with what we have. And every time someone comes up with a new and good plan or even with some success, we are inclined to say: wait till you are older, more experienced, wiser - as I am. This is a really bad attitude! It is a sign of unbelief and of spiritual pride, and we should repent of it whenever we discover it in us.

How do you gain the right attitude of perseverance? Of course, through the practice of persevering! But if we think God can form perseverance in us quickly - "Lord, give me patience - but do it right now!" - that doesn't work. The Lord gives us perseverance through putting us in situations where we have to learn perseverance through patient determination to stay the course and not quit. God works through trials and testing to help us grow in patience and perseverance. It is the Lord doing his work of forming us! You should rejoice in it!

### **Some practical advice**

And if you are in situations like that, there is some simple advice I can give you:

1. Don't get out! If I am in a bedroom with only one light switch at the door, before I go to bed, I try to remember my path I take, then when I put the light out, I go to bed in exactly the same way. If you are in a situation in which you have difficulties or problems knowing the way forward, where things are dark, don't change your direction: stay on the same path as you remembered it when the Lord first directed you. Persevere! Otherwise you will bump your head! You can only rethink your way when there is light!

There is another interesting example in Scripture which tells us we should not give up too soon: in 2 Kings 13, Elisha instructs King Joash to perform a prophetic action: he is to strike the ground with his arrows to achieve a victory over Syria. He does it three times. Then the prophet gets angry and says: “You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck down Syria until you made an end of it, but now you will strike down Syria only three times.” This means we really should bring things to their completion just as God has instructed, even if it is hard work! Otherwise we will not get God’s whole plan accomplished.

2. We need to temper our perseverance with the right kind of humor. True perseverance has nothing to do with grim determination, harshness, or bitterness. There is joy in knowing that you are on the right path, even if it is difficult. You can laugh over the difficulties, since you know that with the Lord you will succeed and share in his victory!

Raising children, for instance, takes perseverance. But many parents can testify to the fact that from time to time one can I really delight in the fact that it is hard work, and it has to do with struggling and keeping at it, and not giving up. They sometimes even like those struggles - and they like their kids too! At least it was our experience as parents, and even though I cannot say how this came about, it was something the Lord did and can do with you if you don't quit or grumble. It is a sign of a true call of the Lord: it may look like an impossible task, but you find that you have faith and perseverance for it! And you can even approach it with the fiery zeal of the athlete who sets his sight on the crown of victory. We can have that kind of godly zeal for the call the Lord has given us! We are walking with him, and that is more like a dance - leaping and joyful!

3. We can only have this attitude of faith and perseverance if we look to the Lord, and if we have a close relationship with him - a relationship which builds our trust in him so that it becomes like Job's. We may not see what the Lord is doing, we may not even see the fulfillment of the promises he gave us - but "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). The Lord gives us the grace to hold onto things not yet seen, to persevere, to be patient like he is, to endure, and to fulfill the great work he has given us!

### **Prayer for perseverance**

I want to close with a prayer of St. Paul for the grace of perseverance:

And so, from the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

– Colossians 1:9-12

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Bernhard Stock is a member of the Regional Council for the [Sword of the Spirit](#) communities in Europe and the Middle East and a founding coordinator of the [Bread of Life community](#) (Brot des Lebens) in Munich and Olching, Germany. Bernhard and his wife Monika are the grateful parents of three children and five grandchildren, who along with their spouses are actively involved in Sword of the Spirit communities.

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publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

email: [living.bulwark@yahoo.com](mailto:living.bulwark@yahoo.com)



## Forgiveness and Reconciliation with One Another

by Carlos Mantica

The following essay is adapted from the book, *From Birdhood to Egghead: Hatch or Rot as a Christian*, by Carlos Mantica. In the forward to the book Fr. Victoriano Arizti, from Victoria, Spain writes: "You are going to experience, dear reader, how these talks and teachings, which ...are Nicaraguan experiences, conceptualized by Chale Mantica in light of God's Word – do give a concrete response to the issues and questions that often come up in your communities or in the apostolic field the Lord has called you to. These talks now come to your hands, with the same love and the same apostolic enthusiasm with which their author developed them, and I hope they will be helpful for your own enrichment and to give practical orientation to those who share with you the yearning for a more genuine Christianity, one that will be an effective answer to the problems confronted by today's society."

I met my Lord at the precise moment when many things in my life were beginning to crumble down, including my family. I now have a family that is very much united and very happy, as a fruit of reconciliation and of the

Lord's mercy. That is why, on addressing the topic of family as the target and instrument of reconciliation, I can do it with praise and thanksgiving to the Lord of all tenderness.

### **The human family is deeply divided at all levels**

I was born in Nicaragua, that trouble-ridden country where the human family is nowadays deeply divided at all levels – children against parents, wives against husbands, brother against brother. This division is today our greatest sorrow, and the task of reconciliation is the most difficult challenge that the Lord poses to his people.

I visit the U.S. with some frequency, and I am sad to discover that, even though in a different way, American families are divided too, and their division is very deep.

Since statistics are very helpful to make our talks more impressive, I decided to gather information about the situation of Catholic families in the United States, and I found some data that are frankly quite interesting.

From 1973 to 1983, the rate of divorced Catholics increased from one in every seven to one in every four marriages. While the divorce rate in the general population of the U.S. increased by 50 percent, during the same period the divorce rate among Catholics increased by 90 percent.

These numbers speak to us about a divided family, about a division that alienates and separates spouses. But the picture is only complete when we look into the situation of their children.

From 1957 to 1979 the incidence of suicide among the youth increased by 230 percent. The figure alone says nothing, until we realize that this increase is ten times higher than the increase in suicide among the adult population. The arrests of white young people under 18 increased by 2730 percent, and the number of murders committed by white youngsters in 310 percent. In the U.S., 40 percent of the murders nowadays are committed by young people between 16 and 24 years old.

The number of illegitimate births rose 800 percent among girls between 15 and 19 years old, despite the generalized use of contraceptives. In 1982, 33 percent of people above 12 years of age used some drug in a more or less customary way, but the percentage went up to 64 percent among high school seniors. More than one third of them had experimented other illegal drugs in addition to marijuana. (Pastoral Renewal, Nov. 1983, p. 40).

### **The inner root of the problem is sin within us**

Statistics are just too cold and too impersonal. We run the risk of seeing only figures where there are real people involved. Each of these young people has a name and a family which could be ours. Behind every integer lies a disintegrated personality. There's something that is not working the way God intended it to. There's someone who is shattered inside.

In the face of this kind of situations, man wonders what is going wrong, where his failure is. We Christians know the answer: no matter how different the road one might have followed, the point of departure is always the same. All of our failures, both personal and social, have their root in the inner breakdown of man through sin, and in his separation from God.

This is what our bishops reminded us of in the Synod of 1983: "The divisions that disturb our world are at once a terrible and revealing sign, and a bitter fruit of that intimate division produced by man through sin, that alienates him from God, from himself and from others."

We need to listen to the voice of the church that is continuously reminding us that the root of our troubles is inside our own hearts. Modern man insists on looking for the cause and the solution to his problems outside of



his own heart. This can be seen both in the case of the divorced woman who asserts that everything will be different with this new husband, and in the young revolutionary who asserts that the new change will finally bring peace.

Unfortunately, divorces and revolutions come one after the other without yielding the expected results. As the root is the same, the fruits are the same.

We do not need an elaborate theology to know that this is true. Even the most complex theology becomes plain and obvious when our own existence teaches us the truth. Family is perhaps the context where we can most clearly verify the existence of that destructive force we carry within us, and which we call sin.

One day we choose a girl, the woman of our dreams, whom we love deeply, for whom we would be willing to do anything, and to whom we want to devote our whole life in order to build a home with her that will be a true paradise. We lack nothing, we have everything it takes—a sincere desire, a firm decision, the necessary love and the person we ourselves chose to make all of this a reality.

### ***Sin within the heart sows division and destruction***

And yet even that dream collapses. The reason is that we carry inside ourselves something that will soon begin to surface – jealousy, grudge, resentment. And happiness is blurred today by anger, and tomorrow by incomprehension, and the next day by mockery and sarcasm, by alienation, by the distance and silence of two people who are drifting away towards lack of love. The sin within us has begun its process of division and destruction.

When this happens, we wonder what has taken place. And, like St. Paul, we answer that “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate... So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me” (Romans 7:15, 17).

I know that among you there are people who are suffering. There are people with deep wounds in their souls, caused by the sins of others. And there are people who have done a lot of harm through their actions or omissions, possibly without intending to, possibly against the people they loved most. It would be better if that had not happened; they would like to start all over again; but they think this is impossible. But with God nothing is impossible.



### God offers restoration through repentance and forgiveness

I'm on my return trip from the impossible. I know the way back. The way God offers us to come back from the impossible is the same he offers to come back from sin to his friendship – the way of reconciliation through repentance and forgiveness.

Man today is shattered inside. Psychiatrists tell us that this inner breakdown, in a very high percentage, is caused by two big factors: guilt, and resentment or grudge.

### ***Repentance and forgiveness are the only cure and solution***

This is something God knows quite well, because he's the one who fashioned us and knows better than anybody else how it is that we work. Everybody knows that a diesel car cannot operate on gasoline. It's not just that it won't run, but that if we try it, we ruin the car. It will be broken inside. God knows that a family cannot work with grudge, because it was made to work with love. And because God knows this, and in addition to that he wants our good and loves us, he then does something we don't always understand – he calls us to repentance, and he commands us to forgive. And he does so because repentance and forgiveness are the only cure and solution for guilt and grudge that are destroying us.

Young people, too, were made to operate on love. So when they don't find it, they look for a replacement, or simply refuse to function. Sometimes they will only experience a tremendous vacuum inside, and they try to fill it up with strong experiences. In other cases, they are filled with hatred or grudge that impels them to violence.

Behind their rebelliousness and their drugs, behind their escapism, behind their violence, we must diagnose a failure in their inner engine. Something is lacking. Something is broken. No matter what fuel he or she is using, it has to be changed. That is, he or she needs to repent and go back to the fuel he was designed for.

### ***Apart from God we cannot save ourselves***

And, brothers and sisters, we were ultimately designed to operate on God. We cannot run without him. Man was made to run with God's life, with the Spirit of God. This is what Genesis tells us, that God blew his own Spirit into dust in order to give us life. When man, through sin, loses the Spirit of God, he becomes mere dust once again. That is, he's now mere flesh and is subject to the laws of the flesh.

This is what our faith teaches us: that man, apart from God and without the help of the Holy Spirit, carries within himself a destroying force that we call sin. Unless we draw near and unite ourselves to God once again through reconciliation, unless the Lord gives us a new heart, unless we are born again from on high, unless the Spirit of God shapes us in the image of Christ, unless God's power acts in our lives... in sum, brothers and sisters, unless we are saved by Jesus Christ, we will continue to fail, despite our best intentions and our greatest efforts, and a destroyed family is the clearest proof to this great truth.

Even though the topic of my talk is not reconciliation to God, all that I will say from now on presupposes this reconciliation and vital union to him. It is through him, with him and in him that everything else is possible.

It is good to know what the Lord commands us to do, but it is also necessary to understand why he commands what he commands. Everything is easier and clearer when we understand the Lord's ways.

### The kingdom of God is peace, joy, and righteousness

There is a parable that can be very useful for us to have a better understanding of the Lord's purposes and ways. It is found in Matthew 18:23-35, and in it the Lord explains to us to some extent what the Kingdom of God is like. We will find a deeper meaning in it if we remember that in Romans 14:17 we are told that the Kingdom of God is living in righteousness, peace and joy. And that's what the Lord wants for us: a life in righteousness, full of his joy and peace. This is the parable:

Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.



### ***Allow the word of God to challenge you***

Brothers and sisters, we Christians need to allow the Word of God to challenge us. The Lord repeatedly says in Scripture that he will only forgive our trespasses if we ourselves forgive those who offend us. That is something very serious, something we need to get clear on: forgiving is not something optional that we can do or left undone, but is a command.

However, I think it is important for you to understand why it is that the Lord commands us to forgive. It is worth discovering at all times, behind every command of God, the love and the tenderness of a Father who loves us.

The Lord often uses his parables to explain to us what God is like. In this parable, the first thing we find, as we look at the amount of this man's debt, is a God who loves us so much that he allows us to accumulate incredible debts. One could say that he doesn't even keep a record of the things he gives us or of the debts accrued.

It is obvious that the intention of the parable is to show us that what we owe God is something we would never be able to pay. But that's what God is like, and he allows for these things because he is Love.

But the thing doesn't stop there. The Lord teaches us something even greater and more beautiful: the only thing this man in the parable dares to do is ask for patience so he can pay. He doesn't even think about asking for more. However, this man on his knees leads God to compassion, and God goes far beyond the man's request. Of his own will, he grants the total cancellation of all his debts.

What this parable teaches us is that God's kindness is much larger than anything we could imagine or anything we dare expecting from him. St. Paul says that what eye has not seen, or ear heard, nor have we even been able to imagine, is what God has reserved for those who love him. We who are the Lord's friends know that very well. That's what he's like.

### ***When God forgives he cancels the debt totally***

The parable also teaches us that God does not forgive in a limited way. He does not keep, as we do, even a little IOU that can become a tool for pressing on the debtors. I'm talking about that IOU of the old unpaid debt, to be charged to that person who still owes it to us, and which we produce every once in a while to rub on his or her face. This can be our wife or our husband. This can be anyone who has been unlucky enough to become indebted to us.

God's cancellation is total. What the parable teaches is that when God forgives, it's a whole new start. When he cancels a debt, the IOU's are destroyed. Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And when something is taken away, it is no longer there.

The meaning of forgiveness in the Bible is very different from what we mean by that. In the world, if you forgive me, then you are the good guy who in your immense generosity has deigned forgiving me; I continue to be the bad guy who wronged you. I am merely a pardoned or paroled criminal who is allowed to walk freely on the streets, but who continues to be a criminal whose record is being kept somewhere.

But with God, things are different. When God blots our sins, no trace is left of them. They have never existed. Not even St. Peter will be able to find them in his heavenly accounting books when he looks you up. So I can come to you and before God clean and unblemished. Not because someone stole my record at the police headquarters. Some say that what happened is that someone spilled it with his own blood and made it illegible. But in fact, something greater than that has happened: when God forgives us, he also justifies us. That is, he makes us just.



It is not just the record that has disappeared. The convict has disappeared too. The convict exists no more, and the reason he exists no more is that he is dead. It is said that he was crucified together with his attorney. So I'm now a new creation. I'm a different person, I have been born again from on high, I have no sin and no past.



### ***Do not accuse, humiliate, or compare others***

My brothers and sisters, it is not possible to keep a healthy, loving relationship with somebody else if this person makes us feel constantly accused. Or if we, despite his forgiveness, always feel tormented by our past failures. The Lord knows this, and that is why he wants and expects that, once your faults have been deleted, you will forget them forever too.

And you, sister, please do not wield your virtues like a big stick to beat your husband or to make other people's faults more obvious. The Lord is even greater and more virtuous, but he does not humiliate us with his holiness. He encourages us and extends his hand to us so we can come closer to him and be lifted up towards him.

A few years ago a lady came to me asking to be prayed for. In her view she was a martyr of her husband, and no one had ever seen so many virtues bound together in one single volume of devotion and holiness. However, as I prayed I began to feel inside myself an unexplainable rage. It was the Lord's wrath. Then I suddenly opened the Bible in front of me, and without looking for a particular passage, I read aloud. The text was Micah 7:4-6, and said:

The best of them is like a brier, the most upright of them a thorn hedge... Guard the doors of your mouth... for... the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house.

The lady turned pale. Her home was a hell. Her husband had become an alcoholic. Our false martyr had all the virtues, except the ones she needed the most – more comprehension, more humility, more love. She was into the bad habit of torturing people with her virtues. Each of her merits was an invoice somebody had to pay.

### ***Forgive your debtors***

Brothers and sisters, if the Lord has already paid all of our debts with his blood, why do we insist on bleeding others out to pay for theirs?

In contrast with God's mercy, the parable shows us the pettiness of man's heart, which keeps a record even of

the smallest debts.

There are many ways to seize someone by the throat as the man in the parable. One of them is precisely through continuous reproach, through accusation, through this perpetual inventory of each and every one of the faults committed since the wedding night, through mistrust, through jealousy. It's like spending your life murdering someone with a small shaving blade. It doesn't kill immediately, but it bleeds the other person out until the relationship and the love finally wither and die.

I think we all can imagine what a marriage would be like if the spouses knew how to forgive each other the way God forgives. It involves coming before each other totally justified, a new creation, in order to start a completely new life all over again. And this is possible if you want.

### ***Not forgiving others has serious consequences***

Finally, Christ tells us that not forgiving has its consequences, and will not be left unpunished. He says that, if we are not reconciled to him – because we insist on not forgiving those who trespass against us – we remain enslaved to the devil and the flesh, which then do with us whatever they want and lead us from death to death and from destruction to destruction.

All of us are, to some extent, actors in this parable. If forgiving is an obligation, it's better for us to feel in the obligation to forgive, even if it is only in order to attain forgiveness from our God. But it is even better for all of us to understand what God's intent is when he commands us to forgive, so that we are able to discover his love even behind his commands.

I have a friend who is very dear to me. Some time ago he wrote something very intimate and personal, which in a certain way gave a new perspective to my life and to the lives of many other persons. It's a piece of his own life, and I would like to share it with you. It is written like a tale, but I know it's more than just a tale. He called it *The Collector of Wounds*, and it goes like this:

### **The Collector of Wounds**

In this world there are collectors of the strangest vanities, of things tangible and intangible.

I met a man who collected wounds. He had a huge album of all the wounds people had inflicted on him. There was a whole variety. Enormous, open and bleeding wounds of atrocious disappointments, of tremendous ingratitude; irregular wounds from bites of hatred, of slander and of that kind of truths that everyone wants to keep hidden and somebody decides to uncover with a rash gesture, as when the sheet is removed from a corpse at the morgue. He even had an album of tiny wounds, hardly visible, but in which the poison of envy was still shining.

He was fond of opening his album of wounds and spending long hours savoring the salty flavor of the blood that dripped from each page, and which was his own blood. There are many collectors of wounds like this man, and their lives are bitter.

Then I met another man, who collected expressions of kindness. He had an album too, which he thought was necessary when he started his collection, but he was only able to paste on it a few of these expressions of kindness, because afterwards he had no time. The expressions of kindness that he gathered were living and flying in his room, filling it with a light like the light of the rainbow.

He could not leaf through his album, because expressions of kindness came by themselves to his hands in endless flocks and swarmed in his room.

There were great expressions of kindness from an open heart, from long, endeared friendships, from beings who knew how to pour love out abundantly.

There were rare expressions of kindness, from hard men, surprised in an unexplainable instant of softening of their hearts, and there were even tiny expressions of kindness, hardly visible, sprinkled with milk like an infant's kiss.

There are many collectors of kindness like this other man, and their lives are sweet.

Something funny happens when you are old. You remember yourself at different times, and it looks as if you were watching other men's lives. These are the first signs of dotage, the dawn of old age. But it's also a time when some things become quite clear.

Between the collector of wounds and the collector of kindness, you are the only difference, my Lord!

## Becoming a collector of kindness

Something funny happens when you are old. You remember yourself at different times, and it looks as if you were watching other men's lives. These are the first signs of dotage, the dawn of old age. But it's also a time when some things become quite clear.

Between the collector of wounds and the collector of kindness, you are the only difference, my Lord!

I met both of those two men. And I say "two" because, even though they are one person, they are totally different. The new man whom my Lord transformed, I love dearly. We were fortunate to travel together in the new life that began when Jesus came to us. When you walk with collectors of kindness, such as he, you get to see many things clearly.

I have also known many collectors of wounds. Their pain is all the more painful to me because it is a deliberate, stubborn, proud pain. Collectors of wounds are usually tied up by a fine string of pride that hinders them from taking that simple leap of forgiveness towards peace and joy. They will not necessarily be punished by God, because in their resentment and rancor they are already bearing their own punishment.

Perhaps you are now beginning to discover the infinite love of God that lies behind each of his commandments. I would now like to share with you something I wrote a long time ago, and which I think can help you gain a little deeper insight into God's intent.

This is an imaginary dialogue between a woman and the Lord, but I think this is valid for all of us. Some of you may find it similar to your own prayers. I would ask that for a moment we place ourselves in the Lord's presence and try to complete this dialogue, making it into an actual conversation between Jesus and each one of us.

What I visualize is a lady talking with Jesus, and the conversation goes more or less like this:

## Dialogue Between a Lady and the Lord

She: Lord, forgive me! I'm really sorry for having grieved you. My debt is so big!

He: I see your heart and I know you are sincere. Of course I forgive you. I told Peter we needed to forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven, and that at the end of just one day. How would I not do the same I'm asking you to do? How would I proclaim one thing and then act differently?

Now there's something I want to ask of you: I want you to forgive that offense that So-and-so caused you (your husband, your wife, your son, etc.). Do you remember?

She: How wouldn't I remember! I can't almost think of anything else!

He: I want you to forgive him.

She: But I can't forgive him after what he did to me.

He: Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see things differently. Let him who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.

She: But you know all the harm he caused to me, and how I have suffered!

He: But of course I know! If he had not harmed you, you wouldn't need to forgive him. It is precisely because he has made you suffer that you need to forgive him.

She: But it's all the same for him whether I forgive him or hate him! None of my things concerns him at all, and maybe he doesn't even remember the past. I think he's not even interested in your forgiveness, much less in mine.

He: I'm aware of that. I haven't said he needs you to forgive him. He has already forgotten the whole thing, even though you continue to remind him as often as you can. What I said is that you need to forgive him.

She: Why me?

He: Well, because you're the one who's suffering. Look at your own face. See how you change and how you destroy yourself inside at the sole idea of having to forgive him. Many of your ailments come from these rancors and grudges you have held in your heart.

She: In other words, you're now going to come up with the story of turning the other cheek....

He: Was it any use to you to strike back as you did? It is because of not turning the other cheek that both of you have ended up injured, and I don't mean just once. A time came when neither of you did what you really wanted. You only reacted to each other's actions, and stopped being free. That's why you both were dragged into this state of affairs. Turning the other cheek means that our actions must not be determined by the actions of others, but by our own will, by what we would really like to do. I know what you really wanted at that time and what you continue to want even now. And that's not what you now have.

She: Lord, one can't win the day with you!

He: But one can enjoy. And joy is gain.

She: Well, then, I'm going to forgive him, but just because you're asking me to.

He: That's a good start. You have to forgive, not because you feel like forgiving him, but because I command you to. I have already said that quite clearly: "I you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mt. 6:15). But there's one thing I want you to be clear about – you are not doing me any favor. I do you the favor of commanding you to forgive, because this is for your good, like the rest of my law. Neither do I command this so that you will feel more virtuous – I command it so that you will be happier.

She: As far as I'm concerned I wouldn't forgive him, but I'm going to for his sake.

He: That's not true. You just said he doesn't care whether you forgive him or not.

She: Oh, well, then, if he doesn't care, I won't forgive him!

He: Just a little while ago you were asking me to forgive all your trespasses. And you know there's been a great many of them. You even felt entitled to claim my forgiveness. Now I, who am your Lord and your master, ask you to forgive one single thing – the thing that hurts you the most, and you're saying no! Don't you think you're putting things upside down?

Now gird your loins and listen: Where were you when I built the vault of heaven, when I set a limit to the ocean, when I shaped the mountains, when I played with galaxies between my fingers? O little worm of mine, my beloved! Don't you think that hatred, rancor or vengeance are a much more serious fault than the thing you're refusing to forgive? Isn't this a sin of pride and arrogance, the very sin that caused the fall of Lucifer? You yourself are also sinking in a hell built by your rancor. The Christian's only revenge is forgiveness. And your revenge is going to be a big one, because I don't just want you to forgive him but to love him as I love you.

Do you know why I won't forgive you unless you forgive? Simply because my forgiveness would be of no use to you. I love you all the



same. I love you always, even at this time of rebellion on your part. But, you see, even with my forgiveness you would continue to be unhappy.

I'm even willing to let you enter heaven even if you don't forgive. But I ask and clarify: Do you think heaven can really be heaven for somebody who does not forgive? Can it be heaven if you live together with him in eternal rancor? If there can be no heaven without love, how can there be love or heaven without forgiveness?

She: But, Lord, what face can I put on to tell him I forgive him...?

He: Now that you mention your face – you no longer have the face I gave you when you began to love him. At your age, everyone is responsible for the face he or she has. Your face has become hard. Your eyes have ceased shining. That's a pity. One cannot have light in the eyes and shadows in the soul, because the eyes are the mirror of the soul.

She: Okay, Lord, I forgive him.... but don't ask me to forget it.

He: You have understood nothing at all. It is remembrance that torments you. If I gave you amnesia, you would not suffer any longer, but neither would you enjoy as I want you to enjoy.

She: You're right, Lord. But I can't guarantee that I will never remember it. I often remember unwillingly. But I promise I will not lick my wounds, I will not sit down to remember the past, or blame him anymore.

He: That's all I'm expecting of you. Leave the rest to me. Allow me to heal those memories and the wound this left in your heart. Do you understand now? I didn't just want to forgive your sins; I also wanted and want to heal you of the harm that the sins of others have left in your heart.

That's the end of the dialogue. Brothers and sisters, the salvation Christ offers to us is not just in heaven, nor does it consist only in forgiving your sins. The Lord wants to save your marriage, your relationship to your children; he wants to save your health and your joy. He wants to save you as a whole. One of the things the Lord wants to save you from is the harm that the sins of others have caused in your heart. Your contribution is forgiveness. The Lord will take care of the rest.

## Difference between reconciliation and feelings of guilt

Now I would like to talk about repentance and reconciliation.

Perhaps, as you understand the immensity of God's mercy and love, or as you understand the magnitude of the harm you have caused to others, you now feel tormented by feelings of guilt. You may even have thought sometimes, or someone might have taught you, that God enjoys having you feel guilty, or that we all expect that the least you can do is feel guilty for all you have done.

But that's a big lie. God does not want to harm you, and feelings of guilt are harmful. But, in addition, they do not lead to reconciliation. They drove Judas to despair, but not to repentance. Feelings of guilt never come from God. They come from the accuser, from him who was a murderer from the beginning.

Let me explain myself. A friend of mine says that guilt is saying, "How evil I am!", whereas repentance is saying, "What a fool I've been! How different all things would have been if only I had acted differently!" Repenting means changing your attitude and starting to act in a different way. That's what God expects of you – that from now on you will act that other way that would have made you happy, or that would have saved you a lot of bitterness.

## **Reconciliation embraces repentance and forgiveness**

Reconciliation is simply the embrace between repentance and forgiveness. It is the encounter between one who says, "I've been foolish, I did wrong. Please forgive me. This will not happen again," and the one who says, "I have been foolish too in not forgiving you, and have unnecessarily borne the bitterness of rancor. Of course I

forgive you!”

### ***Reconciliation of the spouses***

You will say this seems all too easy. I will say it is, when both parties rely on the love and faithfulness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many times, in these years of serving the Lord, I have seen how a single minute was enough for two spouses who were estranged and mutually tormented by their lack of love, by their silence or by deep wounds, to find again the way to happiness through reconciliation. I invite you to try the same today.

You will say you have already tried it. But this time it can be different. The difference may lie in the possibility that, having reconciled yourselves to God first, you both hand over your marriage and your family to the Lord; that you show him, as a pleasant offering in his eyes, your mutual repentance and forgiveness, and ask him to give you a new heart so you can love each other the way he commands you to. But this time you will not just rely on your own strength, because that’s the strength of the flesh, but rather on the faithfulness of the living God who established a sacramental covenant with you the day of your wedding, and on the power of the Holy Spirit who will now inhabit your hearts through grace.

### ***Reconciliation of the family***

The reconciled couple can then, and only then, become an instrument of reconciliation for the whole family, and an instrument for many other things. First of all, as a witness to unity. Our children reject marriage and dispense with it to live together in concubinage, because they have ceased to believe not just in the sanctity of marriage but in the need or the possibility to marry just one person forever. Statistics prove them right. Through our reconciliation and harmony, we need to demonstrate to them that marriage is possible and worthwhile.

We also need reconciliation in order to form our children on the basis of a single mind, the mind of the husband and the wife who, having agreed together as a result of ongoing dialogue, work as a team for the sake of their children, instead of acting as two rivals who contend for their love or their acceptance by competing with each other in a race to see which of the two grants them maximum freedom or maximum luxury and gifts. If they do the latter, they will destroy their children, who will in the end manipulate their differences in order to make the most of them. These will be spoiled children, corrupted by their own parents, because they lacked the necessary unity to form them in discipline and obedience.

### ***The family as an instrument of reconciliation***

Finally, the family is an instrument of reconciliation just as it has been so often and in so many places an instrument of division, of hatred, of resentment, of discrimination, of manipulation, of oppression, of rivalry, of cruelty, of lack of love, of promiscuity, of vice. A family will shape others according to its own character.

Whether we like it or not, our countries will never be more than their families are. It is by itself symptomatic that modern revolutions and all the manifestations of non-conformity are led by youngsters who have just left adolescence and are dominated by a spirit of rebelliousness and licentiousness. I know many of them, and a very high percentage come from destroyed homes.

### ***Termite sins can destroy marriages too***

Just one final recommendation: When you reconciled yourself to God, it is most likely that you only confessed your serious sins, your mortal sins. I have sometimes found marriages that were destroyed by that kind of sin: adultery, physical abuse, manifest cruelty. Or by big sins that others committed against them – slander, envy, etc. But for each one of these, there are 99 marriages that never knew what it was that tore them apart. That’s what we call “termite sins,” which, just as the termites that destroy lots of American houses, cannot be seen, cannot be detected, cannot be accused, we don’t repent of them, and they are not done away with until the damage is done. These are your greatest enemy.

Termite sins are lack of dialogue, mockery, sarcasm, rudeness, yelling, vulgarity, accusation, mistrust, jealousy, rejecting your spouse sexually, squandering, lack of love, unconsciousness. It is these small things, and others like them, that can undermine and corrode your house without your noticing it. They begin by alienating and separating the spouses, but if they are not detected and corrected on time they can end up by destroying your home.

### God's goal for us is a new life of unity together

All of you are very holy, and perhaps you don't think your marriage is threatened by big, conspicuous sins. But the Lord invites us to be perfect, as the Father in heaven is perfect. Let us now draw closer to him, who is now become an offering on the altar, and once reconciled to our brothers, to our spouses and our children, let us also hand to him our termite sins, so we can begin a new life of unity together in our family. Our family, having received the benefit of reconciliation, can now be also an instrument for reconciliation to our children and to all men and women. Glory to the Lord!

[This article is excerpted from the book, *From Birdhood to Egghead: Hatch or Rot as a Christian*, © 2001 Carlos Mantica Abaunza. Used with permission.]

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## The Readiness to Change

by Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1997)

“Put off the old man that belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new man, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

. Ephesians 4:22-24 (RSV)

These words of St. Paul are inscribed above the gate through which all must pass who want to reach the goal set us by God. They implicitly contain the quintessence of the process which baptized man must undergo before he attains the unfolding of the new supernatural life received in Baptism.

All true Christian life, therefore, must begin with a deep yearning to become a new man in Christ, and an inner readiness to “put off the old man” – a readiness to become something fundamentally different.

### All good men desire to change

Even though he should lack religion, the will to change is not unknown to man. He longs to develop and to



perfect himself. He believes he can overcome all vices and deficiencies of his nature by human force alone. All morally aspiring men are conscious of the necessity of a purposeful self-education which should cause them to change and to develop. They, too, – as contrasted to the morally indifferent man who lets himself go and abandons himself passively to his natural dispositions – reveal a certain readiness to change. But for this, no spiritual and moral growth would exist at all.

Yet, when man is touched by the light of Revelation, something entirely new has come to pass. The revelation of the Old Testament alone suffices to make the believer aware of man's metaphysical situation and the terrible wound inflicted upon his nature by original sin. He knows that no human force can heal that wound; that he is in need of redemption. He grasps the truth that repentance is powerless to remove the guilt of sin which separates him from God, that good will and natural moral endeavor will fail to restore him to the beauty of the paradisiac state. Within him lives a deep yearning for the Redeemer, who by divine force will take the guilt of sin and bridge the gulf that separates the human race from God.

Throughout the Old Testament that yearning resounds: “Convert us, O God: and show us Thy face, and we shall be saved” (Psalm 79:4). We perceive the desire for purification which enables us to appear before God, and to endure the presence of the unspeakably Holy One: “Thou shalt sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed: Thou shalt wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow” (Psalm 50:9).

### God calls us to change

The New Testament, however, reveals to us a call which far transcends that yearning. Thus Christ speaks to Nicodemus: “Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

Christ, the Messiah, is not merely the Redeemer who breaks apart the bond and cleanses us from sin. He is also the Dispenser of a new divine life which shall wholly transform us and turn us into new men: “Put off the old man who is corrupted according to the desire of error, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth.” Though we receive this new life in Baptism as a free gift of God, it may not flourish unless we cooperate. “Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new paste,” says St. Paul.

A strong desire must fill us to become different beings, to mortify our old selves and re-arise as new men in Christ. This desire, this readiness to decrease so that “He may grow in us,” is the first elementary precondition for the transformation in Christ. It is the primal gesture by which man reacts to the light of Christ that has reached his eyes: the original gesture directed to God. It is, in other words, the adequate consequence of our consciousness of being in need of redemption on the one hand, and our comprehension of being called by Christ on the other. Our surrender to Christ implies a readiness to let Him fully transform us, without setting any limit to the modification of our nature under His influence.

### Readiness to change versus natural optimism

In regard to their respective readiness to change, the difference between the Christian and the natural idealist is obvious. The idealist is suffused with optimism concerning human nature as such. He underestimates the depth of our defects; he is unaware of the wound, incurable by human means, with which our nature is afflicted. He overlooks our impotence to erase a moral guilt or to bring about autonomously a moral regeneration of ourselves. Moreover, his infatuation with activity prevents him from understanding even the necessity of a basic renewal. He fails to sense the essential inadequacy of all natural morality, as well as the incomparable superiority of virtue supernaturally founded, let alone the full presence of such virtue – holiness.

His readiness to change will differ, therefore, from that of the Christian, above all in the following respects. First, he has in mind a relative change only: an evolution immanent to nature. His endeavor is not, as is the Christian's, to let his nature as a whole be transformed from above, nor to let his character be stamped with a new coinage, a new face, as it were, whose features far transcend human nature and all its possibilities. His object is not to be reborn: to become radically – from the root, that is – another man; he merely wants to perfect himself within the framework of his natural dispositions. He is intent on ensuring an unhampered evolution of these dispositions and potentialities. Sometimes even an express approval of his own nature is implicit therein, and a self-evident confidence in the given tendencies of his nature as they are before being worked upon by conscious self-criticism. Such was, for instance, Goethe's case. Invariably in the idealist, the readiness to change is limited to a concept of nature's immanent evolution or self-perfection: its scope remains exclusively human. Whereas, with the Christian, it refers to a basic transformation and redemption of things human by things divine: to a supernatural goal.

A second point of difference is closely connected with this. The idealist's readiness to change is aimed at certain details or aspects only, never at his character as a whole. The aspiring man of natural morality is intent on eradicating this defect, on acquiring that virtue; the Christian, however, is intent on becoming another man in all things, in regard to both what is bad and what is naturally good in him. He knows that what is naturally good, too, is insufficient before God: that it, too, must submit to supernatural transformation – to a re-creation, we might say, by the new principle of supernatural life conveyed to him by Baptism.

Thirdly, the man of natural moral endeavor, willing as he may be to change in one way or another, will always stick to the firm ground of Nature. How could he be asked to relinquish that foothold, tumbling off into the void? Yet it is precisely this firm ground which the Christian does leave. His readiness to change impels him to break with his unredeemed nature as a whole: he wills to lose the firm ground of unredeemed nature under his feet and to tumble, so to speak, into the arms of Christ. Only he who may say with St. Paul, "I know in whom I have believed" can risk the enormous adventure of dying unto himself and of relinquishing the natural foundation.

### Not all possess the radical readiness to change

Now this radical readiness to change, the necessary condition for a transformation in Christ, is not actually possessed by all Catholic believers. It is, rather, a distinctive trait of those who have grasped the full import of the Call, and without reserve have decided upon an imitation of Christ.

There are many religious Catholics whose readiness to change is merely a conditional one. They exert themselves to keep the commandments and to get rid of such qualities as they have recognized to be sinful. But they lack the will and the readiness to become new men all in all, to break with all purely natural standards, to view all things in a supernatural light. They prefer to evade the act of metanoia: a true conversion of the heart. Hence with undisturbed consciences they cling to all that appears to them legitimate by natural standards.<sup>1</sup>

Their conscience permits them to remain entrenched in their self-assertion. For example, they do not feel the obligation of loving their enemies; they let their pride have its way within certain limits; they insist on the right of giving play to their natural reactions in answer to any humiliation. They maintain as self-evident their claim to the world's respect, they dread being looked upon as fools of Christ; they accord a certain role to human respect, and are anxious to stand justified in the eyes of the world also.

They are not ready for a total breach with the world and its standards; they are swayed by certain conventional considerations; nor do they refrain from letting themselves go within reasonable limits. There are various types

and degrees of this reserved form of the readiness to change; but common to them all is the characteristic of a merely conditional obedience to the Call and an ultimate abiding by one's natural self. However great the differences of degree may be, the decisive cleavage is that which separates the unreserved, radical readiness to change from the somehow limited and partial one.

### Transformation in Christ requires unqualified readiness to change

The full readiness to change – which might even better be termed readiness to become another man – is present in him only who, having heard the call “Follow me” from the mouth of the Lord, follows Him as did the Apostles, “leaving everything behind.” To do so, he is not required literally to relinquish everything in the sense of the evangelical counsels: this would be in answer to another, more particular call. He is merely required to relinquish his old self, the natural foundation, and all purely natural standards, and open himself entirely to Christ's action – comprehending and answering the call addressed to all Christians: “Put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth.”

Readiness to change, taken in this sense, is the first prerequisite for the transformation in Christ. But, in addition thereto, more is needed: a glowing desire to become a new man in Christ; a passionate will to give oneself over to Christ, And this, again, presupposes a state of fluidity, as it were: that we should be like soft wax, ready to receive the imprint of the features of Christ. We must be determined not to entrench ourselves in our nature, not to maintain or assert ourselves, and above all, not to set up beforehand – however unconsciously – a framework of limiting or qualifying factors for the pervasive and re-creative light of Christ. Rather we must be filled with an unquenchable thirst for regeneration in all things. We must fully experience the bliss of flying into Christ's arms, who will transform us by His light beyond any measure we might ourselves intend. We must say as did St. Paul on the road to Damascus; “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?”

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.

[Excerpt from [\*Transformation in Christ\*](#), Chapter 1, © 1948, 1976 Dietrich von Hildebrand © 1990 Alice von Hildebrand, 2001 edition published by [Ignatius Press](#), San Francisco. Used with permission.]

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## “Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?”

by Raniero Cantalamessa

### He suffered and died for our sins

In the New Testament, the kerygma of the passion is always made up of two elements: of a *fact*—he “suffered” and “died”; and of the *reason* for this fact—“for us,” “for our sins” (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3; Romans 4:25). Christ’s passion is ultimately unrelated to us unless we enter into it through the narrow door of this “for us,” because only he who acknowledges that Christ’s passion is his work really understands Christ’s passion.

Therefore, my personal sin was also present in Gethsemane, weighing on the heart of Jesus; on the cross, my egoism and my abuse of freedom kept him nailed. If Christ died “for my sins,” then—simply by making the phrase active—I killed Jesus of Nazareth! The three thousand whom Peter addressed at Pentecost had not all been present in Pilate’s praetorium or on Calvary hammering in the nails, yet he lifted his voice and said to them, “You crucified Jesus of Nazareth!” (cf. Acts 2:23). And by the work of the Holy Spirit, they acknowledged it was true, because it is written, “They were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’ ” (2:37).

“Were you there, were you there, when they crucified my Lord?” says an African-American spiritual full of faith. And it goes on: “Sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.” Every time I hear this hymn, I am compelled to think, “Alas, yes, I was also there, I was also there, when they crucified my Lord!”

It is necessary that every man experience an earthquake once in his lifetime and that he experience in his heart something similar to what happened in nature at the moment of Christ’s death—the curtain of the

Temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the rocks split, and the tombs were opened. It is necessary that a holy fear of God once and for all shatter our hearts, which are so self-confident in spite of everything. Peter the apostle experienced something like this, and he was able to cry out those tremendous words to the multitude because he had first cried them to himself and had “wept bitterly” when Jesus looked at him (Luke 22:62).

In the reading of the passion, we hear these words from John’s Gospel: “They shall look on him whom they have pierced” (19:37). May this prophecy be realized in us too; let us look on him whom we have pierced and mourn for him as one mourns for an only child (cf. Zechariah 12:10). If the world is not converted by listening to us preachers of the gospel, let it be converted by seeing us weep and mourn!

## Long for repentance

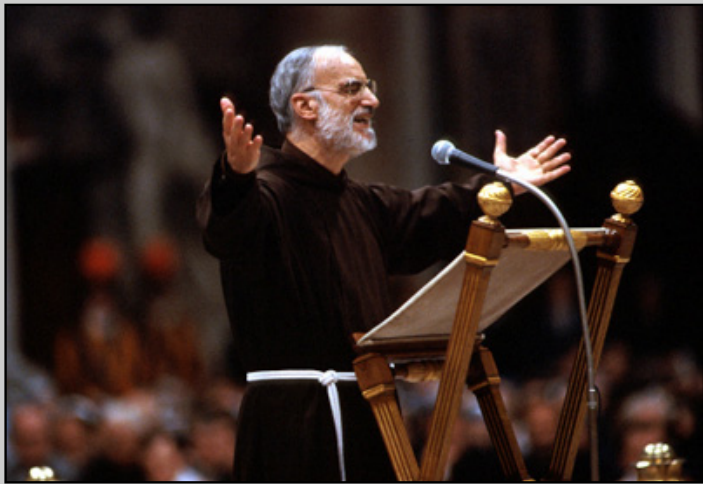
By resurrecting Jesus from the dead, God transformed our greatest sins into his greatest mercy. By killing Jesus, we have killed our sins, which he had taken onto himself. Only if the word “repentance” has reached the bottom of our hearts shall we be able to savor now the floods of light and love enclosed in this joyful Easter message. Whoever has been able to say in all sincerity, “I killed Jesus of Nazareth” knows what it means to be “born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). It is like someone being convinced that he has killed another person, who flees in desperation, believing there is no escape in this world for him, when unexpectedly he hears that the person managed to survive and has forgiven him and even wants to be friends with him.

Sin itself holds no fear for us because we no longer bear it by ourselves. He was “raised for our justification” (Romans 4:25), that is, so that he could take our sins and, in exchange, grant us his justice. A repentant man has been “baptized into Jesus’ death” (6:3), and now it’s as if Jesus were dragging him together with himself out of the tomb and into a new life. “God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Perhaps you think this joyful message is not for you because your veil hasn’t been torn and your eyes haven’t overflowed with tears of repentance. Don’t be sad and don’t despair; this is God’s gift, and he can give it to you from one minute to the next or gradually, perhaps when you least expect it. Just persevere untiringly in imploring him and desiring it, just as I do. If you ardently long for repentance, you have already repented! Let yourself be born again to “a living hope,” and begin to live your new life.

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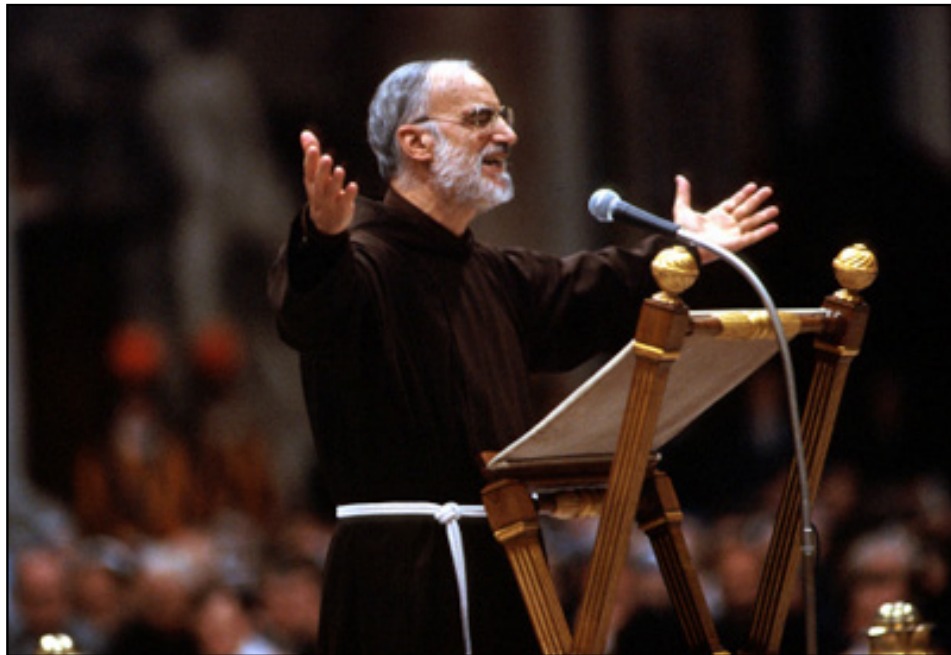


Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, O.F.M. Cap. (born July 22, 1934) is an Italian Catholic priest in the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin. He has devoted his ministry to preaching and writing. He is a Scripture scholar, theologian, and noted author of numerous books. Since 1980 he has served as the Preacher to the Papal Household under Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis. He is a noted ecumenist and frequent worldwide speaker, and a member of the Catholic Delegation for the Dialogue with the Pentecostal Churches.

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## **Raniero Cantalamessa and the Call for a New Evangelization**

### *Part 1 – Proclaiming the Kerygma in the Power of the Holy Spirit*

By Sue Cummins

**Note:** The following article is adapted from the thesis, *Raniero Cantalamessa and the New Evangelization: Proclaiming the Kerygma in the Power of the Holy Spirit*, which was submitted to the School of Theology of Sacred Heart Major Seminary, Detroit, Michigan USA, December 2014. Sue Cummins works full time for the Archdiocese of Detroit’s Department of Evangelization and Catechesis as Regional Catechetical Coordinator.

### **Introduction**

A simple Franciscan friar made a decision over thirty years ago to leave his academic post and dedicate his life to preaching. Since that time he has impacted the lives of thousands of men and women all over the world with his preaching, teaching and writing. Father Raniero Cantalamessa’s writings, sermons, and the example of his life offer wisdom, inspiration, and practical guidance for those seeking to respond effectively to the call for a new evangelization.

According to Cantalamessa, the fundamental rule of evangelization is to proclaim the gospel message (the kerygma) in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>[i]</sup> He asserts that the kerygma should be the essential content of preaching and that “preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit” should be the method of proclamation.<sup>[ii]</sup>

This paper will explore the importance of Cantalamessa’s message for the new evangelization and consider the advice that he gives to those who are called to teach and preach the word of God. Cantalamessa’s emphasis on the importance of preaching the kerygma in the power of the Holy Spirit, while being firmly rooted in the



Tradition of the Church, is a prophetic word for our times. Cantalamessa's plentiful references to Sacred Scripture and to the writings of the Church Fathers provide an entry point to the rich traditions of the Church. His message is indispensable to the success of those who hope to make a significant contribution to the new evangelization.

## The Call for a New Evangelization

Evangelization has been at the heart of the Christian mission since the time of Jesus and the first Apostles. Jesus' last words before ascending to heaven consisted of a mandate to evangelize: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19).<sup>[iii]</sup>

Throughout his career as a preacher Cantalamessa has consistently spoken of the need for a new evangelization. At the opening address of the 2005 International Alpha Conference Cantalamessa spoke about a "presence-absence of Jesus in our time." He pointed out that in secular society many books, television shows, and movies exploit Jesus for the purpose of lucrative gain, while people of faith do not always recognize his importance. Cantalamessa said that Christ is present in our culture, but he is often absent or even excluded from the lives of many who call themselves Christians.<sup>[iv]</sup> Many people believe in some kind of a Supreme Being who created the world and that there is some kind of life beyond death, but they do not have Christ as the object of their faith: "Sociological surveys point to this fact even in countries and regions of ancient Christian tradition, like the one where I was born in central Italy. Jesus is practically absent in this kind of religiosity."<sup>[v]</sup>

Cantalamessa often makes reference to sociological surveys; there are many statistics available that back up and illustrate his thesis. Sherry Weddell makes some very compelling observations about research that has been done on religious belief in the United States.<sup>[vi]</sup> Based on an analysis of data available through the Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life (2008) she points out that religious identity in the United States is very fluid: "53 percent of American adults have left the faith of their childhood at some point; 9 percent have left and returned."<sup>[vii]</sup> The data shows that those who identify themselves as unaffiliated are the "fastest-growing religious demographic" in the United States – one in every six Americans.<sup>[viii]</sup> Of self-identified Catholics only 48 percent are sure that it is possible to have a personal relationship with God.<sup>[ix]</sup> Through her work with Catherine of Siena Institute<sup>[x]</sup> Weddell has had an opportunity to meet with and interview thousands of Catholics from across the United States, many of them serving as parish and diocesan leaders. She and her colleagues have asked many of them to describe their "lived relationship with God." Weddell points out that many of the Catholics who are asked to describe their relationship with God are unable to do so:

The majority of Catholics in the United States are sacramentalized but not evangelized. They do not know that an explicit personal attachment to Christ – personal discipleship – is normative Catholicism as taught by the apostles and reiterated time and time again by the popes, councils, and saints of the Church.<sup>[xi]</sup>

Weddell's experience of working with Catholics across the United States has led her to the conclusion that "few Catholics have ever heard of the kerygma . . . and even fewer know what the kerygma contains or have heard it preached clearly."<sup>[xii]</sup>

The statistics relating to youth and religious belief are even more sobering. The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) that was conducted between the years 2003 and 2005 examined the spirituality of

adolescents in the United States. The findings of this study were reported by Christian Smith in a book he co-authored with Melinda Lundquist Denton.<sup>[xiii]</sup> Smith observes that most of the adolescents interviewed in the study said that they believed in God and they identified their faith as being the faith of their parents.<sup>[xiv]</sup> Further questioning revealed that many who identified themselves as religious, when asked about specific beliefs, said that they did not have any. Of those who said they held specific beliefs, very few were able to describe them. <sup>[xv]</sup> Most teens interviewed did not believe in a Triune God; they did not embrace the gospel of the incarnate Jesus, Son of God, crucified and raised from the dead. Thomas V. Sanabria used the data from NSYR to compare the religious beliefs held by Catholic youth to those held by Protestant youth. His analysis indicates that Catholic youth were less grounded in the basic tenets of Christianity than their Protestant counterparts.<sup>[xvi]</sup>

Smith contends that “the de-facto dominant religion among contemporary U.S. teenagers is what might be called ‘Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD).’” <sup>[xvii]</sup> Smith describes the basic tenets of this MTD “religion” as a creed that consists of the following tenets of faith:

1. A God exists who created and watches over life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God is not particularly involved in one’s life except when needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.<sup>[xviii]</sup>

Further analysis of the data from the National Study of Youth and Religion as it relates to Hispanic youth, along with the results of further study and supplementary interviews, shows that Hispanic teens are not immune to MTD. Fourteen out of the sixteen Hispanic youth who were interviewed in supplemental interviews held to the tenets of MTD, confirming the findings of the National Study. <sup>[xix]</sup>

Kenda Creasy Dean revisited the results of the National Study of Youth and Religion.<sup>[xx]</sup> She writes that the evidence of the NSYR indicates that not only teenagers, but also many congregations of adults that call themselves Christian are “almost Christian”:

After two and a half centuries of shacking up with “the American dream,” churches have perfected a dicey codependence between consumer-driven therapeutic individualism and religious pragmatism. These theological proxies gnaw, termite-like, at our identity as the Body of Christ, eroding our ability to recognize that Jesus’ life of self-giving love directly challenges the American gospel of self-fulfillment and self-actualization.<sup>[xxi]</sup>

Dean recognizes the need for “nurturing a bilingual faith” that includes an ability to communicate with those who are converted and well-versed in Christianity, and an aptitude for speaking with those who are not well-versed in the Christian faith. She is concerned that many churchgoers have not heard the Gospel presented to them in a way that they can make it fully their own. She sees a need for youth leaders and other church members to learn how to communicate in the language of global postmodern secular society in order to translate and effectively pass on the truths of our Christian faith.<sup>[xxii]</sup>

While most of the statistics cited thus far are related to religion in the United States, it is worth noting that Europe is even further down the path of secularization. In his essay “Evangelization of Europe? Observations on a Church in Peril,” Peter Hunermann cites some sobering statistics that illustrate the decline of numbers of those involved in the Church in Europe, and the shrinking numbers of men and women who identify themselves as Christian.[\[xxiii\]](#) He points out that behind the decline in numbers there is an even more important shift in the worldview held by the greater part of the population. Hunermann presents the thesis that the crisis of the Church in Europe is related to the “discontinuity” that exists between the tenets of modernity and the Church.[\[xxiv\]](#) He makes a valid point that one of the reasons for the crisis in the Church is the drastic change that has come about in the attitudes and the practices of modern society.

## Cultural Trends and Challenges to Evangelization

Cantalamessa is very aware of the challenges that modern society presents to evangelization. In a series of Advent sermons given to the papal household in 2010,[\[xxv\]](#) he identifies three cultural trends of our modern age that contribute to the state of the present-day Church: scientism, secularism, and rationalism – all leading to relativism. In his first Advent sermon he outlines four main theses of scientism:

1. Science, and in particular cosmology, physics and biology, are the only objective and serious ways of knowing reality.
2. This way of knowing is incompatible with faith that is based on assumptions which are neither demonstrable nor falsifiable.
3. Science has demonstrated the falsehood, or at least the lack of necessity of the theory of God.
4. Almost the totality or at least the great majority of scientists are atheists.[\[xxvi\]](#)

Cantalamessa points out that, contrary to the fourth tenet, many scientists believe in God, often as a result of their scientific analysis. Still, the influence of atheistic scientists on modern thought should not be underestimated.[\[xxvii\]](#) Of particular concern to Cantalamessa is the denial of the importance and uniqueness of human beings in the created world that leads to a trivialization of their role and of the centrality of Jesus Christ as God made man. He sees non-believing scientists, biologists and cosmologists in particular to be in competition with one another to see who can go furthest in “affirming the total marginality and insignificance of man in the universe and in the great sea of life itself.”[\[xxviii\]](#)

The second Advent sermon deals with the problem of secularism. Cantalamessa explains that the words secular and secularization can be used in a variety of ways and that their connotations are not always negative:

Secularization is a complex and ambivalent phenomenon. It can indicate the autonomy of earthly realities and the separation between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of Caesar and, in this sense, not only is it not against the Gospel but finds in it one of its profound roots; however it can also indicate a whole ensemble of attitudes contrary to religion and to faith; hence, the use of the term secularism is preferred. Secularism is to secularization what scientism is to scientific nature and rationalism to rationality.[\[xxix\]](#)

Secularism with its focus on the here and now diverts the attention of men and women away from the importance of eternal truths. It results in a life that is oriented around the material world where spiritual realities are ignored or denied. There is no reference to a transcendent God who is creator and sustainer of all

life; there is no fear of a final judgment or anticipation of eternal happiness that surpasses any happiness that could be known in this life. Life revolves around experiencing pleasure and avoiding pain.

According to Cantalamessa, the nineteenth century saw a decline in the belief in eternal life: “Little by little, suspicion, forgetfulness and silence fell on the word eternity. Materialism and consumerism did the rest in the opulent society, making it seem inconvenient to still speak of eternity among educated persons.”[\[xxx\]](#) Today even Christians have lost focus on spiritual realities; those Christians who do believe in eternal life rarely speak of it. Many have a very vague or distorted picture of what Sacred Scripture teaches about the spiritual world and the life that awaits them beyond the death of their bodies. Cantalamessa recognizes the negative effect that secularism and the lack of concern about eternal life has on Christian faith:

The fall of the horizon of eternity, or of eternal life, has the effect on Christian life of sand thrown on a flame: it suffocates it, extinguishes it. Faith in eternal life is one of the conditions of the possibility of evangelization. “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all,” exclaims St. Paul (1 Corinthians 15:19).[\[xxxii\]](#)

There are different versions of secularism. The NSYR aptly illustrates the current version of secularism that is prevalent in the United States. This version recognizes the existence of God and looks to some kind of life after death, but it fails to recognize the possibility that entering paradise may require more than being a “nice person.” The need to repent of sin and to live according to the gospel is not recognized. There is a lot of confusion about moral living; most of life is taken up with concern for fulfilling temporal needs and desires.[\[xxxii\]](#)

Cantalamessa ends his Second Advent sermon with the reminder that there is life after death and, whether they realize it or not, all men and women will live forever. He unabashedly points out that it is important to understand that the nature of eternal life will not be the same for all: “the passage from time to eternity is not straight and equal for all. There is a judgment to face and a judgment that can have two very different results, hell or paradise.”[\[xxxiii\]](#) Many who call themselves Christians have not really understood and embraced the truth about God and what is necessary for salvation. Many do not even call themselves Christians. Regardless of religious beliefs or lack of belief, all will one day stand before the Lord Jesus Christ awaiting judgment. All will live forever, but not all will live forever in the joy of full communion with their creator.

It is important, therefore, to realize the high stakes involved in the call to evangelize. Motivation to evangelize wanes when there is no proclamation of the biblical truths regarding heaven and hell. Ralph Martin points out that the watering down of these biblical truths led to a decline of evangelization after Vatican II. He says that these truths need to be stated clearly in order to motivate those called to evangelize:

The reasons for the command [to evangelize] – namely, that the eternal destinies of human beings are really at stake and for most people the preaching of the gospel can make a life-or-death, heaven-or-hell difference – need to be unashamedly stated. This is certainly why Jesus often spoke of the eternal consequences of not accepting his teaching – being lost forever, hell – and did not just give the command to evangelize.[\[xxxiv\]](#)

This does not mean that the evangelist always confronts secularism with arguments laced with fire and brimstone. The love and mercy of God, the saving grace of Jesus, and the joy of life in the Holy Spirit are biblical truths that need emphasis in our day.



The message of the existence of a loving God who longs for a relationship with human beings who were created in love is an attractive and compelling message. Cantalamessa points out that there is an inner longing for life beyond this life that is intrinsic in all human beings. Presenting a positive view of life after death and living a life that is permeated with resurrection hope is an important aspect of evangelization: “As for scientism, speaking also of secularism, the most effective answer does not consist in combating the contrary error, but in making shine again before men the certainty of eternal life, appealing to the intrinsic force that truth possesses when it is accompanied by the testimony of life.”[\[xxxv\]](#)

Cantalamessa addresses the obstacle of rationalism in his final Advent sermon of 2010.[\[xxxvi\]](#) The problem of rationalism is a distorted view of reason that makes reason supreme, higher even than God and spiritual realities that cannot be contained by reason. Rationalism insists that actions and beliefs should be governed by reason alone, and that reason is the primary source of knowledge and truth. Cantalamessa is not denying that reason is important; he recognizes that as Christians we are called to use our reason and that reason is not in conflict with faith. His point is that reason cannot reign supreme over God and that without recognition of the power and sovereignty of God, reason falls short.

Cantalamessa echoes St. John Paul II, who wrote about the relationship between faith and reason in his encyclical letter *Faith and Reason, Fides et Ratio*, promulgated in September 1998. In this encyclical St. John Paul II states that there is “no reason for competition of any kind between reason and faith: each contains the other, and each has its own scope for action” (*FR*, 17). Reason has its place but reason alone is not sufficient:

The world and all that happens within it, including history and the fate of peoples, are realities to be observed, analyzed and assessed with all the resources of reason, but without faith ever being foreign to the process. Faith intervenes not to abolish reason's autonomy nor to reduce its scope for action, but solely to bring the human being to understand that in these events it is the God of Israel who acts. This is to say that with the light of reason human beings can know which path to take, but they can follow that path to its end, quickly and unhindered, only if with a rightly tuned spirit they search for it within the horizon of faith. (*FR*, 16)

The artificial attempt to separate faith and reason takes away from the God-given capacity of human beings to understand the truth about the world and its Creator.

Cantalamessa calls our attention to an address that John Henry Newman gave at Oxford University in December of 1831, entitled “The Usurpations of Reason.”[\[xxxvii\]](#) Newman pointed out several instances where reason had been allowed to rule outside of the appropriate scope of its authority. For Cantalamessa, the title of Newman’s address, “The Usurpations of Reason,” illustrates an understanding of the negative effects of distorted rationalism:

In a note of comment on this address, written in the preface to its third edition in 1871, the author explains what he intends with such an expression. Understood by usurpation of reason is “a certain popular abuse of the faculty, viz., when it occupies itself upon religion, without a due familiar acquaintance with its subject-matter, or without a use of the first principles proper to it. This so-called Reason is in Scripture designated ‘the wisdom of the world’; that is, the reasoning about Religion based upon secular maxims, which are intrinsically foreign to it. [\[xxxviii\]](#)

In Newman’s scenario reason takes an “imperialistic” role over religious beliefs; all actions and beliefs must submit as subjects to reason. Cantalamessa proposes an additional political metaphor, that of isolationism, as

an example of an alternate way in which rationalism distorts the use of reason:

Newman's analysis has new and original features; he brings to light the so to speak imperialist tendency of reason to subject every aspect of reality to its own principles. One can, however, consider rationalism also from another point of view, closely connected with the preceding one. To stay with the political metaphor used by Newman, we can describe it as the attitude of isolationism, of reason's shutting itself in on itself. This does not consist so much of invading the field of another, but of not recognizing the existence of another field outside its own. In other words, in the refusal that some truth might exist outside that which passes through human reason.[\[xxxix\]](#)

Cantalamessa is referring here to the widespread tendency to recognize as real only that which can be proven by the scientific method; anything beyond the scope of scientific proof is ignored or denied.

Another aspect of the usurpation of reason relates to morality. Newman points out that the moral principles of human beings are not necessarily tied up with their intellectual principles. A very intelligent person who possesses a great ability to exercise reason might lead a deplorable moral life.[\[xl\]](#) Reason can be used as a tool for religious purposes, and reason may sometimes lead to religious truths, but religious truths do not need to be established by rational proof the way that the laws of physics might be subjected to the scientific method.[\[xli\]](#) Religious beliefs are not subordinate to reason as their imperial ruler. According to *Fides et Ratio*, when we are dealing with God, the truth about God, and the way of life that God wants for his people, we are dealing with something that goes beyond reason:

On the basis of this deeper form of knowledge, the Chosen People understood that, if reason were to be fully true to itself, then it must respect certain basic rules. The first of these is that reason must realize that human knowledge is a journey which allows no rest; the second stems from the awareness that such a path is not for the proud who think that everything is the fruit of personal conquest; a third rule is grounded in the “fear of God” whose transcendent sovereignty and provident love in the governance of the world reason must recognize. (*FR*, 18)

Cantalamessa combines the elements of Newman's analysis by showing that the cultural trends of scientism, secularism, and rationalism lead to another obstacle to evangelization – relativism. There are different forms of relativism. Protagorean relativism holds that what is perceived is true to the person who perceives it and that truth does not exist independently of what the perceiver says is true. There are no objective standards that can be used to determine truth; knowledge and sense perception are relative to the perceiver. A saying attributed to the Sophist Protagoras describes the mentality of many modern men and women: “Man is the measure of all things; of things that are that they are; and of things that are not that they are not.”[\[xlii\]](#)

The lack of conviction among so many people that there exist objective standards of truth makes it difficult to appeal to natural law or to revelation as a measure of truth. The danger is that individuals without a conviction that truth exists will not search for truth; they may not concern themselves with the existence of God and God's will for their lives. In a Christmas address given to the Roman Curia in December, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI spoke about the importance of keeping the search for God alive: “As the first step of evangelization we must seek to keep this quest alive; we must be concerned that human beings do not set aside the question of God, but rather see it as an essential question for their lives. We must make sure that they are open to this question and to the yearning concealed within it.”[\[xliii\]](#)

Acutely aware of the difficulty of the task that the Church faces in responding to the call to the new

evangelization – within and without – Cantalamessa, like Newman, advises his listeners to maintain hope and joy. He points out that it is important to be aware of the challenges but expedient to avoid negativity or despair and to recognize the many signs of God’s presence in the world.<sup>[xliv]</sup> He points to the many positive things happening in the Church: the outpouring of charisms; the increased participation of the laity in parishes and lay movements; the Catholic organizations and individuals who are dedicated to the care of the poor; those who have been martyred for their faith; the “holy” and “learned” Popes who have served the Church for the past century and a half; the desire for unity and the progress made in ecumenical relations.<sup>[xlv]</sup> Cantalamessa speaks openly about the difficulties in the world and in the Church, but he also provides encouragement and his message is full of hope. He offers many insights into the content and the methods that are necessary for the success of the new evangelization. The next chapter will explore Cantalamessa’s message about the content of the Christian message and the need to proclaim the kerygma, the good news of salvation in Jesus.



Sue Cummins is a member of Word of Life Community and Bethany Association. She lives in Detroit, Michigan USA and teaches as part-time faculty at Sacred Heart Major Seminary. Susan has a concentration in spirituality with a focus on the work of St. Ignatius and St. John of the Cross. She worked for fifteen years as part of an international mission team giving retreats, training, and spiritual direction to leaders of Christian communities in Central America, Mexico, Spain, Europe, and the Middle East. She has over ten years of experience working with youth as senior staff with University Christian Outreach (UCO) and Youth Works Detroit and as a high school teacher. Susan is fluent in Spanish. She worked as director of a bi-lingual Religious Education Program at St. Gabriel Catholic Church in Southwest Detroit from 2005 to 2012. Sue has recently been hired to work full time for the Archdiocese of Detroit’s Department of Evangelization and Catechesis as Regional Catechetical Coordinator.

## Footnotes

[i] Raniero Cantalamessa, *The Mystery of God’s Word*, trans. Alan Neame (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 54. Translated from *Chi ha parlato nel Figlio: Il mistero della parola di Dio* (Milan: Editrice Ancora, 1984).

[ii] Cantalamessa, “The Preaching Ministry,” *The Ashbury Journal* Vol. 63: No. 1 (2008): 33-51, accessed June 18, 2014, <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol63/iss1/3>.

[iii] All biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

[iv] Cantalamessa, “Faith Which Overcomes the World,” Opening Address for the International Alpha Conference, June 2005 (London: Alpha International, 2005), 2.

[v] *Ibid.*, 3.

[vi] Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Our Sunday Visitor: Huntington, IN, 2012).

[vii] Ibid., 19.

[viii] Ibid.

[ix] Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciple*, 44.

[x] Website for Catherine of Siena Institute, accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.siena.org/>.

[xi] Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples*, 46.

[xii] Ibid., 67.

[xiii] Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[xiv] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 122.

[xv] Ibid., 132-33.

[xv] Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus* (Our Sunday Visitor: Huntington, IN, 2012).

[xv] Ibid., 19.

[xv] Ibid.

[xv] Sherry Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciple*, 44.

[xv] Website for Catherine of Siena Institute, accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.siena.org/>.

[xv] Weddell, *Forming Intentional Disciples*, 46.

[xv] Ibid., 67.

[xv] Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[xv] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 122.

[xv] Ibid., 132-33.

[xvi] Thomas V. Sanabria, "Personal Religious Beliefs and Experiences," in *Pathways of Hope and Faith Among Hispanic Teens: Pastoral Reflections and Strategies Inspired by the National Study of Youth and Religion*, ed. Ken Johnson-Mondragon (Stockton, CA: Instituto Fe y Vida, 2007), 41-79. For example 43% of

Hispanic and 47% of white Catholics definitely believed in life after death compared to 53% of Hispanic Protestants and 58% of white Protestants. Of Hispanic Catholic youth 70% believe in a judgment day; white Catholics score lower at 66% compared to Hispanic Protestants at 92% and white Protestants at 82%. When asked about reincarnation, 15% of the Hispanic Catholic youth in the study believed in reincarnation as did 14% of white Catholics; this compares to 5% of Hispanic Protestants and 8% of white Protestant youth.

[xvii] Smith and Lundquist, *Soul Searching*, 166.

[xviii] Ibid., 162-63.

[xix] Johnson-Mondragon, *Pathways of Hope*, 73.

[xx] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[xxi] Ibid., 5.

[xxii] Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian*, 112-30. See also a paper written by Edwin Hernandez with Rebecca Burwell and Jeffery Smith, "A Study of Hispanic Catholics: Why Are They Leaving the Catholic Church? Implications for the New Evangelization," in *The New Evangelization*, 109-142.

[xxiii] Peter Hunermann, "Evangelization of Europe? Observations on a Church in Peril," in Robert J. Schreiter, ed., *Mission in the Third Millennium* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 57-80.

[xxiv] Ibid., 65.

[xxv] Cantalamessa's Advent sermons and other sermons and articles written by him can be found on his website, accessed December 3, 2014, <http://www.cantalamessa.org>.

[xxvi] Cantalamessa, "1<sup>st</sup> Advent Sermon 2010," accessed August 27, 2013, [www.zenit.org/en/articles/father-cantalamessa-s-1st-advent-sermon-2010](http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/father-cantalamessa-s-1st-advent-sermon-2010)).

[xxvii] Ibid.

[xxviii] Ibid.

[xxix] Cantalamessa, "2<sup>nd</sup> Advent Sermon, 2010."

[xxx] Cantalamessa, "2<sup>nd</sup> Advent Sermon, 2010."

[xxxii] Ibid.

[xxxiii] Smith and Lindquist, *Soul Searching*, 163.

[xxxiiii] Cantalamessa, 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent Sermon, 2010.



[xxxiv] Ralph Martin, *Will Many Be Saved? What Vatican II Actually Teaches and Its Implications for the New Evangelization* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 204.

[xxxv] Cantalamessa, 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent Sermon, 2010.

[xxxvi] Cantalamessa, “3<sup>rd</sup> Advent Sermon, 2010,” accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/father-cantalamessa-s-3rd-advent-homily-2010>.

[xxxvii] John Henry Newman, “The Usurpations of Reason,” accessed April 5, 2014, <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/oxford/sermon4>.

[xxxviii] Cantalamessa, *3rd Advent Sermon, 2010*. Newman’s quote is from *Oxford University Sermons*, London, 1900, 54-74.

[xxxix] Cantalamessa, *3rd Advent Sermon, 2010*. Newman’s quote is from *Oxford University Sermons*, London, 1900, 54-74.

[xl] Newman, “The Usurpations of Reason.

[xli] See *Fides et Ratio* 42: “Reason in fact is not asked to pass judgment on the contents of faith, something of which it would be incapable, since this is not its function. Its function is rather to find meaning, to discover explanations which might allow everyone to come to a certain understanding of the contents of faith.”

[xlii] Peter A. Angeles, *The Harper Collins Dictionary of Philosophy* (Harper Collins: NY, 1992), 261.

[xliii] Benedict XVI, “Christmas Address, 2009,” accessed April 5, 2014, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2009/december/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20091221\\_curia-auguri\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2009/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20091221_curia-auguri_en.html).

[xliv] Cantalamessa, *Third Advent Sermon, 2012*. “‘I Bring You Tidings of Great Joy’: Evangelizing Through Joy,” accessed April 15, 2014, <http://www.cantalamessa.org/?p=2049&lang=en> .

[xlv] Ibid.

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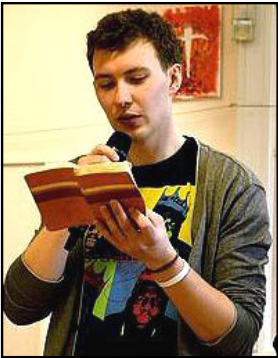
email: [living.bulwark@yahoo.com](mailto:living.bulwark@yahoo.com)



## New Kairos GAP Base in Glasgow

by PM Graham

Intro: The [GAP program](#) is a Kairos initiative for people aged 18 to 22. It has proven to be an effective tool in training and forming young Christians for mission. People from all over the world come to the GAP base in Glasgow, Scotland for a year of service – through evangelism, student outreach, youth work, or media and publications projects. As Gappers, they get the opportunity to live in "households," a small community of young people who pray together, live together and do mission work. PM Graham is a former gapper, now serving as the Kairos Europe and the Middle East GAP Director.



There's a hill in my neighborhood around which Glasgow spreads out like an old rug; patterns, lumps and stains in places, distant mountain ranges like curled up edges. It's a good place to pray. From the top, I'm able to take in the entire city in an eyeful. To change this place, to carry Christ's transforming love into every corner - for a moment, it seems achievable. Up there, I feel like I am standing in the space between heaven and my city: standing in the gap.

The Kairos GAP Year seeks to make that sense a reality in a young person's life. It is a time to draw close to God and to be available to the world that needs Him. In September, Kairos partnered with the Community of the Risen Christ (CRC) to establish a GAP base in Glasgow, Scotland. Six men and women, aged 18-22, have chosen that together they will sacrifice money, comfort and time, and make a daily decision to embrace a life of servanthood and mission as "gappers".

Some time on a GAP year is spent enjoying the adventure of living in a new country and culture. Some is spent receiving formational training, learning about the Lord and how to do his work in a rhythm of prayer, Scripture study and workshops. This builds a close connection to God that allows gappers to pass on a current of grace to the lives they touch in the varied service and mission they spend the rest of their time doing. In youth work and student evangelism, in outreach to the poor and needy, in the new friendships that are made with foreigners that become family, grace flows. My city is being

changed by gappers.

And in the process, they too are being changed. The GAP Program is for young men and women; it's a chance to experience a lot of 'firsts'. The unique challenges and opportunities they are embracing in this year are forming their character and equipping them to return home, or wherever the Lord calls them next, more ready to build the kingdom. GAP is ultimately a source of hope. Glasgow is being changed; where next?

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PM Graham is the GAP Director for [Kairos Europe and the Middle East](#). PM and his wife Niamh live in Glasgow, Scotland, and run the new Kairos GAP Base program there. PM grew up in the [Community of the Risen Christ](#) in Glasgow and Niamh grew up in [Charis Community](#) in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

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## Obeying God's Call to Mission

“I will surely bless you... because you have obeyed me”

by James C. DeSpelder

Intro: The [GAP program](#) is a Kairos initiative for people aged 18 to 22. It has proven to be an effective tool in training and forming young Christians for mission. People from all over the world come to the GAP base in Glasgow, Scotland for a year of service – through evangelism, student outreach, youth work, or media and publications projects. As Gappers they get the opportunity to live in “households,” a small community of young people who pray together, live together and do mission work.

GAP years are for other people. At least, that’s what I told myself. My parents had been suggesting a GAP year for ages, but I would have nothing to do with it. I couldn’t wait to graduate from university, start making money, and begin my climb up the corporate ladder.

But then I went to the [University Christian Outreach](#) (UCO) Winter Retreat held in North America in January 2014.

I expected to be spiritually refreshed and leave renewed – but not changed. I didn’t want to change. At the time, I had an excellent job in my future career field with a fantastic wage, friendly boss, and complete

flexibility with my class schedule. I was set until I graduated. This job was the result of much prayer, patient waiting, and I rightfully considered it a gift from God.

A teaching from Martin Steinbereithner shattered those expectations. As Martin spoke about different Biblical figures, I was only half listening – until he got to Abraham. Abraham’s son Isaac was the result of much prayer, patient waiting, and a gift from God. But still, God called on Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on an altar. Abraham obeyed. Not only was his son unharmed, but he was blessed by God for his obedience.

Martin challenged us to identify gifts from God in our lives that we had turned into idols and to think of ways our idols were inhibiting us from hearing God’s call to us for mission. I was immediately convicted with the realization that my idol was my job. I had snatched the gift God had given me and run away from my generous Father like a greedy child. It was in that moment I knew I was going on a GAP year.

I have been in Glasgow since September 2014 and have experienced a “return on investment” beyond anything I could have imagined. I’ve made lifelong friends in an incredibly hospitable and exciting community. I cannot wait for my personal prayer time every morning, I experience a measureless joy and wonder working with local children, and I’ve been given a wealth of wisdom from the poor.

I have seen God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 22 extended to me - as he extends it to all those who answer his call. “I will surely bless you... because you have obeyed me.”

---

James DeSpelder is from Lansing, Michigan, USA. He grew up in the [Work of Christ Community](#) in Lansing. He is currently in the [Kairos GAP Base program](#) in Glasgow, Scotland. He serves on many projects, including partnering in mission with an evangelical church in one of Glasgow's neediest areas.

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## My Mission Year Experience in Leuven, Belgium

by Sara Fonseca

The [Kairos Mission Year program](#) is for young people who have finished university and want to serve the Lord in a Kairos university outreach. The Mission Year program is especially focused on evangelism, service, and training through active mission. For the year 2014-15, we have three Mission Year missionaries serving in the European region.

So here I am, doing a Mission Year in Leuven, Belgium, working with a university outreach called [Pharos](#). I work with the mission team and specifically lead the women's side of the outreach.

One part of my mission is to lead a sharing group with girls who are on the verge of becoming Christians. An important part of the work is becoming friends with these girls. I listen to them and share about life with the Lord, his love, and all the wonders and challenges of the Christian life. As part of the mission team, I participate in Pharos's general organization and planning. We organize evangelistic activities to attract more people, and we plan other activities in order to help our members grow in their discipleship. In those things, we bring to life Pharos's mission and vision. I also supervise the service of the volunteers, helping them to see our vision and what means to give and receive from Pharos.

I am experiencing God's grace in a very clear way. God is using this time to teach me to give him control, to trust in him, and to be patient. He is talking to me about finding my happiness in him alone, thus being able to be joyful anywhere and under any circumstance.

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Sara Fonseca is from San José, Costa Rica. On her [Mission Year](#) she is serving as a Women's Mission Leader for [Pharos University Outreach](#) in Leuven, Belgium.



Koinonia Life in the Spirit Retreat at Buckden Towers 2015

## Receiving a Fresh Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

by James Mead

[Koinonia](#) is an ecumenical Christian university student group based in central London, UK. Members are from different Christian traditions: Anglicans, Catholics, Evangelicals, Orthodox and Protestants. Koinonia aims at being an intentional community where Christian faith comes alive, whether it be through prayer, conversations, growth in Christian life or time spent together.

To kick-start our new year, [Koinonia](#) hosted a three-day Life in the Spirit Seminar at Buckden Towers at the start of January. While the retreat may only have been planned to help establish a student outreach in Cambridge, it was certainly a very fruitful and enriching experience for all of us that attended from London.

On arriving at the village of Buckden – located 30 minutes west of Cambridge – we immediately entered into a time of fellowship, which was a key element of the retreat. That same evening we were given our first talk which included an outline of the Christian faith, as well as how it is often misconceived. However what surprised me is that despite my Christian upbringing and involvement in a Sword of the Spirit community, it felt as if I was hearing it all for the first time. But this was also the case with several others I spoke to at the time, and is testament to how actively the Spirit was working within us.

Some of the highlights of my involvement in Koinonia this past year, times that brought me closer to God and closer to my friends, were moments of what we in Koinonia-lingo call 'profound encounters'. Our second day involved a series of talks and testimonies which were given in preparation for the prayer meeting being held that evening. Since many of us were attending our first Life in the Spirit seminar, we were taught how to be open to receiving the Holy Spirit, as well as how it would bring us new life. Throughout the duration of the retreat we would meet with a small discussion group in response to each talk, and share about what we had taken out of them. We also had one to one meeting with our group leader.

The evening was then taken as an opportunity to worship and pray over each member of our respective discussion groups. I think one important thing to mention is that if you asked everyone who attended the

retreat what happened at the prayer meeting, no two people would give you the same answer. Within my own group we felt inclined to pray for a number of the spiritual gifts, and were enabled by the Spirit to encourage one another through prophetic words and scripture. God blessed us as both individuals and an outreach, and I therefore greatly anticipate placing further emphasis on our evangelism during this next academic term.

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James Mead is a first year student of Physics at Imperial College London. He has been a key member of [Koinonia](#) for the last seven months. James grew up in [Antioch Community](#) in London, UK.

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email: [living.bulwark@yahoo.com](mailto:living.bulwark@yahoo.com)



## I'm Scared of God

by Sam Williamson

The rising bubble of my New Year enthusiasm was burst last week when I read a prayer in the [\*Imitation of Christ\*](#). It terrified me. Does it scare you too? (Misery loves company.)

Purely as a scientific experiment, pray the following words out loud (or under your breath if your spouse is nearby and already suspicious of your sanity). I'm curious how it speaks to you.

Lord, you know what is best for me; let this be done—or that be done—as you please. Grant what you will, as much as you will, when you will. Do with me as you know best, as will most please you, and will be for your greater honor (Book 3, Chapter 15).

The first phrase is easy: “*You know what’s best for me.*” Sure, God knows everything better than anyone, Theology 101. The second phrase gets prickly: “*Let this—or that—be done as you please.*” I’m okay with “*let this*” be done as long as it means financial or physical health; but what if it means something else? I imagine stock market crashes and cancer.

The next phrase scares me, “*Grant to me what, as much, and whenever you want.*” I want (right now)

a home with a roof and a checkbook that can pay the bills. But what if what he grants is “Never,” or “Not very much,” or, “A lifetime of struggle”?

The last phrase put an exclamation point on my fears: “*Do with me as you please.*” What if God thinks my greatest need is a trial by fire, betrayal by friends, or a financial melt-down? What if my wife and I end up homeless, or that my life’s work looks like campfire smoke that vanishes in the evening sky, forgotten by tomorrow?

How is that for New Year optimism?

### **The vague and the specific**

I *vaguely* pray the Lord’s Prayer with a pious indifference, “Your kingdom come, your will be done!” It’s a shadowy hope for the return of his kingdom on earth. I also *specifically* pray that I make it to the airport on time, “*but your will be done.*” If I miss my plane because of a flat tire or traffic jam, “*well I just want God’s will.*” (I pray it with a hint self-righteousness.)

But there is a sweet spot—actually, a sour spot—somewhere between the vague and specific. There is a very real possibility that “God’s will” for me might include loss and suffering. Maybe he thinks that is what I need most. The thought scares me.

Because I don’t really trust God. I say I believe in God’s love, but sometimes there is a little voice inside me that says I know better than he does, and he’s going to get it wrong.

### **Health and wealth, or suffering?**

I dislike Western Christianity’s doctrines of health and prosperity, the “name-it claim-it” brand of televangelists. They seem to ignore passages that say Christian lives will include difficulty and hardship. They seem to forget that all we really need is God, and that health and wealth are very often obstacles to real rich life, that we often grip tightest the poisons that are killing us.

Even though I intellectually (and Biblically) reject those health and wealth sentiments, my heart secretly embraces them. My heart furtively thinks flat tires and empty bank accounts are the anomaly. They may happen, though rarely, and probably because I failed to think positively.

### **What will really satisfy?**

There is a tiny part of me that doesn’t trust God, and there is a big part of me (I’m just being honest here) that says my real needs can only be satisfied in this world.

But what if the very things I want for my life—including health and wealth—are the worst things for me right now? What if God—filled with love and wisdom—is deliberately, kindly, and gently weaning me from the liquid poison I slurp down every day? What if he does know best?

My battle in life is to believe God loves me more than I do, and he is proving it. I forget that all I need is God, really knowing God; that worldly comforts are the real fading campfire smoke.



If I honestly examine my life, I must admit that my greatest successes were the result of God's actions and my greatest sufferings were the results of my own actions. Why do I mistrust God?

## **The harshness of God**

I think God is calling me to let go of my life, to reach the end of my control, to lay my crown down, to put away my scepter, and to say, "Your kingdom come in my life—all of it." C. S. Lewis said "The harshness of God is kinder than the softness of man."

I draw too much comfort from blessing in this world. I forget that the blessing of God point me to my only true need: God himself. Not just what he gives. Financial or physical health is not what I need at this moment. What I need is God; knowing him, hearing him, worshiping him, being in a relationship with him. Everything else is just a signpost not the destination.

God's will might may be to rip down the signposts so that my only guide is his presence. Do I really want *my* will for my life? I know—at least deep down I know—that my will almost always wreaks havoc in my life. His will leads to true comfort.

## **I think God is leading me back to him**

William Cowper wrote a [\*poem about suffering\*](#). In the middle of it is this verse:

His purposes will ripen fast, unfolding every hour. The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flower. Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take, the clouds ye so much dread, are big with mercy and shall break, with blessings on your head.

God always gives us what we most desperately need. And sometimes we need a weaning. The blessing I need most is to reach the end of myself (and this world), and reach for God alone. God alone will satisfy the deepest longings of my heart. "Father, Your will be done."

Even when I'm scared.

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Sam Williamson grew up in Detroit, Michigan, USA. He is the son of a Presbyterian pastor and grandson of missionaries to China. He moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1975. He worked in London England from 1979 to 1982, helping to establish [Antioch](#), a member community of the Sword of the Spirit. After about twenty-five years as an executive at a software company in Ann Arbor he sensed God call him to something new. He left the software company in 2008 and now speaks at men's retreats, churches, and campus outreaches. He is married to Carla Williamson and they have four grown children and a grandson. He has a blog site, [www.beliefsoftheheart.com](http://www.beliefsoftheheart.com), and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsOfTheHeart.com.





## What Is the Essence of Worship?

by Sam Williamson

Several years ago, I joined a local business organization. Their stated intention was to help business people do their job better; a kind of coaching through semi-monthly seminars.

At the opening and close of each session, we sang a song that went something like this: “*Yes, I can do it; Yes, I can do it; I have a positive frame of mind.*” (I kid you not—truth is stranger than fiction.) By the end of the evening, every face was aglow with expectation; and two weeks later, everybody needed another face-lift.

I also found their teachings to be less *substance* and more *selling*. Instead of nourishing tips on handling angry clients, I received frothy, double-shot lattes of motivational, positive thinking. The talks were inspiring but insubstantial; caffeine without fruit or vegetables. Or protein.

Then I began to wonder how close my worship-music experience paralleled that seminar jingle feeling; maybe a boost to my spirits to face another week, but mostly just a jolt of java.

Bear with me. Worshipful music is wonderful. But I began to examine the *nature* of worship. I asked myself, “What is the *essence* of worship? Does worship *require* music?”

I tried an experiment: I took a six month sabbatical from any form of worship music—personal prayer time, worship CD's, and even singing during a church service—and I found I love it.

Song-free worship taught me how to worship better.

### **Because real worship changes us**

Real worship is a two-way street. The English word, “worship,” comes from the Old English phrase, “*worth-shape*.” The *worth* of our subject shapes our souls. Everyone worships something—fame, wealth, or a good family—and the value we give it drives our lives.

Psalm 115 says the gods of the peoples have unseeing eyes, unhearing ears, and unfeeling hands. Then it claims, “*Those who make them become like them, and so do all who worship them*” (vs. 8). It says that the act of worship re-forms us in the image of the thing we worship.

If we worship success, we become arrogant (or depressed) and if we worship people-pleasing, the fear of rejection rules our behavior. Our object of worship controls our lives.

If we examine our biggest problems—our anger, deepest sadness, anxieties, or most uncontrollable behaviors—we will always find an object of worship cracking its whip. Our problem in life is that we functionally worship other gods, taskmasters with whips in hand.

### **So what is worship?**

Real worship is more than singing praises; it is the act of giving away our hearts. Worship is attributing ultimate value to something; it thinks, “If I had *that* I'd be happy;” it is a deep belief of the heart that says, “*That is all I need.*”

Worship is what we most deeply value. It's not just the times we set aside to sing praise songs. We are constantly worshipping. Moment-by-moment, we live *for* something. “Where our treasure is, there will our hearts and minds be also.”

Archbishop William Temple wrote, “Your religion is what you do with your solitude.” What do we think about when we wait in line or drive to work? Where does our mind naturally drift when no external force (like TV, work, or screaming kids) engages it?

Our minds drift to what we most deeply believe we need. It imagines kids on the honor roll, our names in lights, bank accounts full, a different spouse, our bosses serving us, or our ministries suddenly exploding in success. Something deep down inside us believes that is our greatest need; that “that” will make us happy.

This is worship.

Instead of singing, I meditated on the Psalms; in place of rhythm, I read the gospels. Worship is not a feeling as much as the place of our deepest trust. Worship is a heart-rest on God.

## What do we do?

We need a change of mind; we need a vision of God that destroys the earthly religion of what we do in our solitude. We need an intense focus (of heart, mind, soul and strength) on the beauty of God. It means looking, gazing, meditating, and reflecting on the majesty of God

We can reform our worship by a conscious decisions to attribute ultimate value to the Ultimate Being who is ultimately beyond us; and yet who sits beside us on our front porch and lives within us as we wash the dishes. It is a decision to think and meditate on God. It's worship.

Singing can be an *act* of worship, but it isn't worship itself. It is ever-so-possible (and we've all probably done it), to sing a half-hour of godly worship songs—and even temporarily be inspired—and then return to our “normal” lives where we grasp for appreciation, praise, health, or financial peace.

Real worship, instead, is an inner vision of the reality of God, and giving all our hearts to him.

And worship *music* can open the rusty doors of our heart to spiritually see what the dust of the world obscures. The gods of this world constantly tempt us in Superbowl commercials and the success of others around us. Singing truths reminds us of how reality really works.

It is in the *truth* of the songs—which the music unveils—that changes us forever. We come to see the amazing God through singing of his *Amazing Grace*; and that sight shifts the deep song in our hearts to a new rhythm that remains. Even when the emotional high dissipates.

## Substance over hype

That seminar jingle, “*Yes, I can do it; I have a positive frame of mind,*” was vapor-ware, a sales pitch to myself based on nothing but smoke and mirrors.

Worship of the real God reveals rock-solid truths to my heart: that he is all I need, that he *has* done it, and I'll never be the same. Only worship of the *real* God will *really* satisfying.

I'm glad I'm singing about God once more. It comes from a *real* positive frame of mind.

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CHALLENGES IN LIVING TOGETHER AS COMMUNITY



Wide and Easy for the Many, Narrow and Hard for a Few

by Tom Caballes

***Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.***

***Matthew 7:13 14***

Most of us like to live a life that is easy, convenient and pleasurable. We try to avoid pain, hardships and troubles. Are we not supposed to enjoy life? The answer for this is yes – provided we are only looking at this life. But God has something much, much better in mind. He wants to share eternity with us.

*For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? [Matthew 16:25-26].*

God is asking us to ‘lose our life’ for Him, and that is why following God is hard. The gate that leads to Him is narrow. Are you one of the ‘few’ ones who are willing to walk through the narrow gate, where the way is

hard? Do you know what will it cost? Are you willing to pay the price?

### ***So how do we enter through the narrow gate?***

1. Life of discipleship is a cycle; there are good times, but there are also hard times. When God blesses us with good times, let us enjoy them. But let us not be surprised when difficulties come our way. Let us anticipate that they will come, and we need to face them with the resolve to overcome and ‘win.’
2. God wants us to grow in character as we face challenges in life, and not just overcome them. These are some of the character traits we grow in as we face trials: endurance, forbearance, patience, faithfulness, perseverance, forgiveness, flexibility, and self-control. God also wants us to draw close to Him; the less independent we are, the more God-dependent we become. And maybe, that is the whole point of the challenge or trial we face – that we draw near to God and grow to be like Him.
3. We need to have the mind of Christ as we face our difficulties. We need to ask: if Jesus were in my situation, what would He do? Also, what would He **not** do? What options would He consider? If we are not sure, it would be good to ask someone whom we trust what their thinking is about the situation.
4. Hardships are meant to be temporary; we need to stand tall and never give up. We need to endure all types of hardships and persecutions. Even as we face hardships and trials, we are to rejoice and know that we will be victorious in the end. After all, all types of hardships are only temporary; one day, we will win the crown of life. Quitters never win, and winners never quit – especially in eternal matters.
5. The narrow gate in this life [our challenges and trials] are meant to tell us one thing: we were never meant to be for this world only. We are citizens of heaven [Philippians 3:20], and we ought to long for our real home in heaven, where there will be no more “*grief, crying, or pain...*” [Revelations 21:4].

### ***Other Scripture passages:***

- *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.* [Romans 8:18]
- *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you are involved in various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But you must let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.* [James 1:2-4]
- *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.* [2 Corinthians 4:17-18]
- Other references: 1 Peter 1:3-8; James 1:12.

### ***For personal reflection or group sharing***

1. Which gate do you think you are passing through in this life – the wide and easy one, or the narrow and hard one? Can you validate and prove it?



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.

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CHALLENGES IN LIVING TOGETHER AS COMMUNITY



(c) Kevin Carden

## Lead Us Not Into Temptation

by Tom Caballes

***Pray then like this ... Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil...***

***- Matthew 6:9 13***

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus taught us to pray the “Our Father.” The first part refers to God, the second part refers to us and our needs. This part of the prayer, “lead us not into temptation...” comes immediately after the asking for forgiveness. Jesus knows our need to be forgiven and tendency to fall into sin through temptation. How?

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. [Hebrews 4:15]*

He knows our state of sinfulness and how easy it is for us to fall. Verse 16 of Hebrews continues:

*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*



God's grace and mercy is always there for us.

### **So how do we not fall into sin through temptation?**

1. We need to commit to doing the positive: love God, offer our life to Him, seek Him in daily prayer and the Scripture, grow in His character, and love and serve God's people. The key to avoiding temptation and sin in our lives is to strive for holiness. *Strive for ... holiness without which no one will see the Lord.* [Hebrews 12:14] Holiness and sin are opposites – we can pursue only one. We need to pursue one daily, consistently, and without fail. If and when we fail, we need to repent and go back to the right path.
2. Temptation itself is not sin; but it is an opening that can lead to sin. Let us avoid all forms of temptations if and when we can, especially in the areas where we are weak. Many times we need to run away to win.
3. We need to sift through what goes in our minds, eyes and hearts and never let our guards down. *For all that is in the world-the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions-is not from the Father but is from the world.* [1 John 2:16] Our unguarded minds, eyes and hearts connives with the enemy within, our flesh. What should our minds be occupied with? See Philippians 4:8.
4. The way we handle media plays a very significant role in the way we can be tempted. Billboards, magazines, newspapers, movies, TV shows, and the internet are the modern ways temptations can creep upon us. We need to know how to protect ourselves from these, like placing the computer in a public area.
5. We need to leave our past behind. *Brothers ... one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead...* [Philippians 3:13]. We are a new creation in Christ. Let us leave the old man behind and let the new man in us grow into the likeness and image of Christ. Let us leave the sins of our youth. Let us settle our unresolved past – hurts, resentment, grudges and so forth. Only those who resent and not forgive are the ones who hurt themselves. We can be free from our past – it's our choice.

### **Other Scripture passages:**

- *No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.* [1 Corinthians 10:13]
- *Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.* [2 Corinthians 7:1]
- *That you are to put away, in relation to your earlier way of life, the old man, which has become evil by love of deceit; And be made new in the spirit of your mind, And put on the new man, to which God has given life, in righteousness and a true and holy way of living.* [Ephesians 4:22-24]
- Other references: 2 Peter 3:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; 1 Timothy 6:9.

### **For personal reflection or group sharing**

1. What kind of temptations do I regularly encounter?
2. What are my personal weaknesses? In what ways do temptations come to me through my weaknesses?





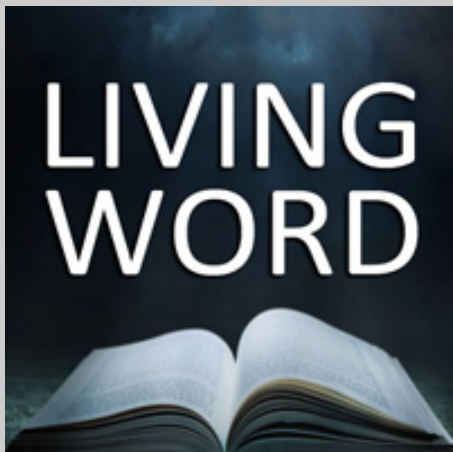
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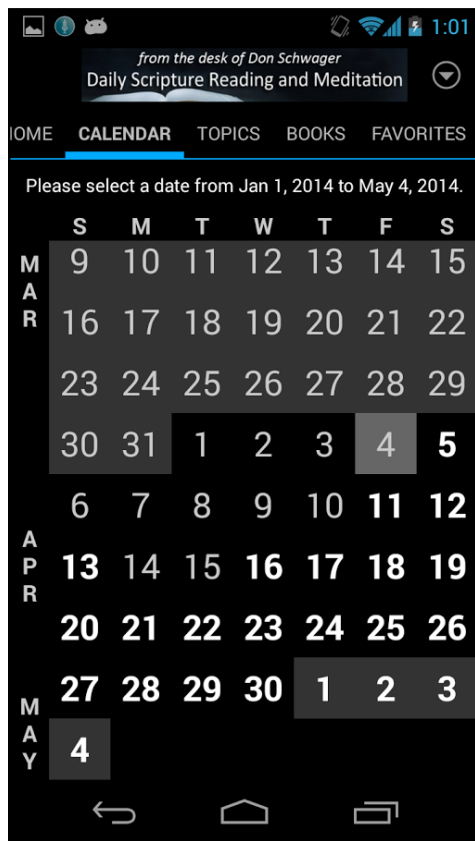
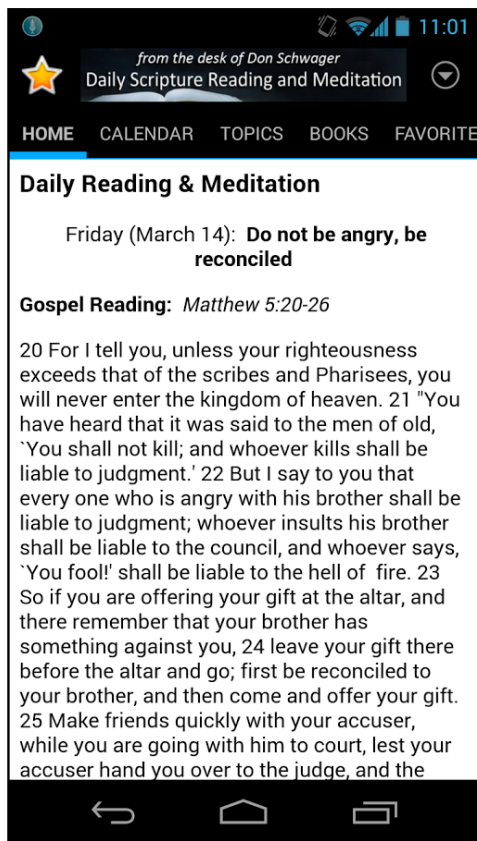
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## Spiritual Reading for the Forty Days of Lent

- [The Fire of Christ's Love and Why Did Jesus Die for Our Sins?](#) by Raniero Cantalamessa
- ["Were you there when they crucified my Lord?"](#) by Raniero Cantalamessa
- [The Beatitudes Are Inseparable from the Cross](#), by Archbishop Sheen
  
- [Quest for Holiness](#), by William Sangster
- [Why Holiness Is Necessary](#), by J.I. Packer
- [Growing Downward to Grow Up](#): The Life of Repentance, by J.I. Packer
- [Surrender to God](#): An orientation to Lent, by John Henry Newman
- [Christ Calls Us Deeper Still](#) by John Henry Newman
  
- [Salt and Light](#): Our Vocation to Holiness, by Donald Bloesch
- [A New Kind of Saint](#), by Donald Bloesch
- [With Christ in the School of Holiness](#) by JI Packer
- [Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing](#): quotes and meditation, by Soren Kierkegaard
- [Emptied for Our Sake](#), by Bernard of Clairvaux
  
- [The Cross - the One True Glorification of God](#), by Joseph Ratzinger/ Pope Benedict XVI
- [Worship at the Cross](#) by Charles Simpson
- [The Cross of Christ - the Measure of the World](#), by John Henry Newman
- [The Seven Last Words of Jesus: paintings and reflections](#) by John Dunne
  
- [Is Your Life Christ-Centered or Self-Centered](#), by Bob Tedesco
- [A Disciple's Yoke](#), by Bruce Yocum
- [Pursuing Holiness in an Unholy World](#), by Tom Caballes
  
- [Forgiveness and Reconciliation With One Another](#), by Carlos Mantica
- [The Readiness to Change](#), by Dietrich von Hildebrand
- [The Lavish Love of the Prodigal Father](#): reflection on the parable of the prodigal son, by Don Schwager
- [With Jesus in the Wilderness for Forty Days](#), reflection by Don Schwager
  
- [The Danger of "I Would Never Do That,"](#) by Sam Williamson
- [He Must Increase: Finding Our Identity in Jesus Christ](#), by Jan Munk
- [Focus for Fasting: Pursuing our higher calling to serve and worship Christ](#), by Jerry Munk
- [Manna and Mammon: A battlefield that shows our mettle](#), by Dan Propson

### Articles by Steve Clark

- [The Redeemer – What God Wanted](#)
- [The Great Downfall](#)
- [The Redeemer Who Died](#)
- [The Obedient Son](#): The humility of the Son of the King

- [Christ's Humility and Victory](#)
- [Dying to Defeat Death](#): The death of Jesus was a victory over death itself
- [Exalted Over All: The Victory of the Redeemer](#)
- [New Life in Christ](#)
- [Receiving Redemption](#): United with Christ we pass from death to new life

#### Articles by Jeanne Kun

- [Discipleship: "Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me"](#)
- [Jesus' Crucifixion: "It is finished"](#)
- [The Triumph of the Cross: "The Lord has risen indeed"](#)
- [Contemplating Christ's Passion](#)
- [Freedom from Sin and Death: "A New Creation"](#)
- [Hosanna to the Son of David!](#) and [Jesus: A Portrait of Zeal](#)
- [The Agony in the Garden](#): Love's Surrender
- [Jesus: A Portrait of Obedience](#)
- [Exiled from Eden](#)
- [Mary of Bethany](#)
- [Mary Magdalene](#): A portrait of love stronger than death
- [The Pharisee and Tax Collector: "Be Merciful to Me,"](#) by Jean Kun

#### From the early church writers

- [A Mirror to see Inside Ourselves](#), by Gregory the Great
- [The Mountain of Your Sins - Never too High](#), by Cyril of Jerusalem
- [Why Does God Allow Temptation?](#) by Maximus the Confessor
- [Dead to Sin](#), by John Chrysostom (349-407 AD)
- [God Has Reigned from a Tree](#): meditations on the Cross of Jesus Christ
- [Fasting and Feasting](#): A selection of short readings for Lent from the early church fathers
- [Walking in the Light](#), by Gregory of Nyssa
- [The Ladder of Divine Ascent](#): *spiritual wisdom from John Climacus, Abbot of Monastery, Sinai, Egypt*

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