



***Listen to Him***

***"This is my Beloved Son, listen to Him"*** – Mark 9:7

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## Listening with a Disciple's Ear

"Morning by morning he wakens my ears to hear  
as those who are taught" – Isaiah 50:4

### In this issue

This issue focuses on the merciful Father who sends his only begotten Son who brings us new life in the Holy Spirit so we can walk in love and truth as his adopted sons and daughters.

In the four Gospel accounts of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus, we hear the eternal Father who speaks audibly to his Son and to all who have ears to listen to his voice:

"This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased - listen to him"

(Mark 9:7, Luke 9:35, Matthew 3:17, John 12:28).

God the Father speaks to us through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the eternal Word of God who has come in the flesh to become one with us in our humanity and to redeem us from sin, Satan, and death. Through the power of his life-giving Word he comes to us each and every day to strengthen and renew us in faith, hope, and love.

Ask the Lord Jesus to open your ears to hear his voice and to give you understanding of his steadfast love, mercy, and forgiveness, through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

"Morning by morning he wakens my ears to hear as those who are taught"

(Isaiah 50:4).

"His mercies never come to an end - they are new every morning"

(Lamentations of Jeremiah 3:22,23).

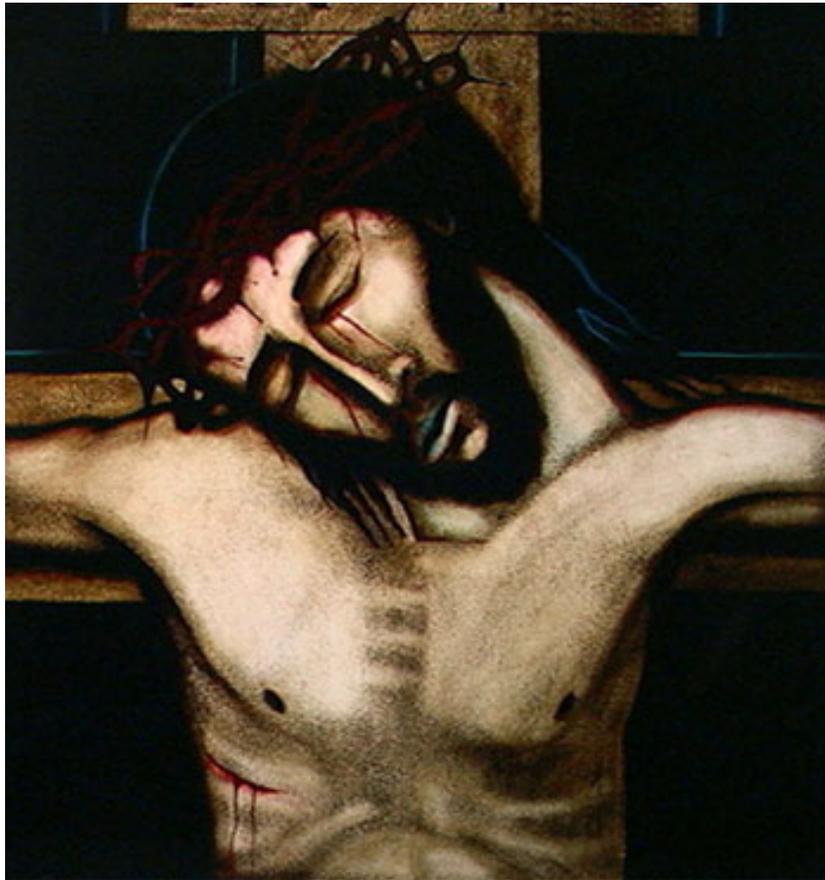
May the Lord Jesus give us, individually and corporately, a disciple's ear that is eager to listen and to follow the Lord with expectant faith and trusting hope in his promises. And just as he did with his first disciples, may he graciously open the Scriptures for us and set our hearts on fire with the love of Christ (Luke 24:32; 44-45).

Sincerely in Christ,  
Don Schwager  
editor

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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)



## The Humility and Victory of the Redeemer

by Steve Clark

### Introduction

The redemption of the Children of Israel from Egypt came through a victory that God won. He himself came “down to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land” (Exodus 3:8). He brought them out “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders” (Deuteronomy 26:8). In the Exodus, “the Lord...has triumphed gloriously” (Exodus 15:1), as the Israelites sang in “The Song of Moses”. The redemption of Israel from Egypt was a victory that God himself won in a struggle with Pharaoh, the Egyptian army, and the gods of Egypt (Exodus 12:12).

“In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19). God “came down” once again to deliver his people, only this time he became human and redeemed human beings in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ too won a victory “with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terrors, with signs and wonders”. But as we have seen, that victory was begun in an unusual way. He first laid down his life on the cross, in order that human beings could have the blood of the true Passover lamb sprinkled upon them and so be saved from the destroyer. He then could lead them into the good land of true freedom.

If we say that Christ defeated the forces which make for human destruction, we could be referring to three somewhat

distinct events: what happened on the cross, what happened in the resurrection, or what happens when human beings become Christians and so are personally redeemed. We could, of course, be referring to the result of all three events at the same time; and, in fact, most commonly that is just what we do. We should perhaps add to these what happens as the result of the Second Coming and the consummation of all things, but since they have not yet occurred, they are a victory we still look forward to.

The victory of Christ, then, occurs in stages. The first stage occurred on the cross. His death on the cross was a real victory – a moral one. He endured death in full faithfulness to God and thereby offered the sacrifice of his life. It was a paradoxical victory, because at the moment of breathing his last, his enemies – death and Satan – were in possession of the field and seemed to be the victors. Yet, in fact, he had defeated them because his death robbed them of their power.



The second stage occurred through the resurrection. On the third day after he died, he was raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of the Father. In rising again, he achieved a victory in his own person. As a result, his own humanity existed free of death and of any subjection to this world and to Satan.

The third stage occurs as individuals become Christians and receive from Christ new life and freedom. Christ's victory is achieved in them because they are liberated from the power of death and Satan to become the possession of Christ. By the power of God in Christ, they become "the spoils" (Isaiah 53:12) of battle.

The fourth stage is yet to come. Jesus will come again, and he will come leading the armies of heaven. He will then banish sin, death and Satan from this world. That will allow him to confer on the human beings who belong to him the prize of life in the transfigured, glorified world, what we most commonly call the life of heaven.

In the second part of this book, we looked at three statements of why Jesus' death was important. He did for us something we could not do for ourselves. He offered the sacrifice that was acceptable to God for our deliverance. That sacrifice paid the price for freeing us from the slavery of sin. That sacrifice involved making satisfaction for the penalty due to human sin and was accounted for us.

In the third part of the book, we saw that Christ's death could be an acceptable sacrifice, because of who he was. He was the new Adam, high priest and messianic king, who was the Son of God. He had a standing with and relationship with God that allowed him to act on our behalf and to be accepted by God. His death was also able to make a difference for our sins because in dying obediently he gave his life fully in love of God and love of us. It was given in response to what his Father wanted in order to make amends for the sins of the human race. In that way, his

death was an offering that was acceptable to God.

Up to this point, we have looked primarily at the death of Christ in itself. While we will still consider his death, we also will now begin to look at the broader picture. It is not enough to say Christ's death redeems us. His death does not make full sense apart from his resurrection and ascension. His dying on the cross is only one part of what Christ did on earth to save us. The crucifixion may be the most puzzling part to us and so require more thought, but it is not a separable part. It must be seen as a component of the victory that Christ came to win. As we consider his victory, we will see his death in a new light, a light we will gain through surveying the whole process.

In this part we therefore begin to take a different perspective. We will consider the way Christ acted to accomplish the redemption. His death was part of a process of going from this fallen world to the right hand of the Father, where he shared his Father's throne and so was able to be the redeemer of the human race. It was a kind of exodus (Luke 9:31) or passover (Luke 22:15-16) and is sometimes referred to as "the paschal mystery". In this passage to a better place, he himself was changed so that he became a new kind of human being, a human being with a glorified life, a life that could now be shared with us.

Consideration of this triumphal passage shows us three more reasons why the death of Christ was able to redeem us:

1. He humbled himself;
2. He defeated death;
3. He was exalted over all.

In the first chapter of this fourth part, we will consider the way his death was in fact a victory, achieved through self-humbling. In the next two chapters we will look at his resurrection and ascension. In so doing, we will look at the difference his death made for himself and his personal triumph. In the last part of the book we will go on to look at his giving of the Spirit and his second coming. In so doing, we will look at the difference his death made for us and will make for us. That will allow us to see his full victory.

## The Testing

*He...partook of the same nature [as those he was to save], that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.*                      Hebrews 2:9, 14-15

As Adam confronted Satan, so did Christ. At the very beginning of his public ministry, right after being anointed with the Spirit as the messianic King and proclaimed as God's Son, Christ encountered Satan himself. We read about that encounter in the fourth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him,*

*If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.*

*But he answered,*

*It is written,*

*'Man shall not live by bread alone,*

*but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'*

*Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him,*

*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,*

*'He will give his angels charge of you,'  
and  
'On their hands they will bear you up,  
lest you strike your foot against a stone.'*

*Jesus said to him,*

*Again it is written,*

*'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'*

*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world  
and the glory of them; and he said to him,*

*All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.*

*Then Jesus said to him,*

*Begone, Satan! for it is written,*

*'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'*

*Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.*

- Matthew 4:1-11

To be tempted is to be tested by an inducement to do evil, to sin (see p. . For righteous, godly people, then, a temptation is also an attack on what they value most, living in a way pleasing to God and so attaining the purpose for which they have been made. Christ began his public ministry by undergoing such an attack. The first Adam had to face Satan in combat and in so doing brought the human race down in a great defeat. The new Adam also had to face Satan. Upon the outcome of that encounter hung the promise of a new future for human beings.

“The Testing” or “The Trial” or, as we more commonly term it, “The Temptation (in the Wilderness)” is recounted at the beginning of the Gospel for a reason. It was a prelude to the rest of Christ’s earthly ministry, which in turn was the prelude to his heavenly ministry of redeeming human beings. He did not come for a peaceful ministry of teaching winning truths, speaking gracious words, blessing children, and being commended by all – however much these things formed part of what he did. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Christ came for a war, and the initial campaign was to fight on earth to reach an assured position of heavenly power and authority from which to complete the task. That war was first manifested in the event we call the temptation.

The encounter in Matthew 4 was a fight, but one that did not involve physical force. The temptation was an ethical or moral fight where the battlefield is the will or heart, the inner place where human beings make decisions. In this case, the battlefield was the human heart of Christ.

The issue Christ faced was his role as the human Son of God. How would he conduct himself in the position he held? His identity had been manifested to the world by the heavenly voice at his baptism: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). Like the first Adam, the new Adam had to maintain the position that was his by the grace and choice of God.

The issue of his position as the Son of God was clearly stated by the tempter in saying “if you are the Son of God...” Christ was tempted to prove himself as the especially favored one of God. He was first tempted to prove himself by an act of power as great as Moses performed when he provided bread in the wilderness. He was then tempted to prove himself by an act of “faith” in God that would prove God’s special protection. At the end, he was presented all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them and tempted to receive them, not from God but from “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31): “All these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.”

The temptations were subtle. Like the temptation faced by Adam and Eve, Satan tempted Christ with something God

in fact wanted him to have. By God's intention Christ would do great acts of power, including making bread in the wilderness. He would receive striking protection from God. He would become the ruler of the whole world.

But the nub of the temptation for Christ was the same as for Adam and Eve. Would he take the path of obedience? Would he follow the instructions of God, trusting God to bring him where he wanted him to be? Or would he reach out and exalt himself, making use of the power and position God gave him but not in God's way?

Christ won his initial combat with Satan. But it was only the first round. As the Gospel of Luke tells us, "When the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). The account we describe as The Temptation of Christ only reveals in a more vivid way the struggle Christ was undergoing all during his public ministry. Further temptations from Satan are described at those points where Christ turned away from establishing a messianic kingdom of earthly glory and took instead the path that led to the cross (Matthew 16:23; Luke 22:53; John 12:31-32; 14:30).

The path Christ took could be summed up in his own words. "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11). To translate the saying into more literal English: "Everyone who raises himself will be lowered, and he who lowers himself will be raised."

This principle was applied to Christ's death and resurrection in the Philippians 2 passage that we considered at the beginning of the last chapter. The new Adam, the Son of God, humbled himself in obedience to the point of death. This self-humbling, this self-lowering, resulted in an exaltation, a rising. *Because* "he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross, *therefore* God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:8-11).

In Hebrew idiom the word "lowering" or "going down" can refer to defeat, just as "exaltation" or "going up" can refer to victory. Christ's death on the cross was a going down to go up. It was a defeat that resulted in victory, a falling in battle that resulted in rising in triumph. Christ's path followed his own paradoxical instruction: the way to go up is to go down. It had to in order to overcome the fallenness of this world.

In this chapter we are going to look at Christ's victory over the enemies of the human race, a victory that was accomplished through lowering himself or humbling himself. In one way we have already done that in the last chapter. The chief enemy of the human race is sin. Christ defeated sin definitively in his own person by keeping the commandments to the end, at the cost of his own life. He did so through the humility of obedience and service. He defeated sin, in other words, by never sinning.

Yet, as most if not all of us experience, there is more to sin than simply some action we do or do not do. There seems to be a power behind sin, a power that makes it difficult not to act disobediently and transgress God's commandments. Externally, as Scripture tells us, that power comes from Satan and from "this world", this place of exile, this house of bondage we live in that makes it hard for us to serve God. Internally, that power is the "weakness of the flesh" that makes us prey to death. Together "the world, the flesh and the devil" (Ephesians 2:1-3) determine much of what happens to the fallen human race and produce the pattern of sin we have already observed.

Christ defeated sin itself, but he also defeated those spiritual forces that hold human beings enslaved to sin. He defeated Satan and death in his own person and so put himself in the position to defeat Satan and death by freeing other human beings from sin and death. He won this victory by following the paradoxical principle of going down to go up. Christ humbled himself, let himself be put down in defeat to win the victory over the main enemies of the human race. He let himself lose to Satan in order to win over him. He let himself be overcome by the world in order

to overcome the world (John 16:33). He let himself be put to death in order to defeat death.

This is a chapter about the victory of Christ – on the cross itself. It is probably most natural for us to speak about a victory when someone obtains the results of the struggle – when an army is driven away or a city conquered. Similarly, it is natural to speak of a redemption when a slave is actually freed from an oppressive master and comes into the possession of a good master. We therefore most naturally connect Christ’s victory with the resurrection and redemption with the point at which human beings are freed from bondage.

Yet we sometimes speak of victory when “the tide has turned” and the war is “now in our hands”, and so we speak of the victory on the cross and redemption through the cross. When we do, we express the truth that the sufferings and death on the cross made the victory of the resurrection and our redemption possible. Christ’s resurrection to glory and our redemption from bondage would not have occurred if Christ had not died the way he did. Even more, once he had died, the resurrection and our redemption were assured. The obstacle had been taken away. Now God’s plan could unfold in and through Christ the Lord.

This chapter therefore concerns the way Christ’s humility led to spiritual victory because it led to God’s action on his behalf. To gain insight into the paradox of Christ’s statement about going down to go up, we must insert “by God” into it. He was probably using the Jewish form of reverential speech that talks about God’s actions by using the passive form and not mentioning God directly. For us, the statement would convey its meaning more clearly if it were phrased: “Everyone who raises himself will be lowered by God, and everyone who lowers himself will be raised by God.” Jesus’ statement is not a mere generalization from ordinary human experience. To state more fully what he said, the key to spiritual victory over the fallenness of this world is the action of God and the way to bring about that action is submission to God and his plan.

## The Enemy

The conflict Christ faced was a moral and therefore internal one, but Christ had an external opponent. He did not only have to deal with desires or tendencies inside himself that might lead him to wrong choices. He was dealing with a being outside himself leading him to sin. He was encountering Satan.

When modern people think of Satan’s activity in human life, what often comes to mind is possession. From time to time we hear about dramatic exorcisms, attempted liberations from the mysterious control a demonic force has over an individual. Or some, most commonly Christians, think more of Satan’s activity as special influences of evil spirits or “holds” that such spirits can have upon people, holds that need to be broken by a process of “deliverance”. Others associate Satan with curses, hexes, spells, and malign and hidden influences that come from witchcraft, voodoo, or spiritualism.

All these, however, are only special works of the devil, not what he is mainly about. When John says, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil,” the context makes clear that “the works of the devil” are committing sin. In regard to the human race, Satan is mainly interested in getting people to sin.

Satan is behind what we have been calling the sin problem. Since what God commands is unqualifiedly good, sin is moral evil. Satan is behind the moral evil of the universe because he himself has become morally corrupt and passes on his own way of life. But he is also behind the moral evil of the universe in a further way. He attempts to get human beings to choose moral evil so that they sin, that is, enter into disobedience to God.

Satan, the leader of a rebellion against God, entices human beings to disobey God as a method of joining them to his

own kingdom. His strategy is similar to the way modern governments sometimes win over spies or traitors. They first get them to commit a crime so that the traitors have a personal interest in being free of the authority that would punish them if caught.

The existence of the organized rebellion that is the kingdom of Satan is not always clearly recognized. Keeping it hidden works to his advantage. As a result, sins that he is trying to bring human beings to commit often do not look like sins. As Paul puts it, “Satan disguises himself as an angel of light,” and “his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). Sin can appear to be humanitarian or philanthropic. Agents of evil can be disciplined and self-controlled, even courteous and affable. If the result of their actions, however, is to take human beings away from honoring and obeying God, they are advancing the kingdom of Satan and ultimately furthering evil.

The New Testament writings present Satan and demonic forces as waging a fight for control of the human race. New Testament passages about warfare and fighting in the Christian life do not refer, for the most part at least, to physical combat. They refer to a moral or ethical combat. Behind sin, in the common New Testament view, lies not just human weakness and ignorance, nor simply human perversity, but something more than human.

“We are not contending against flesh and blood” (Ephesians 6:12), said Paul about opposition to the Christian message. We are not just contending with the human forces we can see. We are confronting evil spiritual forces as well. We are, in fact, confronting “the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11). We are up against a struggle designed to lead us either to give up serving God or, at least, to turn to disobedience to God.

That struggle is primarily conducted by deceit, temptation, and unacknowledged influences working upon us. Satan is “the father of lies” (John 8:44). In this age, his main tactics are persuasion to sin, what we might call propaganda. As we know, such propaganda is often most effective when it is least overt.

There is, however, another important truth about Satan’s power: he seems not only to have influence in this world but also authority. The New Testament writings speak of the work of redemption as freeing people from Satan’s power or authority (Acts 26:18) or delivering them from the kingdom of darkness (Colossians 1:13). Christ even spoke of Satan as the ruler of this world (John 12:31). Paul especially spoke of the greater evil spirits in words that indicate they have ruling power. They are principalities and powers, thrones and dominions, world rulers of this present darkness (Ephesians 6:12; Colossians 1:16).

Satan’s rule seems to be real, but there is no indication in the New Testament that it is just or lawful. He is a usurper. God, however, seems to respect his rule and allow it to continue. He clearly does not allow it because he wants what Satan wants. He allows it because he lets those who rebel from him conduct their own affairs in the way they choose. As Paul indicates, that is in itself penal because a life of sin leads people into destructive habits and inevitably leads to death (Romans 1:12-22). That death is not just physical but spiritual as well, separation from God and loss of true life. Those who die in such a state go down to the place of the dead and there find themselves under the rule of Satan. He is most justly not the ruler of earth but the ruler of the nether regions, of hell, of those who live in separation from God.

Although Satan is the ruler of hell, in this age he is also the ruler of this world, of the current state of human affairs. Through the fall, he has obtained dominion over human beings, even before their final death, because they are spiritually already dead. Human beings who choose sin rather than God de facto choose to have Satan as their ruler. By that choice, they leave the blessing and protection that come from being in God’s kingdom and find themselves in a world of Satan’s making. The consequences of sin, therefore, include subjection to the rule of Satan and other demonic beings.

From God's point of view, allowing Satan sway over fallen human beings is just. After all, they chose him and believed his message. Moreover, it was only fitting that sin should have such consequences. The obedience God teaches is obedience to what makes heaven possible – love of him and love of one another. A life of ingratitude and rebellion toward one's Creator, a life of loving oneself first, in itself creates hellish conditions.

Nor is it strange that those who choose to turn away from God find themselves under a ruler who turns out to be a tyrant. A ruler of such a place, such a kingdom, is like what he rules. Satan is a being of malice and that malice shapes the way he rules.

From God's point of view, Satan's authority is something like that of a jailer. A jailer would not have authority over anyone if there were no crimes. His authority comes into existence because of the crime of those he rules. In a similar way, where slavery functions legally as a way of dealing with insolvent debtors, slave masters would have no authority over anyone if they did not fall into debt they could not repay. Satan is a kind of penal slave master who acquires dominion over his subjects because of their debts, their debts due to sin. Since he himself induced them to contract those debts, they also can be seen as his captives, but they became captives by their own decision.

Like the company stores in mining towns during early capitalist exploitation, the control Satan gained was accomplished with a certain legality. He managed to persuade Adam, after all, to choose to contract the debt of sin. Human beings are held by a certain legal justice, no matter how great the malice with which their captor acted. God, then, has been faced with the captivity of his creatures to a ruler who would not give them up freely and so had to be defeated. Nonetheless, their captor also had a certain claim in justice that had to be dealt with properly. Simple force would not do.

## The Fight

***The Personal Struggle.*** It is for this war of liberation that Christ came. His sufferings and death issuing in resurrection were a battle, the turning point of the war for the soul of the human race. As Colossians 2:15 tells us, the cross was the place where Christ “disarmed the principalities and powers”. There he triumphed over them.

We do not often view the crucifixion as a victory. One current of popular devotion, in fact, makes the cross seem like a great misfortune that was simply reversed by the resurrection. Nonetheless, the New Testament contains many passages where the crucifixion is seen as a combat with Satan from which Christ emerges victorious.<sup>[1]</sup> In fact, when the sufferings and death of Christ are seen in that light, we can more easily see them precisely as redemption. On the cross, Christ was delivering human beings from an oppressive enslaving force, one from which they could not free themselves, and to deliver them, he needed to win a moral victory.

During the last day of his life, we find Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, in a situation very similar to the temptation. The Gospel of Matthew describes it this way:

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples,  
 Sit here, while I go yonder and pray.  
 And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled.  
 Then he said to them,  
 My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.  
 And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed,  
 My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.

And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter,  
So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.  
Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed,  
My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done.  
And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words.  
Then he came to the disciples and said to them,  
Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand. - Matthew 26:36-46

The fact that Christ is in a garden is probably typologically significant. He is the new Adam encountering Satan in a garden like paradise. But Gethsemane is a garden of grief in the middle of the fallen world rather than a garden of delight in the world as it was created.

Christ is going through what is often described as “the agony in the garden”. When we hear the word “agony” we primarily think of pain or suffering. That is an aspect of what Christ went through, but the word in origin means a struggle or a contest like a wrestling match. The “agony” in the garden refers to Christ’s combat, his “death struggle”.

Even though Satan is not explicitly mentioned, Jesus is there in combat with him. The three times Christ returns to prayer are probably connected to the three times he had to undergo temptation by Satan in the desert. If that is so, “the agony” is something of a repeat of the temptation. The scene in the garden may be itself an encounter with Satan. Or it may be a preparation for the real struggle with Satan on the cross when Jesus was given over to the power of darkness (Luke 22:53) – just as the temptation in the wilderness was a preparation for the struggle with Satan that was his public ministry. Perhaps it was both at the same time.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Satan has the initiative. He wants to turn back the initial incursion of the Son of God. He intends to do so primarily by working through the Jewish and Roman leaders.

In the wilderness Satan tempted Christ to use the power he had for his own worldly success. He tempted Christ to set up a kingdom over this world, an empire that would embrace “all the kingdoms of the world”. Satan no doubt made such an endeavor seem good. If Christ actually controlled the entire world, could he not see to it that the human race would live in a better way? The encounter with Satan, however, was a test as to whether Christ would turn aside from the path on which his Father had set him.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ faced a different type of temptation to turn aside. If events continued on their present course, he would go to his death the next day. He knew he would face crucifixion, the death reserved for insurrectionists, those claiming to be messiahs and seeking to establish a Jewish kingdom independent of the Romans.

Christ knew what crucifixion was like. The Romans crucified people on the roads entering cities so that the sight would deter others from committing similar crimes. Crucifixion was a cruel, degrading death, deliberately made to be a torture. Moreover, such a death would involve the humiliation of being an apparently failed messiah. It would be a seeming defeat at the hands of the very ones he had challenged – the worldly authorities and behind them the ruler of this world, Satan himself. It was no doubt such a death that was before Christ’s eyes in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Yet he was still free. Instead of staying at the garden where Judas and the temple police would find him, Christ could take the road that passed Gethsemane away from, rather than toward, Jerusalem. He could then escape across the Jordan to safety. The temptation he faced in the garden was the temptation not to die, not to lay down his life, and therefore not to obey his Father in the face of great suffering.

When Christ prayed to his Father, he was troubled by fear and sorrowful at what lay ahead. Yet he also knew why he would have to undergo such a death. He had come to serve, to give his life as a ransom for the many. Christ had come, as he had just told his disciples, to pour out his blood for many so that they could be part of the new covenant and receive forgiveness for their sins. He “must” suffer and die. His Father had given him a command to do so in order that those who believe in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Christ was free not to die – only too free. That freedom was probably itself the source of the testing. When we have no choice, there is not as much of a struggle to endure suffering. We usually swallow what we have to take with some measure of resignation. When we could get out of a difficult situation but believe we should undergo it, then we face a much more difficult test. Jesus faced such a test in Gethsemane.

The victory of Christ was expressed in the prayer, “Not my will, but yours be done.” In praying such a prayer, Christ rejected the course of action any human would have wanted to take, and instead accepted the full purpose of God. That prayer was probably a plea for help to go through what faced him. It was, however, a willing acceptance of God’s will and a desire to see other human beings served as a result of what he would do. In the Gospel of John, in a scene that corresponds to the agony in the garden, Christ expressed the same willingness to do the will of God, “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say, ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name” (John 12:27-28).

***Losing to Win.*** Christ then began what is sometimes called “his passion”. “Passion” can mean “suffering” and here refers to the suffering Christ knew he must undergo for the salvation of human beings from their sins. His passion was an ordeal involving a true humiliation, but one that he went through with a great deal of self-mastery and personal dignity. Christ knew what he was about because he had made a decision in Gethsemane. He died well, in a way fitting for an unblemished lamb.

The Gospel of John records the last words of Christ on the cross: “It is finished” (John 19:30). By these words he did not simply mean that his sufferings were over and now he would die. He also meant that he had completed the task for which he came. His words registered victory rather than defeat. Christ had succeeded in putting aside “my will”, his own human desire that recoiled from such an ordeal, and had instead embraced “your will”, his Father’s plan for the redemption of the human race. He had been obedient to death. The Son of God had therefore succeeded in dying in such a way that his sufferings and death could be a payment for the redemption of human beings.

In the death of Christ, Satan was defeated. As the Letter to the Hebrews states the point,

We see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels...so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one... He...partook of the same nature [as those he was to save], that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. Hebrews 2:9,  
14-15

Not only was Satan defeated but so were all those who share in his rule. Colossians says,

God made [you] alive... having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it [RSV: him].  
Colossians 2:13-15

Both passages speak about Christ's death as a defeat of Satan. The first says he "destroyed" Satan, although that translation is misleading because it seems to imply that Satan went out of existence after Christ's death. The word in this context rather indicates that Satan lost his ability to inflict death, spiritual, eternal death, on the "many sons" who belonged to Christ (Heb 2:10-13). Once Christ died, Satan did not lose all power over the human race, nor all power to inflict death. He did, however, lose his ability to hold in bondage those who belonged to Christ. That power was destroyed by what Christ did. Christ "tasted death", that is, underwent death for a short period of time, so that other human beings would not have to swallow the poison of death, that is, die eternally.

The Colossians passage provides an explanation for why that was. On the cross the debt due to sin was canceled and we were forgiven our trespasses. As a result, Satan's power due to our indebtedness to the punishment of sin was taken away. His power can no longer affect those who are "in Christ" (Colossians 2:10-12). The death of Christ on the cross was the greatest defeat Satan suffered, the reversal of the great victory he won when he induced Adam to fall.

When Christ fought and defeated Satan, clearly he did not defeat him by physical force. He was "crucified in weakness" (2 Corinthians 13:4), in what looked like a defeat from a human perspective. He was humiliated in the eyes of all, treated like a great criminal, apparently ending his life as a failed messiah. And yet, in fact, he was winning a great victory.

Christ's way of fighting was paradoxical. To fight, he refused to fight. He refused to defend himself, not so that he could be a pacifist but so that he could be a sacrificial Lamb set apart to be slain. He deliberately chose to "endure the shame" of defeat (Hebrews 12:2) in the confidence that his very defeat would be victory, that his very lowering would be a raising up.

In the eyes of a fallen world, such a way of fighting makes no sense. It only makes sense from a heavenly perspective, which allows for the Messiah to make his life an offering to overcome sin. As Augustine put it in his *Confessions* (10, 43), addressing God the Father: "For our sake he became in your sight both victor and victim — victor, indeed, because he was victim."

At the same time, Satan, who looked like he was achieving his greatest victory, was undergoing defeat. In the words of many Christian writers, he "overreached himself". He was like a commander who seems to be winning a battle and charges deep into the ranks of his enemy — only to find that he has fallen into a trap and is surrounded with no hope of escape.

At the very moment Satan seemed to be achieving his greatest triumph, he was being most completely defeated. Because the human race was under the sentence of death as a consequence of the fall, he could have put anyone else to death with justice. Instead, Satan put to death the sinless Son of God, the one who was truly innocent, and who therefore did not deserve to undergo the penal consequences of sin. Christ's death consequently could be an expiation for the sins of others. Satan went too far and so produced the one event which would deprive him of his hold over the whole human race.

Did Satan know what he was doing? How could he have allowed this to happen? The answer seems to be that he did not know what he was doing. As Paul put it, “None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8). Ignatius of Antioch, a man who lived in the time of the apostles, described Satan’s ignorance this way: “Now, Mary’s virginity and her giving birth escaped the notice of the prince of this world, as did the Lord’s death” (Ephesians, 19,1). Leo the Great (died A.D. 460) stated it this way, “And in order that he might set the human race free from the bonds of deadly transgression, He hid the power of His majesty from the raging devil, and opposed him with our frail and humble nature” (*Sermon LXII*, 3).

Satan seemed to understand enough to know that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God in the sense in which kings of Israel were sons of God. But he had defeated would-be messiahs and kings of Israel before. He did not seem to reckon with the fact that this King was God’s Son in a more than human way. Satan did not seem to understand the “secret and hidden wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 2:7), that is, God’s plan to restore the human race to a glorified life that only became obvious with the resurrection.

Satan was tricked – not tricked in a mean way, but outwitted by a plan conceived in divine wisdom. Perhaps even more accurately, he was outwitted by his own pride. Satan was so set on his own exaltation and dominion that he could not imagine the willingness of his divine adversary to lower himself to the complete humiliation of giving his life for the sake of his creatures. He had no way of reckoning on the humility of God.

***A Trial of Justice.*** The crucifixion was a contest of justice between God and Satan. Traditionally the Book of Job has been used to provide a perspective on the sufferings of Christ. It is now often overlooked in teaching on the crucifixion, but nonetheless it is still illuminating.

Many Christian teachers throughout the centuries have seen Job himself as a type of Christ. The Book of Job narrates a contest between God and Satan. God is holding court as the King and Judge of human affairs. Satan comes before God in the role of “adversary”, something like a prosecuting attorney. He enters into debate with God, because if he can establish his case as just or righteous, he can get his way. God is willing to argue, because he is only willing to reign in justice or righteousness and because he wants it to be seen clearly that justice is being done.

God points out Job, a blameless man who fears God and refuses to do evil. In God’s view, Job is the example of a man who proves that sin is not all-powerful and that righteousness can prevail. Satan’s reply to God is, “Does Job fear God for nothing?” He is making the claim, in other words, that Job does not serve God because he truly is a servant of God. Rather, Job serves God because he gets what he wants from doing so. He is merely a hireling. He was, so to speak, bribed by God to behave. Implied in Satan’s position is the claim that no human being serves God for the sake of serving God.

As we know, God allowed Satan to afflict Job, depriving him of every human good, and although Job complained, he remained steadfastly righteous. Job’s endurance was a reply to Satan, an imperfect one but a reply nonetheless. God’s full reply to Satan, however, did not come in the Book of Job. It came in Christ, the truly righteous servant of God. It came in the way Christ underwent “the afflictions of Job” in his sufferings and death. In his crucifixion, Christ was God’s response to Satan. His death showed God’s justice in a way the world and Satan could see (cf. Romans 3:25-26).

The crucifixion is God’s counter-statement to Satan’s most fundamental accusations against the human race. It is first of all a statement that the human race is capable of being what God asks it to be. Christ underwent the

sufferings of Job, not for personal reward but for the sake of the glory of his Father. He had nothing to gain personally. After all, he began with heavenly glory in the presence of God (John 17:5; Philippians 2:6).

Being rich, Christ impoverished himself for the sake of others and therefore for the sake of God who sent him to serve them (2 Corinthians 8:9). He went through sufferings great enough to make human life seem valueless, and he did so willingly to the end in order to accomplish his mission. He showed that human nature could keep the commandments of God. In so doing he victoriously refuted Satan's accusation.

Even more, the very path of the crucifixion and of the redemption is a counter-statement to Satan. In the way Christ died, he lowered or humbled himself. He voluntarily underwent the humiliation of defeat and degradation as a criminal. As a result he offered his Father an act of humility for the redemption of others. This was not only a fitting sacrifice in atonement but also a stunning counter-statement to the pride with which Satan fell, and which he taught to Adam and Eve to induce them to fall.

In the Gospel of John, Christ describes his "lifting up" as the judgment of Satan, "the ruler of this world" (John 16:11; 12:31). "Judgment" here means "condemnation". His statement probably does not mean that Satan was personally condemned at that point for his rebellion against God. Rather Christ is referring to the way in which Satan is deprived of his power. He is condemned the way a corrupt governor might be removed from office or the way a defeated king who had usurped his power might be deprived of his authority.

With the crucifixion of Christ, Satan lost his rule or power over those members of the human race who would choose to belong to Christ. But when he was deprived of that position, Satan was deprived in full justice. God pointed to his Son and said, "See my servant. He was obedient and faithful to death. You are without excuse, as are all who have chosen your path. You could have obeyed. Had you obeyed, you would not have lived in constant humiliation but rather in glory, as he will. You deserve to have no power over human beings, and so you will have none over those who come to my Son to be set free from you."

## The Humility of the Redeemer

The way to live is to die. The way to be victorious is to undergo defeat. The way to go up is to go down. This principle is paradoxical, but it describes the path Christ took. That same principle applies to our own lives. The way Christ died is not just the source of our redemption but also a pattern that should shape our redeemed lives in this fallen world.

Scripture states this truth in various ways. "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). "Have the same orientation [RSV: this mind] among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus who...humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:5, 8). "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:2). "For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). "Take up [your] cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

We are to imitate Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Yet if we do not understand what this means, imitating Christ could get us into a great deal of trouble. It does not mean imitating him in his power or authority, claiming to be king and messiah, relating to others as their lord. Denouncing people the way Christ denounced the Pharisees, for instance, may be appropriate under certain circumstances when we have an authorization from God similar to the one Christ

had. It is not, however, supposed to be something we do whenever we come across someone not behaving well simply because we want to follow Christ's example.

If we look at all the passages in which we are urged to imitate Christ, we find that they concern his sufferings and death.<sup>[2]</sup> We are called to imitate him in his lowliness or humility, not in his messiah-ship, or his divinity, or his exaltation. We are to imitate him in the way he chose to go down in order to go up.

Here again we could make a mistake, less dangerous than the previous one but distorting nonetheless. We could decide that imitating Christ in his sufferings was the key to handling all circumstances in life. We could "open not our mouths", never reproving wrong or explaining ourselves when falsely accused. We could become pacifists simply because Christ told his disciples in Gethsemane not to use the sword to defend themselves.

Such responses, based on words that were given in a particular situation, may be good responses in similar situations (such as those of persecution by lawful authority) on the basis of the imitation of Christ. We can see such an application in Peter's exhortation to slaves with masters who mistreat them (1 Peter 2:18-25). But Christ's approach to his passion is not a universal rule for handling every situation. This was demonstrated by his own previous conduct, when he himself "went after" the scribes and Pharisees and other ruling authorities (e.g., Matthew 23), rather than "opening not his mouth".

We are most especially called to imitate Christ's humility in the readiness to undergo sufferings for the kingdom of God. We are called to willingly undergo loss of reputation, loss of possessions, physical harm, and even death because of our faithfulness to God. The summons to take up our cross and follow Christ is the summons to follow a master who provokes opposition from the kingdom of darkness and a fallen world – but who steadfastly refuses to give up obeying his Father because of that opposition.

We are, however, also called to imitate Christ more broadly – in the way he loved God and neighbor. We are to have the servant-love Christ manifested in the way of the cross. He humbled himself to become a servant. As a servant, he was obedient to God and he gave his life to serve those his Father sent him to. He loved in humility.

Humility points us away from making our own good and our own glory our aim. To be sure, when we are humble, we do not lose our desire for happiness or excellence. In fact, God intends them for the human race. Christ came to bring us to glory (Hebrews 2:10). But the way to go up is to go down. God does not put our glorification into our own hands. Our fallenness means that we cannot seek our own glory and fully seek the good of others at the same time. We need to correct for the self-centered tendencies of our fallen nature. God's plan, therefore, is that we please him by loving others as Christ loved us, and leave our glorification to him. The way up is the way of reliance on God.

When our human fallenness has been completely overcome in the glorified life, loving others as ourselves may be easy, even effortless. In this life, however, there will always be resistance to overcome, both internal and external. In this life, there will always be personal cost. We will have to choose to suffer losses to live consistently for the welfare of others. In no other way can the fallen world be overcome in our own lives in this age. That is why the new covenant reformulation (the reformulation for disciples of Christ) of the second great commandment is "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). That reformulation does not change what we are asked to do. Rather, it describes the only path that will allow us to do what we are asked to do: going down to go up, suffering defeat to achieve victory, dying to live.

Humility would have been important for human beings even if they had not fallen. Adam and Eve would have had to

show humility towards God by obedient submission and by gratefully receiving his gifts and blessings as his creatures. They would have had to show humility towards one another by daily servant-love. That humility would have made it possible for human life to reflect the glory of God.

But for the new Adam, humility inevitably involved humiliation – personal suffering, defeat, and death. These are not in themselves God’s desire or purpose for the human race. Rather, they are the necessary way for anyone who fulfills God’s purpose and keeps his commandments to succeed at living a godly life in a fallen world, a world dominated by sin, Satan, and death.

The path of the cross understood as the path of love is a model of the purpose of human life, a model of the kind of love God wants human beings to live for all eternity. The path of the cross understood as the path of suffering is a model of the means to that end, a model of the way to love in this fallen world. Tragic as it may seem, in a fallen world the only way to truly love is to go through suffering.

The path of the cross is also a path of faith and hope in God. It is not exactly a human, earthly strategy. Humble, humiliated service and death is not the normal way great earthly victories come about. Only when we recognize that God and his action is the key to overcoming the fallen state of the human race can we follow Christ’s path of humility, and only when God acts is that path of humility redemptive and victorious. Therefore, that path can only be followed by having faith and hope in God because of what God did in Christ. As First Peter explains: “Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1:21).

Because of his divinity we tend not to think of Christ as someone who needed faith and hope. But his path of humiliation to exaltation could only be taken in faith and hope. I once had the experience of watching a neophyte learn hang gliding. We were on the top of a cliff and I overheard him being instructed. I heard the veteran say that the way to soar aloft was to jump off the cliff. For me that meant plunging to the rocks below. When I looked at the neophyte with his eyes gazing downward over the cliff, and his face turning whiter and whiter, I was sure that was what he thought the instructions amounted to as well.

As it turned out, whatever his instructor had told him worked. The young hang glider jumped off the cliff and began to soar. But I was convinced that no matter how sure I was that jumping off the cliff was the way to fly, I would have “sweated blood” if I were to try it.

Even worse would have been knowing that the way to soar was not only to jump off, but in fact to crash on the rocks and die in pain a few hours later with the assurance that I would then wake up, find myself free to soar wherever I wished whenever I wished, and experience an indescribable joy and gladness that I had done what I did. Even if I was sure of what I had to do, my human nature could not have accepted it peacefully.

Divine though he was, Christ’s human nature was “like ours in all things except sin”. He was able to take the way down, to suffer and die in great humiliation. But it was very costly. And it was a step he could not have taken without reliance upon his Father.

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[1]. For passages which speak about Christ’s death as a combat with or victory over Satan and his kingdom, see Appendix One.

[2]. For a list of passages which speak about Christ's death as a moral example to be imitated as well as passages which speak about our sharing in Christ's sufferings as a way of following him, see Appendix One.

> See [related articles](#) by [Steve Clark](#)

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[Steve Clark](#) is a founder and former president of the [Sword of the Spirit](#), a noted author of numerous books and articles, and a frequent speaker.

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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)



## Whose Side Are You On?

### *Those Who Witnessed the Passion*

by Carlos Mantica

#### **I. Introduction**

We often remark how much the world has changed, how different things now are if we compare them to those great old times that each one of us remembers with longing.

When we take a look into the world of Jesus, the world in which he lived seems to us so strange that we get the impression that all of that happened not just in a different age but in a different planet.

There is no doubt that things are different now in this world of computers, bombs and space rockets. But whenever I read the Gospel, what surprises me most is to see that everything in fact has changed... except for people. Everything is different now, but man continues to be the same. And in the gospels there are scenes that would seem to have been taken, not from something written two thousand years ago, but from yesterday's newspaper. These are scenes that look like a catalogue, a sampler, a portrait of men whom we come across everyday – their ideas, their values, their attitudes. And in that catalogue, in that portrait, we can find ourselves too. I'm there.

I'm referring, for instance, to the scenes of the Lord's Passion and Crucifixion. When we take a look at the actors that surround the Passion and Death of our Lord, we encounter a variety of characters and attitudes that can help us to see ourselves.

Who am I in that portrait? Where do I find myself among the multitude? Whose side have I taken in that story? And I say, "which side did I take" because, even though Christ died one single time and now lives and reigns for ever, the story of our salvation continues to be written today, and is determined precisely by the position we take concerning Jesus of Nazareth. At the end of the story there will only be two places – those at his right and those at his left.

I invite all of you, then, to peer for a while into those passages, trying to find ourselves in them. What role am I playing in the drama? Which of all those characters is me?

My plan is to meet each of those characters along the way of the cross, and see what they tell me. You can try to do the same.

## II. The High Priest

The first character we meet is the High Priest. It is Thursday, April 4. The night has come, and the full moon announces the imminent celebration of the Passover. That night Jesus was arrested at Gethsemane and taken to the house of Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was the High Priest that year (John 18:12-24). John, who was following Jesus at a distance, managed to enter the house because he was acquainted with Caiaphas, and he is the one who best narrates what took place there that night. Peter stays outside, but then John speaks to the maid who kept the door, who lets him in to stay in the courtyard with the servants and guards. Peter was brave, for shortly before he had cut Malchus' ear at Gethsemane, and he now enters the place where the wounded man is sure to be staying.

The suffering of Jesus now begins. They start interrogating and torturing him. Caiaphas questions Jesus concerning his disciples and his teaching. Concerning those who followed him, Jesus replies thus:

*"I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together; I have said nothing secretly. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them; they know what I said."*

It is striking that these are almost the same words he had said in Gethsemane to those who came to arrest him:

*Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. (Matthew 26:55)*

This amounts to saying, I have always walked in the light; you walk in darkness. I have nothing to hide, nor do I act underground.

*When he had said this, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?"*

It's always the same: the flatterer takes advantage of the defenseless in order to please the boss. And the Lord is stricken because he answers Caiaphas, and then he is tortured because he does not answer Pilate. If the

prisoner does not respond... Speak out, you...! And then comes the slap and the kicking. But if he does respond, then... That's not a way to answer the boss! And then the slap and the kicking come just the same.

Who is this Caiaphas who is questioning the Lord? He is one of those who first condemns and gives the sentence, and then starts to find out. John points this out (18:14):

*It was Caiaphas who had given counsel to the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.*

*So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death. (John 11:53)*

The law said, "Thou shalt not kill." The scribes say, "Someone has to die."

But the most moving thing is that there are other persons who also seem to agree with Caiaphas: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is expedient that Jesus should die so that his people can be saved.

There is only one difference – Christ is willing to die for us and instead of us, so that we can live forever. The others are willing to kill... for the good of the people. And that's not the same thing.

And it continues not being the same thing. There are some who are willing to die, but only if they can take with them as many people as possible. But even more numerous are the astute ones who do not hesitate to send others to their death... for the sake of the people.

All wars, invasions, political assassinations, acts of terrorism, kidnappings, ransacking, election frauds, dictatorships and armies have always been justified for the sake of the people. The people should be very happy, that there are so many persons thinking about their good.

But I don't want to continue pointing OTHERS with my finger, the "bad guys" on this side or on the other side. Those who want to be Jesus' disciples and to follow him, he has called to bear his cross too and to offer their lives for the sake of others. The Lord says no one has greater love than he who gives his life for others. And he also says that unless the seed fall on the ground and die, it will be fruitless. Being Christians involves dying to ourselves so Christ can live in us.

But we always want *the others* to be the ones who die. It is *she* that's got to change. It is *he* who has to yield. It is *the rich* who has to be screwed. It is *the poor* who has to pay. It is *my dad* who has to understand me. It is *my son* who has to open his mind. It is *the government* that has to do this. It is *the people* who have to protest. It is *she* that has to ask my forgiveness. It is so-and-so... it is always *the other* who has to die so I can be well. And the torture continues.

Brothers and sisters, there is one who has already died once for all, for the salvation of his people. And it is he who asks us to die to ourselves and take up our cross and follow him, placing the others ahead of us.

### **III. The Sanhedrin**

Jesus' suffering goes on. He is now taken to the house of Caiaphas himself, where the elders and scribes are waiting. There Caiaphas questions him again, and condemns him as a blasphemer:

*“He has uttered blasphemy. Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your judgment?” They answered, “He deserves death.” Then they spat in his face, and struck him; and some slapped him, saying, “Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?” (Matthew 26:65-67)*

Please mark well – those who strike him and spit on him are not the guards, but the members of the Supreme Court. These are the ones who first slander him through false, paid witnesses, and then personally strike him and mock him. It is a habit of many powerful ones, to first kick and soil what they are about to eat, just like pigs do.

In their concern for condemning Jesus they have broken so many laws, that they now need to legalize their illegality. They have acted out of time and out of place – during the night, and in a private home. They have broken all the trial laws of Israel. That is why, when the sun rises, they take him to the Sanhedrin:

*When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; and they led him away to their council... And they all said, “Are you the Son of God, then?” And he said to them, “You say that I am.” And they said, “What further testimony to we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips.” (Luke 22:66, 70-71)*

Everything is now legalized. The secret midnight meeting has now been ratified by the judiciary.

#### **IV. Pilate**

They now take him to Pilate, the representative of the invading empire. His approval and help are necessary. Let this other guy bear the burden of this death. There are three lapidary sentences and an action that made Pilate immortal:

1. *What is truth?* With this question, Pilate was trying to play the philosopher. But he cannot recognize truth when it is standing before him. He is blind to the truth, as so many of us are.
2. *I find no crime in him.* And yet,
3. *I will therefore chastise him and release him.*
4. Pilate washes his hands and delivers Jesus over to them, for them to crucify him.

The Gospel is clear that Pilate condemns someone he judges to be innocent, through fear of losing his position, his peace and his lifestyle. The Jews said to him,

*“He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.” (Luke 23:5)*

Pilate cannot allow troublemakers or agitators in Jerusalem, and these people say that Jesus is such. Pilate is a coward. The first thing he tries to do is pass the buck to someone else – Herod, the governor of Galilee. So he hands over the package to him. Later he has him scourged and tortured in order to awake in others a compassion he does not have.

But, in addition to being a coward, he is intelligent, and that makes him twice a coward. He knows that Jesus is not a dangerous revolutionary, and so he thinks about placing the Jews in evidence. He forces them to choose between Jesus and Barabbas, of whom scripture says clearly that he was a rebel. That is, he had already been

condemned for the crime of sedition, of rebelling against the Roman government.

Whom do you want released – John Paul II, or Che Guevara? And they answered, “We want Barabbas” – the insurrectionist.

Brothers and sisters, there are people who find no use for intelligence or compassion. These people are seekers of personal comfort, they are cowards. They are willing to do anything in order to keep their jobs, their influence, or to please someone else. These are the people who sell their conscience, who let themselves be bribed. They are the faint-hearted, the ones who always try to pass responsibility on to others, the ones who wash their own hands.

Or perhaps we would identify more with the crowd. “Crucify him!” They want no peaceful leaders.

It is funny – the name “Bar-Abbas” means “Son of the father” (others translate, “son of the teacher”). They prefer the “son of the father” who is a revolutionary, an insurrectionist, willing to kill for their sake, than the Son of God who is peaceful and willing to die for their sake. Release Barabbas!

## V. Herod

Only Luke records the visit to Herod. Herod seems to be in the middle of a party and wants to be amazed or amused. He is willing to take sides with Jesus under the condition that Jesus will perform a little miracle for him.

*[Herod] was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. (Luke 23:7)*

He wanted to see him, for the same reason many a TV show where some evangelist performs miracles. Only the spectacular aspect of Christianity is of interest to them. I am not sick and I have no interest in what they are going to say; but if people get healed there, I have to go and see. If the Pope comes, I won't miss him. If the Lord acts powerfully in this retreat or gathering and performs a miracle, I will be excited and will clap my hands, but then I will go home and go on with my life as if nothing ever happened.

If they don't get what they expected they get angry and mock at the whole thing, which is what Herod did. “And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then, arraying him in gorgeous apparel, he sent him back to Pilate” (Luke 23:11).

## VI. Those Who Were Absent

I know that we respond with disgust at the characters we have found up to now. None of us is one of them. It is always THE OTHERS who look like them.

And yet there is a group which, in my opinion, is still more contemptible and notorious. This is the group of those who were absent, the great absent ones.

1. Those who once followed him and acclaimed him, but are not there today. Some of them out of cowardice, like his closest acquaintances. Others, like the ones he will meet later on in the way to Emaus, due to disappointment. Christ was not what I expected. He did not do what I wanted him to do.

- He did not preach what I liked.
2. Those who one day proclaimed him as king because he fed them. First three thousand, then five thousand. They are not there any more.
  3. The people of the very city of Jerusalem where he will be crucified today, who just the Sunday before had received him with palms – *Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!* – and who today join the mob to cry out *Crucify him*, because the tide has changed and it is not wise to take sides with the loser. No doubt many are only following the slogans of the portable carry-on mob that had been operating since seven thirty a.m. in the courtyard of Fortress Antonia, when Jesus was taken there, and which we shall shortly see in action once again by the cross.
  4. The innumerable ones who had been healed by Jesus, who are today playing the blind, the deaf, the mute, the lame, out of convenience, and who look at Jesus as at a leper.
  5. Peter, who said, “even if all of them forsake you, I will not,” did not trust his own courage too much, and is not there. James, who together with John had said he could drink the cup. Thomas, who had said when they were approaching Jerusalem, “Let us all go to die with him.” Nicodemus, who always acted in the dark.

I know that Jesus felt in his heart a deeper pain due to all these absences, than due to the scourge strikes of the torturers.

## VII. The Carry-on Mob

Let’s now try to see how the portable carry-on mob is moved from place to place and operates as a means to shape “public opinion”, the voice of the people.

Behind it are those who throw the stone but hide their hand, those who slander without showing their faces. We find these by the cross in Matthew 27:41-42: “So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him [*grumbling among themselves and passing on the slogan*], saying, ‘He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.’”

The soldiers are the first to repeat the slogan. This is recorded in Luke 23:36: “The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him vinegar, and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’”

That looks like mere coincidence. But the carry-on mob goes on repeating the slogan, until finally, as is recorded by Matthew 27:39-41, “those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the son of God, come down from the cross.’” (Where did I hear that before?).

You can see that Matthew notes that it was “those who passed by”, because Christ was crucified by the road, close to the gates of Jerusalem, on a holiday when the city was packed with people because of the Passover. It is the ones who passed by, and yet they already know something that is supposed to be known only by those who had been present at the house of Caiaphas and at the Sanhedrin: that he had been falsely accused of having said that he could destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. And they repeat the slogan that the organizers of the rally were saying just among themselves, “Save yourself and come down from the cross.”

What a sad role the mob plays! What a sad role partisan mobs play urged by need and servilism! And what a sad role we play when we repeat so readily what others want us to say, without first pondering it in our hearts! Many more people have been crucified and continue to be crucified by our tongues, by “public opinion”.

## VIII. Those Who Take Advantage of the Situation

Next to them, you can bet there's going to be the group of those who take advantage of the situation. By the cross, it is the soldiers who take advantage of their own position and authority in order to gamble over Jesus' tunic and distribute the cloak among them.

The cloak was distributed by cutting it, that is, dividing it into pieces, as some authorities do with things that are not theirs and that are not very valuable. But the tunic was a fine item. It was the seamless, one-piece tunic, which had no doubt been woven by Mary. It was his mother's gift. They don't divide something as valuable as that, but gamble over it to see who's lucky enough to get it.

## IX. The Fearful Ones

And in front of them is the largest group of all, that of the fearful ones. "There were many women looking from afar," says Luke 27:55.

Women... and surely men too, but they all preferred to look at the show from a prudent distance.

I don't want to offend anyone, for it was a courageous man who told us that *Everyone is the master of his own fear*. It's just that in the whole history of the human race, no greater injustice, or with greater hatred, has ever been committed than the one that was committed that afternoon against the only just man that has ever existed.

I don't think I'm more courageous than Peter, but, just like Peter, my acts of cowardice hurt me. And it is less cowardly to stay at a distance, powerless, than abusing, striking or mocking the defenseless who, nailed to a cross that should have been ours, asks the Father to forgive them because they know not what they are doing. And it was all done in order to please the powerful, to go with the trend, to obey the slogans, to echo the public opinion.

## X. The Bad Thief

There is another group, quite present among our people, which is represented at the crucifixion scene by the bad thief.

Their suffering only increases their fury, which they then unload over the innocent, without seeing or acknowledging their own faults.

This is possibly the most Nicaraguan-like of all groups. And no one asks forgiveness for them, who are instead praised and glorified.

Like the bad thief, they are people who suffer a lot. I'm referring to all those people whom hunger and suffering, abandonment, ignorance, alcohol, drugs and promiscuity have led to burglary, to squatting in somebody else's land, to ransacking, to murder, to servile attitudes, to deceit, to violence. They then dump their fury without acknowledging any of their sins, and without caring whether their victim is an innocent.

In Nicaragua they feel fully entitled to commit any kind of crime, for the very fact of being poor. Many, like the bad thief, are willing to repeat the slogan: "If you are really the Christ, come down from the cross!" (Luke 23:39). 'If you really are the representative of Christ on earth, pray for peace!', as the Sandinistas yelled at the

square during the first visit of John Paul II to Nicaragua.

Maybe if you just follow the current of those who are in power and if you act against the innocent, you will be taken down from your own cross.

## **XI. The Show - Lovers**

And here reappears the old group of those who never lose hope of watching a good show.

“Some of the by-standers said, ‘This man is calling Elijah.’” And when the soldier came up to give him vinegar to drink from a sponge, they said, “Let him alone, let us see if Elijah comes to save him!” . (‘Don’t ruin my show with a gesture of mercy!’)

### *Those Who Knew How to Respond*

We have seen a series of characters who witnessed the passion, and I’m now in danger of neglecting other characters in whom we also can find a reflection of ourselves, or from whom we may have something to learn. I’m referring to people who did know how to respond when they met Jesus that day.

## **XII. Veronica**

I’m thinking, for instance, of that woman whom we have happened to call Veronica, the one who wiped the face of Jesus.

There is no act of heroism in her. She simply came out to meet Jesus and wiped his face that was full of sweat, blood and spit. What we admire in her is her heart. No doubt she did many other things like that, before and after that beautiful gesture. She embodies all those silent women who, in an anonymous way, help the needy and the suffering.

No one knows who this woman is. She has been mistakenly called Veronica, due to the famous Canvas of Veronica where the face of Jesus remained printed. It is quite possible that this canvas never existed as such, but is rather the same Shroud of Turin, with which the body of Christ was wrapped to place him in the tomb, and where the image of his whole body remained printed. For centuries it was folded, showing only the face. It was called the *Veron-Icon*, a mixture of a Latin and a Greek word which means “the true image”, and subsequently someone must have given the name Veronica to the woman.

No one knows, then, who this woman actually was. We only know what she had in her heart. Just the same, we usually do not know the name behind a lot of good actions that occur around us.

## **XIII. Simon of Cyrene**

The next character we find is one who has been forced to be there. This is Simon of Cyrene. He was coming from his workplace, peered in to look at the crowd, and was forcefully recruited to bear Jesus’ cross up to Calvary. You may wonder what merit there is in doing this by force.

And in fact, there is no merit in that. Simon’s merit was that in that human refuse, totally devoid of strength to bear his own cross, he was able to recognize the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, and then follow him

beyond the cross. We know it was so because Mark tells us that Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus, two members of the Christian community in Jerusalem. This means that Simon entered the community, and was wise enough to proclaim the good news to his children, who also became disciples of Jesus.

#### **XIV. The Centurion**

Once we get to the foot of the cross we find a soldier. He is an officer of the invading Empire, a Roman centurion. He is alien to the beliefs of the Jewish people, or, in other words, an ignorant in religious matters. And yet it is this centurion, together with Thomas the unbeliever, the first one to recognize Christ as the Son of God.

“Truly this man was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).

#### **XV. The Magdalene**

By the cross there is a prostitute. She is with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and she will be the first one to whom Jesus appears after the resurrection. In this sense, she will also be the first apostle in announcing the Good News even to Peter himself – the news that Christ is alive and has risen.

What lesson can we learn from Mary of Magdala, the neighborhood prostitute, possibly the same woman from whom Jesus cast out seven demons? In my opinion, it is the most important lesson for many of us here: that the multitude of her sins do not separate her from her Lord. Much was forgiven her because she loved much, and she trusts in her Lord’s love and forgiveness. Because, no matter how great your sins might have been, greater is the love and the forgiveness of him who gave up his life for you.

She does not fear the murmuring of the bigots who criticized Jesus because he was in her company. She does not fear the good women who would undoubtedly gaze at her with suspicion or speak softly behind her back. She does not fear her former colleagues, who would no doubt say now to her, as has happened to many of us: ‘Look at that pious woman! She has no shame! Who does she think she’s deceiving?’

She fears nothing, because there is nothing that can now separate her from the love of Jesus.

#### **XVI. The Good Thief**

Facing her, and next to Jesus, another man is hanging who is very much like her. This is Dimas, whom we call the good thief. He was a thief, and probably a good one. I don’t think he had been crucified just because of a slip of the hands committed out of necessity. He was no angel.

And yet he is the only man to whom Jesus guaranteed heaven, right here on earth: “I assure you, today you shall be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). He is the only saint canonized by Jesus himself.

The reason is that, like Mary Magdalene, he recognizes he is a sinner, and has faith in Jesus Christ. He trusts in the Lord’s mercy and places himself in his hands. “Lord, remember me when you come to your Kingdom.” And he defends Jesus Christ: “...he rebuked his companion, saying, ‘Have you no fear of God, you who are under the same punishment? We are suffering with reason, because we are paying the just punishment of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong’” (Luke 23:41).

And then he committed the greatest theft in all history, for that afternoon he stole Paradise itself.

## **XVII. The Apostle John**

Next to Mary the Magdalene there is a young lad. He is the youngest of the apostles, to whom the Lord will then grant reaching such an old age, that the word was passed on that he would never die. This is the apostle John, the mystic and poet in the group.

Everything in him speaks to us about his youth. In Gethsemane the guards want to arrest him, grabbing him from his clothes, and then, just as we used to do in our games as children, he puts off his clothes and runs naked, leaving the guard with the clothes in his hands. But this has been more of a strategic withdrawal than a flight. Together with Peter, he follows the Lord from a distance, and with Peter he enters the house of Annas. He is the one who best narrates all the events of that night.

It is he who at some point notifies Mary about all that is taking place, and accompanies her along the Via Dolorosa and up to the foot of the cross. He will never separate from her any more. When he hears from Mary the Magdalene the news of the resurrection, he is the first to arrive at the tomb because he outran Peter.

John stays next to his Master all the time. Even though there is nothing he can do, he never denies him or forsakes him.

## **XVIII. Mary**

And finally, the great silent woman. She is always present at the turning points of her son's life, but always in the background, silent and humble. It is the handmaid of the Lord, now become our mother. She never breaks down with sorrow.

I have said some time that her husband, the Holy Spirit, was undoubtedly in her and with her at all times. 'Full of grace, the Lord is with you!' Otherwise, it would be impossible to understand such steadfastness, such strength, such elegance and majesty in a woman, a widow who would hardly be fifty years old, and who is now losing her only child in a dreadful death.

If a tree is known by its fruit, she must have been, and still is, an extraordinary woman, if she conceived and brought up such a child. Jesus no doubt looked like his mother. His Father had no physical appearance, so he could only resemble her. He's just like Mary, and Mary is just like him. That is why the two of them are now actually on the scaffold. In his case, the nails are going through his hands and feet. In her case, a sword of sorrow is going through her heart, as had been prophesied to her. He is our Redeemer, she is our Co-Redeemer. Blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus!

## **XIX. Conclusion**

Brothers and sisters, we have walked the way of the cross and met those who witnessed the passion. I could now ask you, is there any one among them whom you could consider a mirror of yourself? Perhaps not in his or her character, but in attitudes, in values, in ideas, in his or her position towards Jesus Christ. Where do you place yourself among those who witnessed the Passion? What group do you belong to?

And yet, what I would now like to tell you is that **it doesn't matter**. It doesn't matter what group you have

belonged to up to now. Don't become bitter by looking back. Jesus did not suffer for you to suffer too. Jesus did not die for you to continue in a state of death. Death is just the step before resurrection. Jesus is alive, and what he wants is for you to have life, and life in abundance!

Yes, even if you have been a sinner like Mary the Magdalene. Even if you have come here by force or just by chance, like Simon of Cyrene. Even if you have been condemned by men for serious crimes, like Dimas [the good thief]. Even if you are completely ignorant in religious matters and do not understand the enormous wonder that is opening before you because you came across Jesus... even if you are at the service of the enemies of Christ, like the centurion... you can respond today to the cross, to the saving blood of Jesus Christ, and take part in his resurrection and in his glory!

*Whoever confesses me before men --says the Lord--, I shall confess him before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I will deny him before my Father... (Luke 12:8)*

I would like to end with a parable that the Lord wrote for you:

*Then Jesus told them this parable: "Who among you, if he has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, does not leave the ninety nine in the field and goes to look for the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he is so happy that he puts it over his shoulders and, upon arriving to his house, gathers his neighbors and says, 'Congratulate me, because I have found the sheep I had lost.' I assure you that, in the same way, there is more joy for one sinner who repents, than for ninety nine righteous ones who have no need for conversion.*

Brother or sister, you can be that joy of the Lord, who does not want to drag you or push you or accuse you, but to carry you on his shoulders and celebrate having found you.

> See other Living Bulwark [articles](#) by [Carlos Mantica](#)

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This article is adapted from the book, *From Egghead to Birdhood (hatch or rot as a Christian)*, (c) copyright 2001 Carlos Mantica.

Carlos Mantica is a founder of The City of God community (La Ciudad de Dios) in Managua, Nicaragua, and a founding leader of the [Sword of the Spirit](#). He served as president of the Sword of the Spirit between 1991 and 1995.

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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)



## Ecce Homo! Behold the Man!

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

*Ecce homo!* – Behold the man! In Him the world was reconciled with God. It is not by its overthrowing but by its reconciliation that the world is subdued. It is not by ideals and programs or by conscience, duty, responsibility and virtue that reality can be confronted and overcome, but simply and solely by the perfect love of God.

Here again it is not by a general idea of love that this is achieved, but by the really *lived* love of God in Jesus Christ. This love of God does not withdraw from reality into noble souls secluded from the world. It experiences and suffers the reality of the world in all its hardness. The world exhausts its fury against the body of Christ. But, tormented, He forgives the world its sin. That is how the reconciliation is accomplished. *Ecce homo!*

The figure of the Reconciler, of the God-Man Jesus Christ, comes between God and the world and fills the center of all history. In this figure the secret of the world is laid bare, and in this figure there is revealed the secret of God. No abyss of evil can remain hidden from Him through whom the world is reconciled with God. But the abyss of the love of God encompasses even the most abysmal godlessness of the world. In a manner which passes all comprehension God reverses the judgement of justice and piety, declares Himself guilty towards the world, and thereby wipes out the world's guilt.

God Himself sets out on the path of humiliation and atonement, and thereby absolves the world. God is willing to be guilty of our guilt. He takes upon Himself the punishment and the suffering which this guilt has brought on us. God Himself answers for godlessness, love for hatred, the saint for the sinner. Now there is no more godlessness, no more hatred, no more sin which God has not taken upon Himself, suffered for an expiated. Now there is no more reality, no more world, but it is reconciled with God and at peace. God did this in His dear Son Jesus Christ. *Ecce homo!*

## **The Despiser of Men**

*Ecce homo!* – Behold the God who has become man, the unfathomable mystery of the love of God for the world. God loves man [human beings]. God loves the world. It is not an ideal man that He loves, but man as he is; not an ideal world, but the real world. What we find abominable in man's opposition to God, what we shrink back from with pain and hostility, the real man, the real world, this is for God the ground for unfathomable love, and it is with this that He unites Himself utterly.

God becomes man, real man. While we are trying to grow out beyond our manhood, to leave the man behind us, God becomes man and we have to recognize that God wishes us men, too, to be real men. While we are distinguishing the pious from the ungodly, the good from the wicked, the noble from the mean, God makes no distinction at all in His love for the real man. He does not permit us to classify men and the world according to our own standards and to set ourselves up as judges over them. He leads us *ad absurdum* by Himself becoming a real man and a companion of sinners and thereby compelling us to become the judges of God. God sides with the real man and with the real world against all their accusers. Together with [human beings] and with the world He comes before the judges, so that the judges are now made the accused.

But it is not enough to say that God comes to men's help. This assertion rests upon an infinitely more profound one, and one whose significance is still more impenetrable. This is the assertion that in the conception and birth of Jesus Christ God took on manhood in the flesh. God secures His love against any suggestion that it is not genuine or that it is doubtful or uncertain, for He Himself enters into the life of man as man and takes upon Himself and carries in the flesh the nature, the character, and the guilt and suffering of man...

The news that God has become man strikes at the very heart of an age in which both the good and the wicked regard either scorn for man or the idolization of man as the highest attainable wisdom. The weaknesses of human nature are displayed more clearly in a time of storm than in the smooth course of more peaceful periods. In the face of totally unexpected threats and opportunities it is fear, desire, irresolution and brutality which reveal themselves as the motives for the actions of the overwhelming majority.

At such a time as this it is easy for the tyrannical despiser of men to exploit the baseness of the human heart, nurturing it and calling it by other names. Fear he calls responsibility. Desire he calls keenness. Irresolution becomes solidarity. Brutality becomes masterfulness. Human weaknesses are played upon with unchaste seductiveness, so that meanness and baseness are reproduced and multiplied ever anew. The vilest contempt for mankind goes about its sinister business with the holiest of protestations of devotion to the human cause.

And, as the base man grows baser, he becomes an ever more willing and adaptable tool in the hand of the tyrant. The small band of the upright are reviled. Their bravery is called insubordination; their self-control is called pharisaism; their independence arbitrariness and their masterfulness arrogance. For the tyrannical despiser of men popularity is the token of the highest love of mankind...

It is only through God's being made man that it is possible to know the real man and not to despise him. The

real man can live before God, and we can allow the real man to live before God side by side with ourselves without either despising or deifying him. That is not to say that this is really a value on its own account. It is simply and solely because God has loved the real man and has taken him to Himself. The ground for God's love towards man does not lie in man but solely in God Himself. And again, the reason why we can live as real men and can love the real man at our side is to be found solely in the incarnation of God, in the unfathomable love of God for man.

## **The Successful Man**

*Ecce homo!* – Behold the man sentenced by God, the figure of grief and pain. That is how the Reconciler of the world appears. The guilt of mankind has fallen upon Him. It casts Him into shame and death before God's judgement seat. This is the great price which God pays for reconciliation with the world. Only by God's executing judgement upon Himself can there be peace between Him and the world and between man and man. But the secret of this judgement, of this passion and death, is the love of God for the world and for man.

What befell Christ befalls every man in Him. It is only as one who is sentenced by God that man can live before God. Only the crucified man is at peace with God. It is in the figure of the Crucified that man recognizes and discovers himself. To be taken up by God, to be executed on the cross and reconciled, that is the reality of manhood.

In a world where success is the measure and justification of all things the figure of Him who was sentenced and crucified remains a stranger and is at best the object of pity. The world will allow itself to be subdued only by success. It is not ideas or opinions which decide, but deeds. Success alone justifies wrongs done. Success heals the wounds of guilt. There is no sense in reproaching the successful man for his unvirtuous behavior, for this would be to remain in the past while the successful man strides forward from one deed to the next, conquering the future and securing the irrevocability of what has been done.

The successful man presents us with accomplished facts which can never again be reversed. What he destroys cannot be restored. What he constructs will acquire at least a prescriptive right in the next generation. No indictment can make good the guilt which the successful man has left behind him. The indictment falls silent with the passage of time, but the success remains and determines the course of history. The judges of history play a sad role in comparison with its protagonists. History rides rough-shod over their heads. With a frankness and off-handedness which no other earthly power could permit itself, history appeals in its own cause to the dictum that the end justifies the means.

So far we have been talking about facts and not about valuations. There are three possible attitudes which men and periods may adopt with regard to these facts.

When a successful figure becomes especially prominent and conspicuous, the majority give way to the idolization of success. They become blind to right and wrong, truth and untruth, fair play and foul play. They have eyes only for the deed, for the successful result. The moral and intellectual critical faculty is blunted. It is dazzled by the brilliance of the successful man and by the longing in some way to share in his success. It is not even seen that success is healing the wounds of guilt, for the guilt itself is no longer recognized. Success is simply identified with good. This attitude is genuine and pardonable only in a state of intoxication. When sobriety returns it can be achieved only at the price of a deep inner untruthfulness and conscious self-deception. This brings with it an inward rotteness from which there is scarcely a possibility of recovery...

The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard. Such thought is a denial of eternal justice. Neither the triumph of the successful nor the bitter hatred which the successful arouse in the hearts of the unsuccessful can ultimately overcome the world...

It is out of pure love that God is willing to let man stand before Him, and that is why He sentences man. It is a sentence of mercy that God pronounces on mankind in Christ. In the cross of Christ God confronts the successful man with the sanctification of pain, sorrow, humility, failure, poverty, loneliness and despair. That does not mean that all this has a value in itself, but it receives its sanctification from the love of God, the love which takes all this upon itself as its just reward. God's acceptance of the cross is His judgement upon the successful man. But the unsuccessful man must recognize that what enables him to stand before God is not his lack of success as such, not his position as a pariah, but solely the willing acceptance of the sentence passed on him by the divine love. It was precisely the cross of Christ, the failure of Christ in the world, which led to His success in history, but this is a mystery of the divine cosmic order and cannot be regarded as a general rule even though it is repeated from time to time in the sufferings of His Church.

Only in the cross of Christ, that is, as those upon whom sentence has been executed, do men achieve their true form.

### **The Idolization of Death**

*Ecce homo!* – Behold the man who has been taken to Himself by God, sentenced and executed and awakened by God to a new life. Behold the Risen One. The "yes" which God addresses to man has achieved its purpose through and beyond judgement and death. God's love for man has proved stronger than death. By God's miracle there has been created a new man, a new life, a new creature. "Life has secured the victory. It has overcome death." God's love has become the death of death and the life of man. Humanity has been made new in Jesus Christ, who became man, was crucified and rose again. What befell Christ befell all men, for Christ was man. The new man has been created.

The miracle of Christ's resurrection makes nonsense of that idolization of death which is prevalent among us today. Where death is the last thing, fear of death is combined with defiance. Where death is the last thing, earthly life is all or nothing. Boastful reliance on earthly eternities goes side by side with a frivolous playing with life. A convulsive acceptance and seizing hold of life stands cheek by jowl with indifference and contempt for life.

There is no clearer indication of the idolization of death than when a period claims to be building for eternity and yet life has no value in this period, or when big words are spoken of a new man, of a new world and of a new society which is to be ushered in, and yet all that is new is the destruction of life as we have it. The drastic acceptance or rejection of earthly life reveals that only death has any value here. To clutch at everything or to cast away everything is the reaction of one who believes fanatically in death.

But wherever it is recognized that the power of death has been broken, wherever the world of death is illumined by the miracle of the resurrection and of the new life, there no eternities are demanded of life but one takes of life what it offers, not all or nothing but good and evil, the important and the unimportant, joy and sorrow; one neither clings convulsively to life nor casts it frivolously away. One is content with the allotted span and one does not invest earthly things with the title of eternity; one allows to death the limited rights which it still possess. It is from beyond death that one expects the coming of the new man and of the new world, from the power by which death has been vanquished.

The risen Christ bears the new humanity within Himself, the final glorious "yes" which God addresses to the new man. It is true that mankind is still living the old life, but it is already beyond the old. It still lives in a world of death, but it is already beyond death. It still lives in a world of sin, but it is already beyond sin. The night is not yet over, but already the dawn is breaking.

The man whom God has taken to Himself, sentenced and awakened to a new life, this is Jesus Christ. In Him it is all mankind. It is ourselves. Only the form of Jesus Christ confronts the world and defeats it. And it is from this form alone that there comes the formation of a new world, a world which is reconciled with God.

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This excerpt was originally published in German as *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, edited by Eberhard Bethge, et al., by Chr. Kaiser Verlag / Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh, in 1998; Band 6, *Illegale Theologenausbildung: Sammelvikariate 1937–1940*, edited by Dirk Schulz. First English-language edition of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6*, published by Fortress Press in 2009, translated from the German edition edited by Dirk Schulz ; English edition edited by Victoria J. Barnett; translated by Victoria J. Barnett ... [et al.]; supplementary material translated by Douglas W. Stott.

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For another English translation of this work, see *Meditations on the Cross* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pages 47-59, edited by Manfred Weber and translated by Douglas W. Stott, copyright © 1996 Kaiser/Gutersloher Verlagshaus, in Gütersloh. English translation Westminster John Knox Press 1998.

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German Lutheran pastor and a founding member of the Confessing Church. He was the first of the German theologians to speak out clearly against the persecution of the Jews and the evils of the Nazi ideology. In spring of 1935 Dietrich Bonhoeffer was called by the Confessing Church in Germany to take charge of an "illegal," underground seminary at Finkenwalde, Germany (now Poland). He served as pastor, administrator, and teacher there until the seminary was closed down by Hitler's Gestapo in September, 1937.

In the seminary at Finkenwalde Bonhoeffer taught the importance of shared life together as disciples of Christ. He was convinced that the renewal of the church would depend upon recovering the biblical understanding of the communal practices of Christian obedience and shared life. This is where true formation of discipleship could best flourish and mature.

Bonhoeffer's teaching led to the formation of a community house for the seminarians to help them enter into and learn the practical disciplines of the Christian faith in community. In 1937 Bonhoeffer completed two books, *Life Together* and *The Cost of Discipleship*. They were first published in German in 1939. Both books encompass Bonhoeffer's theological understanding of what it means to live as a Christian community in the Body of Christ.

He was arrested and imprisoned by the Gestapo in April 1943. On April 8, 1945 he was hanged as a traitor in the Flossenburg concentration camp. As he left his cell on his way to execution he said to his companion, "This is the end – but for me, the beginning of life."

photo of Bonhoeffer in the courtyard of Tegel prison, summer 1944; source: Christian Kaiser Verlag

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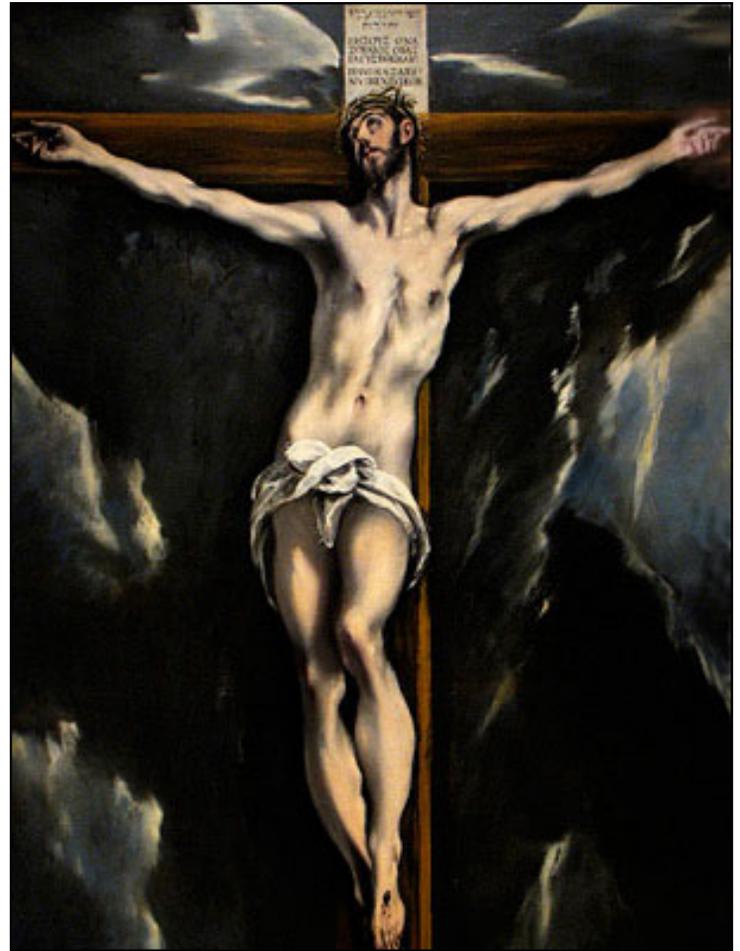
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February/March 2016 - Vol. 84

## The Cross – the One True Glorification of God

by Joseph Ratzinger  
(Pope Benedict XVI)

An excerpt from *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week –  
From the Entrance Into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*,  
March, 2011



Christ on the Cross, by El Greco (1585-95)

According to the account of the evangelists, Jesus died, praying, at the ninth hour, that is to say, around 3:00 P.M. Luke gives his final prayer as a line from Psalm 31: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46; Ps 31:5). In John’s account, Jesus’ last words are: “It is finished!” (John 19:30). In the Greek text, this word (*tetéléstai*) points back to the very beginning of the Passion narrative, to the episode of the washing of the feet, which the evangelist introduces by observing that Jesus loved his own “to the end (*télos*)” (John 13:1). This “end,” this *ne plus ultra* of loving, is now attained in the moment of death. He has truly gone right to the end, to the very limit and even beyond that limit. He has accomplished the utter fullness of love – he has given himself.

In our reflection on Jesus’ prayer on the Mount of Olives in chapter 6, we encountered a further meaning of this same word (*teleioun*) in connection with Hebrews 5:9: in the Torah it means consecration, bestowal of priestly dignity, in other words, total dedication to God. I think we may detect this same meaning here, on the basis of Jesus’ high-priestly prayer. Jesus has accomplished the act of consecration – the priestly handing-over of himself and the world to God – right to the end (cf. John 17:19). So in this final word, the great mystery of the Cross shines forth. The new cosmic liturgy is accomplished. The Cross of Jesus replaces all other acts of worship as the one true glorification of God, in which God glorifies himself through him in whom he grants us his love, thereby drawing us to himself.

The Synoptic Gospels explicitly portray Jesus’ death on the Cross as a cosmic and liturgical event: the sun is darkened, the veil of the Temple is torn in two, the earth quakes, the dead rise again.

Even more important than the cosmic sign is an act of faith: the Roman centurion – the commander of the execution

squad – in his consternation over all that he sees taking place, acknowledges Jesus as God’s Son: “Truly, this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39). At the foot of the Cross, the Church of the Gentiles comes into being. Through the Cross, the Lord gathers people together to form the new community of the worldwide Church. Through the suffering Son, they recognize the true God.

While the Romans, as a deterrent, deliberately left victims of crucifixion hanging on the cross after they had died, Jewish law required them to be taken down on the same day (cf. Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Hence the execution squad had to hasten the victims’ death by breaking their legs. This applied also in the case of the crucifixion on Golgotha. The legs of the two “thieves” are broken. But then the soldiers see that Jesus is already dead. So they do not break his legs. Instead, one of them pierces Jesus’ right side – his heart– and “at once there came out blood and water” (John 19:34). It is the hour when the paschal lambs are being slaughtered. It was laid down that no bone of these lambs was to be broken (cf. Exodus 12:46). Jesus appears here as the true Paschal Lamb, pure and whole.

So in this passage we may detect a tacit reference to the very beginning of Jesus’ story – to the hour when John the Baptist said: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Those words, which were inevitably obscure at the time as a mysterious prophecy of things to come, are now a reality. Jesus is the Lamb chosen by God himself. On the Cross he takes upon himself the sins of the world, and he wipes them away.

Yet at the same time, there are echoes of Psalm 34, which says: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken” (Psalm 34:19-20). The Lord, the just man, has suffered much, he has suffered everything, and yet God has kept guard over him: no bone of his has been broken.

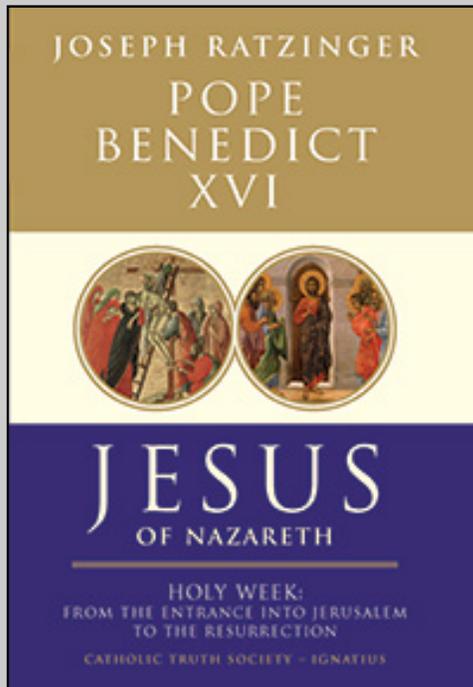
Blood and water flowed from the pierced heart of Jesus. True to Zechariah’s prophecy, the Church in every century has looked upon this pierced heart and recognized therein the source of the blessings that are symbolized in blood and water. The prophecy prompts a search for a deeper understanding of what really happened there.

An initial step toward this understanding can be found in the First Letter of Saint John, which emphatically takes up the theme of the blood and water flowing from Jesus’ side: “This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth. There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree” (1 John 5:6-8).

What does the author mean by this insistence that Jesus came not with water only but also with blood? We may assume that he is alluding to a tendency to place all the emphasis on Jesus’ baptism while setting the Cross aside. And this probably also meant that only the word, the doctrine, the message was held to be important, but not “the flesh”, the living body of Christ that bled on the Cross; it probably meant an attempt to create a Christianity of thoughts and ideas, divorced from the reality of the flesh – sacrifice and sacrament.

In this double outpouring of blood and water, the Fathers saw an image of the two fundamental sacraments – Eucharist and Baptism – which spring forth from the Lord’s pierced side, from his heart. This is the new outpouring that creates the Church and renews mankind. Moreover, the opened side of the Lord asleep on the Cross prompted the Fathers to point to the creation of Eve from the side of the sleeping Adam, and so in this outpouring of the sacraments they also recognized the birth of the Church: the creation of the new woman from the side of the new Adam.

[Excerpt from [Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance Into Jerusalem To The Resurrection](#), by Pope Benedict XVI, Chapter 8, © 2011 [Ignatius Press](#) (US), [CTS](#) (UK). Used with permission.]



“I hope that I have been granted an insight into the figure of our Lord that can be helpful to all readers who seek to encounter Jesus and to believe in him.”

- from the Forward *to Jesus of Nazareth, Part Two*

Joseph Ratzinger, for many years a renowned theologian, scripture scholar, and university professor, before becoming an archbishop, cardinal, and now pope of the Roman Catholic Church, was born in Bavaria, Germany in 1927. He was ordained priest in 1951. He became Archbishop of Munich and Freising in 1977.

When he was elected pope on April 19, 2005, he took the name Benedict XVI, in honor of St. Benedict of Nursia, the founder of Western monasticism. The pope said that “with his life and work St Benedict exercised a fundamental influence on the development of European civilization and culture” and helped Europe to emerge from the “dark night of history” that followed the fall of the Roman Empire.

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recent retreat with members of Emmanuel Community from Aleppo and members of People of God from Beirut

*“I wrapped my arms around them and tears of joy filled my eyes!”*

## Spotlight on Emmanuel

A community sustained by love in the middle of a war torn city

Report by André J. Codouni

The man and his wife, both leaders in the community Emmanuel, had left Aleppo for a couple of weeks to be with their daughter as she delivered a baby far from the insecurity of the city. Now they felt compelled to hasten back because of the love they had for the Lord’s work and for the brothers and sisters they had left behind. As they met up with the others on their return, the man described the overwhelming joy he felt when he hugged and kissed the others; in his words: “As I wrapped my arms around my brothers and sisters, tears of joys filled my eyes”...

Emmanuel, a community made up of families, single people, young and old, currently consists of eighty five members. They give witness in the middle of a life or death struggle within an area close to the center of Aleppo; routinely the members are asked how they fare in their circumstances and they promptly answer in so many words: “Our fight is of a spiritual nature and what we are doing together has tremendous importance in the balance of things”. Another adds: “For us what is at stake is the future and the survival of the Christians in Aleppo, Syria and maybe all of the Middle East”.

This deep conviction goes hand in hand with reaching out to others with excitement and zeal. One hears them repeating “Now, we are seeing the fruits of reaching out to others, more than during times of peace. People are responding and committing themselves to Christ, sometimes instantly”. A couple of months ago they finished

giving a life in the Spirit Seminar and they prayed with about thirty new members who want to continue with the group.



war torn Aleppo is the largest city in Syria

The situation in the center of the city has increasingly become more difficult to bear. Real threats surround them. ISIS and other groups have encircled the middle of Aleppo threatening to kill all “Infidels”. The uncertainty they live under from one day to the next is naturally unbearable. Food and heating fuel are hard to find. Sometimes the population has to survive without any supply of fresh water for as long as two weeks. People live in constant alert; they relentlessly hear sounds of explosions in the background to ever remind them that things are not normal. There is the danger of snipers and sleep is regularly interrupted and parents worry about their children and their safety. Jobs continue to be extremely scarce. Prices have more than tripled and essential commodities are very hard to get.



great loss of lives and traumatized survivors in Aleppo

The strategic importance of Aleppo cannot be exaggerated. It is the largest city in Syria and is situated right in the middle of many junctions and strategic areas. The situation there has become exceedingly challenging.

Yet Emmanuel members choose to stay. The Lord formed a people in the midst of what is looking more and more like a city in ruins. They have banded closely together around a common mission; they come together to pray and to be guided together daily by the Lord. Their faithfulness is an inspiration to many and their joy is contagious. They see themselves “as disciples on mission” and they are committed to remain together and in support of each other. They boldly encourage others to join with them.



many churches and monasteries in Aleppo have been destroyed in the conflict

Until about four years ago Aleppo had been a peaceful, relatively prosperous city known for its spice rich, flavorful cuisine as well as strong social and family bonds. The Muslim and Christian population had peacefully lived side by side for centuries. Aleppo had been a refuge where many of the Christians persecuted within the region of Asia Minor had previously converged. All too fast, however, everyone was caught by the whirlwind of events. Christians were labeled “infidel” by armed extremist groups; church groups were suspiciously censored if not persecuted.

In the middle of that situation and for the courage with which the members remain in the city, one is compelled to ask them “What are the things that inspire you to stay?” The simple answers one hears repeated with sincerity do reveal a striking unity of vision within the group. A couple tells “We came back for the mission”; another adds: “Here, I find meaning to life”; a young woman adds: “To experience joy and peace even in the middle of the war”; a young man volunteers, “To continue to share daily strength, consolation and support with the others”.

All will tell how mutual care keeps them going and many give witness to the “benefit that comes from God’s

guidance”. “We want to follow Christ and bring others to him”, a woman leader says, she has taken as her daily motto Jesus’ call in Matthew 4:19: “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men”.



Jean Barbara gives teaching to University Christian Outreach group from Aleppo

Our brothers and sisters are putting their words into action. They are consistently enduring and heroically living the command to be salt, light and leaven. Here are some of the stories that they have shared about which illustrate their extraordinary level of commitment:

- A young couple was asked by the husband’s employer to move for a few weeks to a new location within Syria where they found safety. There, the man was asked to stay long term, and was promised a pay raise and a secure job; even a year’s stipend and pay for his wife was put on the table. The man however decided not to take the offer even at the risk of completely losing his position. Why? Because he said: “We could not bear to not return to Aleppo. Our greatest fear was to miss out on helping with the mission God has called us to with the others”. This young couple continues to inspire many with their dedication, faith and generosity and they are determined to sell all in order to keep “the pearl of great price”.
- This wholehearted dedication permeates the whole community; when the group was invited to attend a retreat given by the People of God (Lebanon) in the Syrian coastal city of Tartous on the Mediterranean, not too far from the border with Lebanon, the members had to travel under the threat of danger for about fifteen hours through a dozen or so checkpoints. At the end of that grueling trip, they arrived with cheerful spirits against all odds and when they met up with their Lebanese counterparts, everyone was overcome with admiration by their joyfulness and enthusiasm.
- The group also perseveres in intercession for their own needs and they are supported by our prayers in the Sword of the Spirit. A senior woman leader excitedly tells about how the group interceded for a crucial access road into the city to open. “Just like in Joshua 6:20”, she said, “on the last and seventh day of our humbling ourselves before God, the access road was open for delivery of essential goods for survival, and the “walls of Jericho came tumbling down”. The exact same set of events happened again a few months later.
- One young man recounted how after prayer and consultation, he decided not to travel abroad: “I felt the Lord leading me to postpone the opportunity to travel and take a secure position in the United States in order to spend another year of service and outreach with Emmanuel”. That young man is actively serving now in the community and his church.

Emmanuel is steadfast in their faithfulness to the Lord, please continue to pray for them and for those leading

and ministering to them.

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André J. Codouni is a member of the [People of God](#) community in Beirut, Lebanon.

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## Krist Kiran Parivar

– "Family of the Rays of Christ" Community in Pune, India

by Luke Lobo

Krist Kiran Parivar, which means "Family of the Rays of Christ," is a covenant community located in Pune which is located in the western part of India. It is 70 miles west of Mumbai. Luke Lobo, the senior coordinator for Krist Kiran Parivar explains how the community began and gives a brief description of community life and mission.

Our community came into being in March 2000. Many of its members originally belonged to a charismatic prayer group, St. Patrick's Prayer Fellowship, which had started in 1988. From October 1999, for a period of about three months, the members of the prayer group felt the need to pray and wait on the Lord to discern the future course of the group. On the basis of prophecies received during these weeks of prayer, the leaders of the group felt that the Lord was moving them to some form of community life. These messages were also confirmed by others outside the prayer group who were in some way associated with the group.



In November 1999, a few members of the Community of Jesus, Light of the World, Mumbai, were invited to share their experience of community life at the prayer group’s annual family camp. In March 2000, members of the community in Mumbai were asked to give further input on community life to those members of the prayer group who felt called to form community. Following that weekend, about 30 people felt this call, and Krist Kiran Parivar was born. The community in Mumbai continued to support us by regular visits from their senior coordinator and others, leading us in our first faltering steps in community life. Henry Fernandes, then president of the Asian Region of the Sword of the Spirit, also visited and gave us input.

Our formation received a new impetus in 2005 when Ken Noecker, who was part of the Joy of the Lord community in Manila and a member of the Servants of the Word brotherhood, was appointed by the Sword of the Spirit as our outside coordinator and began visiting us regularly. We became an initial underway member of the Sword of the Spirit in November 2009, after a team of six members of other Sword of the Spirit communities conducted a visitation of the community to verify that we had the basics of our common life in place.

We are now nearing the end of our formation program as a Sword of the Spirit community and look forward to standing shoulder to shoulder with other fully-formed communities. We are thankful for the support we have received in our effort to build community, and the relationships we share internationally have been a blessing.



The name “Krist Kiran Parivar” means the Family of the Rays of Christ. The name was chosen after all the members gave their prayerful suggestions. The members felt that the community was being called to be the rays of Christ in the world and especially in the city of Pune, while Christ himself remains the centre and source of our light.



The logo was designed keeping this in mind, incorporating the cross, the rays and the lotus, India's national flower. The inner ring of its petals stand up together, signifying our solidarity and close relationships, and the outer ring spreads outwards, signifying our mission to bring Christ to others.

Members of the community come from different parishes of the city. Living closely together in neighbourhoods is challenging in India, since investment in a house is for most people a one-time affair, and one cannot afford to buy and sell houses at will. Most of our members come from middle class backgrounds.

Pune is a university and manufacturing city of almost six million people. As in most cities, we have a mixed population of people who have migrated from different parts of the country. Members of the community are from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Members come also from varied educational and professional backgrounds – we have many teachers, some IT professionals, businessmen, retired army officers, a tailor, domestic helpers, homemakers, and so on. The community has about 100 members in all, including the single professionals, young adults and children. Our oldest member is 82 years old and our youngest is 1 year old. Most of us are Catholics. Christians in India are a very small minority – less than 3% of the total population and less than 1% of the population of the city.



Our community meets frequently and in various groupings so that we can strengthen one another in Christ. We consider meeting together a high priority. The whole community meets every 2nd and 4th Sunday for praise, worship and teaching and in small men's groups and women's groups for personal sharing twice a month. Our Young Adults (ages 13-21) meet every Sunday and hold their own outreaches. Our young professionals outreach group, the Joshua Gen, meet twice in the month for prayer, teaching and fellowship.



Besides these we have an annual residential weekend for the whole community for “fun, faith and fellowship.” We also have leadership training programs, and men’s and women’s events. The members of the community who have made a long-term covenant commitment also meet a few times a year.

We have declared the year 2016 as a year of mission for our community. We feel the Lord wants us to expand our territory – to bring many people into closer personal contact with him and closer contact with community lived for him.

If people would like to contact us, they can email us at [kristkiranparivar@gmail.com](mailto:kristkiranparivar@gmail.com). Soon we’ll have a website up and running to make it easier for people to get in touch and see who we are.

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## Community of Nazareth in Dublin, Ireland

by Brendan Lynch

### *God has called us to life together and to mission*

The Community of Nazareth was formed in September of 1984. A few years prior to that, a group of married couples used meet together regularly as part of a movement known as *Les Équipes de Notre Dame*, the idea being to share as a group in a way that would strengthen their marriages. It so happened that most of the couples in that particular sharing group had also some involvement in the charismatic renewal. But they perceived something more was needed and especially that it ought to involve their children and indeed the wider Christian people.

Soon afterwards, our founding leaders, Éanna Johnson and his wife Pat, were put in touch with the People of Hope, a lay covenant community in New Jersey. In the summer of 1982 they and their children paid the community a visit. There they saw a vision for what covenant community life could be in Dublin. On returning home the Johnsons shared their experience with the members of their group, and with some other friends. Éanna recounts that people's responses "varied from instant when-do-we-start enthusiasm to cautious interest. The next two years," he recalls, "were a time of prayer, discernment, discussion and finally decision." On 8th September 1984, at a retreat in Ballyvalloo, Co. Wexford, nine married couples, six single adults, and a priest, the late and beloved Fr. Cyril Byrne, each made their covenant commitment to God and to one another as the Community of Nazareth.

The community has slowly grown in number through the intervening 30 years. There are now 110 adult members and approximately 100 children and young adults under age 18 in the community, and we pack a fairly sizeable local parish hall every 2 weeks at our community gatherings. Many members live in suburban

South Dublin, within 10 miles of the city centre. A sizeable number of us live in one neighbourhood, and most live within 15 minutes of there. This nearness of most of our houses brings great blessings to our life and in particular it allows our young people to meet together regularly.

Thanks be to God, we have people of all ages among our members and so our community has a noticeable trans-generational feel. All our founding members were Catholic and at this point about 95 percent of the membership is Catholic, with a small number from other Christian traditions. Among our members one can find business people, an architect, a dentist, a pharmacist, accountants, actuaries, engineers, landscapers, Christian radio broadcasters, trainee teachers, housewives and more. We are also largely mono-cultural – nearly all are Irish!

Apart from our fortnightly gatherings, we also meet fortnightly in small sharing groups – separate men's and women's groups, in order to facilitate open personal sharing – and we have monthly married couple meetings to help us strengthen this key social unit in our communities. Our children from 8 to 17 meet weekly in 3 differing groups, based on age, and the older ones can bring friends along. They learn scripture, pray together, do service together and create environments where they can speak to others about Christ. For those aged 18 to mid-20s we have a youth outreach grouping known as Ignite.

During the past five years or more, the Lord's word to us has been, essentially, Mission, Mission, Mission! Although it is challenging in Europe to speak to others about Christ these days, we are keen to give it our best shot, trusting that the Lord is greatly multiplying the little we can muster. We believe his prophetic word to the communities in the Sword of the Spirit that "we are meant for more than this" and that "our ears will tingle" when we see all the young people he sends our way to follow his paths – indeed we are beginning to see these things already.

After some years of relatively low outreach activity, the community in the last 3 or 4 years has revived the running of Life in the Spirit Seminars, the seven-week course of talks and discussion that helped so many of us to learn who the Lord Jesus is and receive the power of his Holy Spirit. We have run these recently in some local parishes. As a result, people are connecting with the Lord and with the community. This year we have also run parenting and marriage courses in a local parish to good effect, helping fellow parishioners in these key areas of life and allowing us to get to know people who want to go deeper in the Christian life.

The Ignite outreach for 18- to 23-year-olds aims to help community young people bring their own peers into closer contact with Christ and with our life as a community. Our own young people courageously invite friends and acquaintances along to join them in praise of the Lord. They meet on a regular basis in this context, and the good news gets spread abroad to more people. This is key in bringing the faith to the next generation.

Being part of an international ecumenical grouping of charismatic covenant communities, the Sword of the Spirit, is a great blessing to our life. Through this, we have beloved brothers and sisters in many places around the world who share the kind of life we seek to live in the Lord. Relating to these people at international meetings and sharing teaching and pastoral resources help us remain strong in the call we have been given. Many of our young people have made deep and lasting friendships with peers in other communities in places like Belfast, Glasgow, London, Belgium, Munich, Poland, America and beyond. These contacts really seem to enliven and enrich their growing commitment to live their lives for God.

One of the ways we seek to bring others to Christ is to have many of our community meetings open to visitors. Most months, our gatherings on the first and third Sunday of each month are open to all, and as time goes on we find that more new people are attending and showing an interest in becoming part of our life.



## *Gather My People* – Restoring Extended Families and Communities

by Bob Tedesco

In this essay on Christian community, Bob Tedesco, a former president of the North American region of the [Sword of the Spirit](#), addresses the topic of building Christian communities that last and the importance of restoring intergenerational family life and clans that are mutually supportive of sustaining a Christian way of life together.

In a yearly review of our community life, our coordinators recognized that certain elements of our community life had weakened or slipped a bit. We discussed the situation in ways that identified a weakening of our overall vision, and for certain elements of our way of life, a loss of vision.

In recent decades and certainly through the twentieth century, society has changed significantly in structure. When the world changes, people change, and the Christian church is changed as well. In the past thirty to forty years, we have seen the Lord responding to those changes and restoring something *ancient*.

If we look at Old Testament societies, we can see individuals, couples, families, clans (two or more generations - clans not used here in the negative sense), tribes, and a people. Within the “people” we can see other groupings: priestly, governing, military, workers, etc. Modern societal structure (especially Western societies) seems to look more like: individuals, couples, families, weak extended families, and nations. Life is lived and decisions are made in a way that repeatedly destroys connectedness until we are isolated units. In our Sword of the Spirit communities we see individuals, couples, families, clans, the local community, a region and an international community of communities (a people).

## Two founding directions

In the summer of 1973, our local community was given two founding words: “Gather my people together;” and “Build to last” (prophetic direction for the [People of God](#) in Pittsburgh). We have responded to the first word (gather) with numerous expressions of evangelistic outreach: Life in the Spirit courses, retreats, conferences, concerts, prayer meetings, men’s breakfasts, etc. We have also repeatedly emphasized evangelism on a personal level. “Gathering” has always been a significant part of our life together.

We have also taken “building” seriously from the beginning, and our national and international ties have had a lot to do with our understanding of how things go together in a way that will last: locally, trans-locally and internationally.

Gathering and building are expressed very well in Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission. We noticed that it says, “Go and make disciples...teaching them to observe *all that I have commanded you.*”

So, for us it meant, first of all, discipleship; a discipleship where we are formed in Christian character. Second, it meant being put together (built) in a way that can endure in a culture that is hostile to Christianity and even more hostile to Christian culture.

Our coordinators take a concern for: 1) our ongoing relationship with Jesus; 2) our underlying attitudes, postures and influences; and 3) our long-term evangelism and growth. In Acts 2:41, we see the Bible takes a concern for growth when it says “that day 3,000 were added to their number.”

Community growth for us comes from adult evangelism and transgenerational evangelism (the term we use to describe our children growing into adult members of the community).

## A community of disciples on mission

We are a community of individuals, couples, clans and movements on mission. We have a lot of teaching material on discipleship, on community, on marriage and family life. We have very little teaching on movements and no teaching on life in a clan. We have recently developed a series on senior life, which can improve the role of seniors in community and extended families. But, we have very little written about extended family life in a Christian community.

## Terminology

By “family” here, we mean the nuclear model with one generation of adults. “Clan” is used for extended family with two or three generations of adults living community life. By “movements” we mean groupings of adults with a common activity and outreach that support the overall mission of the community. Individuals and families are limited by life spans, but they lay a foundation for clans, movements, communities and the Sword of the Spirit that transcends lifetimes. Pastoral leaders and youth workers working with second and third generations have a special responsibility to be aware of and support those second and third generation members. They are key links in a network of relationships that span multiple generations.

## On mission

It is not my intention here to talk at length about our mission but it should be said that our mission is:

- To evangelize, and to lead people into real decisions to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, and to be baptized in the Holy Spirit
- To lead the individuals who have made those decisions into discipleship relationships of formation in Christian character and Christian community

- To rediscover and establish the Christian culture in scriptural wisdom
- To establish movements and outreaches that serve the Lord's purposes.

## A bigger vision

Our vision is often *much* too small. The Lord's plan for individuals, couples and families far surpasses our limited view and ideas. The American nuclear family model is *not* the Lord's plan. The "nuclearization" of the family is creating walled-off social units that cannot be easily accessed by other extended family members and friends. What used to be a very permeable border is becoming increasingly opaque to outside light and influence. Some of that "thickening of the membrane" is due to fear, and part of it is due to the real need to survive in a toxic culture.

We also quickly absorb other modern attitudes and approaches. "I'm eighteen and I can do what I want!" Can you pay your own bills? I knew a man who used to say, "I can't wait until my kids graduate from high school so I can send them off to college!" I had serious news for him that some of the most difficult and needy years for some children are the years between eighteen and twenty-five!

Sometimes we say, "I want the best of everything for my children." Won't they end up being spoiled "brats" if they too easily get the best of everything? Christian parents might say, "If he would only answer an altar call..." but, would he not also need discipleship, supportive relationships, and Christian character formation? "They need to maximize their gifts and potential" is also a common posture.

The Lord is saying, "Come and go with me. It will cost you, but it will be better!" The Lord has a *big* strategy for families, clans, and movements; but modern influences and limitations are blocking the next levels from developing. These influences and limitations are worst at the personal and family levels.

## A big strategy for clans and movements

First, we need to say again that the Lord's plan for family is bigger than the nuclear model. Keeping that in mind, we can begin to explore what he has in mind for clans and multi-generational family life. In some of our communities we have begun to see the unfolding of these expressions as multi-generational families emerge in communities that are 30-40 years in existence. Knowing that multi-generational families are a part of his plan can sharpen the focus of my service, and my decisions can be made in light of his strategy. That is, we can live life *intentionally* and coherently to support the new life that is emerging. This is not rocket science. It is the Lord restoring and rebuilding what has been damaged or destroyed by ungodly modern living. Living for self is self-destructive at every level of life and every level of basic human groupings.

On a worldwide basis, we see a steady stream of church movements that have served to bring individuals to encounter the living Christ so that lives, families, and vocations can be restored to him. All of this spiritual activity and energy is ultimately intended for the rebuilding of *his* family.

Again, knowing more of his plan sharpens the focus of my service: I know how to pastor or to steward that which I have been placed over. I even know more about how to write my will!

However, a greater body of teaching is still needed since the Lord is restoring expressions of the Body that we had not anticipated. For example, men and women living "single for the Lord" in an ecumenical setting and yet attached or related to a wider body of families and singles. Additionally, the fostering and protecting of clans is an area in need of teaching and development. Clusters or intentional neighborhood living has been explored with some success, but it has not yet seen the development and understanding of its dynamic to get the most out of it. But, think about that: intentional Christian neighborhoods! These would be neighborhoods where our young people could at least have some chance of developing life-long Christian relationships.

The Lord is restoring something in covenant Christian community: a stable network of brothers and sisters with whom we can grow old, while serving him over the span of generations; a place where our children can grow up with friends, marry and raise their children in the company of lifelong friendships.

## Coherence – a gift of community

So, the various aspects of our life together – relationships, covenant, discipleship, mission, worship – are all meant to go together, to add up to something, to build something for God that lasts. His plan is *coherent* – it makes sense. It is understandable (though not fully revealed). It is seamless. It is discernable and intelligent. It is comprehensive, and it is long-term. We think in terms of one or two generations. He sees many. This plan involves individuals, families, clans, movements, and tribes or communities. Our lives and the lives of these groupings are meant to add up to something, to be built into something. In building terms we are not just raw materials, we are stones built into a dwelling place. In farming terms we are not just seeds of wheat scattered in a random field, but the field is prepared, turned over with the rows such that the plants support each other when the wind blows, and at the harvest, the fruit is easily gathered. *We are not a single stalk of wheat in a windstorm, but a field of wheat in mutual support.*

Life was more naturally coherent in earlier times. Farms served villages, and the marketplace provided a continual intersection for people who would know each other for lifetimes. Congregations and denominations never had to take a concern for the disintegration of what seemed to be the natural structure of humanity. Today’s lifestyle seems more like a patchwork of temporary relationships: in many cases functional relationships (e.g. career) which vaporize with the next downsizing, or graduation, or the next “opportunity.” The Lord is restoring something in covenant Christian community: a stable network of brothers and sisters with whom we can grow old, while serving him over the span of generations; a place where our children can grow up with friends, marry and raise their children in the company of lifelong friendships. We need to see the vision, embrace it and teach it to our children.

## Coherent or “buffet”

We are modern, informed consumers. We shop for the best: the best values, investments, groups, and activities. Often, however, we do that without a coherent strategy, or without a long-term sense of how our choices fit together. If we took a patchwork approach to planning for retirement, we would find ourselves relying on Social Security. Yet, we can invest a lot of time and money in Christianity without taking concern for how it might all fit together in the Lord’s plan. Parents taking a real concern for their children often “shop” for the best schools, the best youth groups, etc. This “patchwork” Christianity does not build the Body of Christ, but repeatedly weakens it. In worst cases, the children are even leading the family in several directions that end up having a *disconnecting*, incoherent effect on the family. Mission trips, youth groups, retreats, gatherings, campus groups, small groups and relationships should all connect, they should build into something.

## Summary

I would advise young families to plan to be a clan: to take a coherent approach to life and choices, and to raise the children so that they understand and can embrace the call. Additionally, we need to orient the family and clan beyond itself so that it embraces and is built into the wider community and even to the community of communities (the Sword of the Spirit).

More developed families will find it harder, since the children will not have seen this from an early age, but we can still aid the process by making good decisions. For example, if we decide to send them to the “best” college

hundreds of miles away, we make a decision that “disconnects” them from family and friends and usually results in them settling in some other area of the planet.

Mature families and singles can also live so as to support this work of God in service and in pastoral work. [Two passages from the Book of Revelation depict God's people gathered together into a holy city – the new Jerusalem.]

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away; and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.” And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.”

– Revelation 21:1-5

In the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; on the three east gates, on the three north gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles...

– Revelation 21:10-14

The Lord is building something; it has a design; it has foundations, walls and gates, and a detailed plan.

“Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

– Acts 2:40b-47

They lived differently: not just a little differently but radically different lives. They spent a lot of time together and shared things. Their life together was a part of the Lord’s plan to save them from a “crooked generation” (vs. 40).

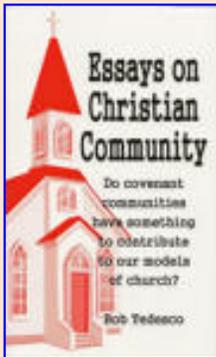
For all of us, our lives are called to have purpose, to make sense, to add up to something; we need to stay together and make decisions and investments of time and money that support our call.

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**Essays on Christian Community:**

*Do covenant communities have something to contribute to our models of church?*

written by Bob Tedesco,  
published by [Tabor House](#), Lansing, Michigan,  
2010, 157 pages.



Bob Tedesco is past President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit, a founder of the People of God community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 39 years.

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## *A Holy Nation: Raising Our Children for the Lord*

by Bob Tedesco

The Lord's Prayer is one of the most important points of unity in Christianity. Virtually every Christian has it memorized and can recite it from a very young age. Aside from a few exceptions there is nearly universal agreement on the wording.

Across the spectrum of Christianity and over hundreds of years, there have been some teachers who have taught that the Lord's Prayer is a collection of topics or areas to address in prayer, and not just a rote prayer to be quickly or mindlessly recited. One argument for their approach is to ask, "When the disciples asked the Lord to teach them to pray, do we really think that his response was to direct them to recite a twenty second prayer?"



## Hallowed be thy name

One free-church model addresses the “Hallowed be thy name” topic as a time to recite and consider some of the names and roles of the Lord, as given in scripture. The group listed eight of them. The Lord is righteous, holy, present, our peace, our healing, our provision, a banner in our midst, and our shepherd.

## Righteous and holy

Recently, while praying this model, I was struck by the distinction between righteous and holy. To be righteous, among other things, is to do the right things. We think of righteous individuals as people of character: honest, trustworthy, truthful, reliable, upright, loyal.

To be holy, on the other hand, is to be set apart for God. “Things” can be holy as well as individuals. Roles can be holy, as in the cases of a priest or a minister. A *nation* can be holy. There are many righteous people in various cultures and religious expressions. Not all righteous people are holy. Not all holy people are righteous (at least not all the time).

We are called to be righteous *and* holy. We are called as a people to: 1) do the right things, and 2) be set apart for God: for his purposes, his plans, his actions, his kingdom. The apostle Peter describes Christians as, “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy” (1Peter 2:9-10 RSV).

## A holy nation

So, we are “God’s own *people*.” We are not just God’s own singles, God’s own marriages, and not just only God’s own family. This has significant meaning for how we raise children *within* a family and how we relate to other people’s children.

Whether single or married, we are called to help other people raise their children, and that will be somewhat difficult since, at least in Western culture, we are no longer “wired” to be very concerned beyond family borders. But because we are called as a holy nation, a holy people, we should really foster that concern beyond family borders. We serve, participate in, and support events, groups, and outreaches that benefit the children of others.

## Raising our own

Because we are called as a holy nation, a holy people, we are called to raise our children to be *set apart for God*. “From now on you must live the rest of your earthly lives controlled by God’s will and not by human

desires” (1Peter 4:2 TEV). It is not a sufficient response to the Lord to raise our children to be righteous, to get a good education, have a good career, and live happily ever after. It is not even spiritually safe (for them)! Such things may have seemed safe in the 1950s, but the environment that we now live in is such a mine field that few are surviving it.

In the early part of the charismatic renewal, there was a fair amount of discussion in various church circles of what it meant to be saved, how to *get* saved, etc. Today it is a real concern to address the question, “How do the saved survive?” Our younger Christians are having great difficulty traversing the gauntlet that is young adult life, especially if there is a significant disconnect: a non-local college, or being in a romantic relationship with a non-Christian, or in a strong relationship with a group of non-Christian friends (real or virtual).

If our children are not set apart for God and trained to view their lives that way (that is, view them as holy), the righteousness that seemed so ingrained is unlikely to carry the day over the long haul.

### Jesus’ pattern: “Thy will be done”

“Lord, teach us to pray,” was a request that sprang from the disciples observing Jesus’ pattern, admiring it, and wanting to embrace it. What was that pattern? In simplest terms, Jesus sought out the Father, praised him, listened to his instructions, and then *did* them. It was a daily pattern. It was a good pattern for Jesus.

What the world needs today are disciples who seek the Lord, hear and discern his direction, and then follow it.

That’s what Jesus did.

That’s how we hope to live.

And that’s the vision of life that we should be passing on to our children!



Bob Tedesco is past President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit, a founder of the People of God community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 42 years.

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***The Word of God Is Living and Active – Hebrews 4:12***



**Listening to the Word of God in  
the School of the Holy Spirit**

by Don Schwager

**A Charismatic and Scriptural Approach to Reading Scripture Spiritually**

The Lord Jesus invites us to encounter him in the daily reading of Sacred Scripture. Through the gift and working of the Holy Spirit he opens our ears to hear his voice and to recognize his presence as he speaks to us through his word.

Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), wrote: "The Scriptures are in fact, in any passage you care to choose, singing of Christ, provided we have ears that are capable of picking out the tune. The Lord opened the minds of the Apostles so that they understood the Scriptures. That he will open our minds too is our prayer."

**The Lord opens the Scriptures for us**

The Lord wants us to approach the Sacred Scriptures not simply as a word of the past but as God's Word that is also addressed to us today. Saint Jerome, an early church father (347-420 AD) who had a passionate love for the Bible, wrote that to read Scripture is to converse with God.

"You are reading [Scripture]? No. Your betrothed is talking to you. It is your betrothed, that is, Christ, who is united with you. He tears you away from the solitude of the desert and brings you into his home, saying to you,

‘Enter into the joy of your Master’... “How could one live without the knowledge of Scripture, through which one learns to know Christ himself, who is the life of believers?”

**“Reading the Scriptures without the Holy Spirit would be like opening a book in the dark.”**

- Raniero Cantalamessa, *The Mystery of God's Word*

Jesus told his disciples, “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” ( John 14:25). The Scriptures will remain a dead letter until we allow the Holy Spirit to open our ears and soften our hearts to receive his word with meekness and trust. Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa writes: “Reading the Scriptures without the Holy Spirit would be like opening a book in the dark” (*The Mystery of God's Word*).

### **A formational approach to reading Scripture with the Holy Spirit**

How can we read the Scriptures with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit will give us a disciple's ear if we are ready to listen and eager to learn. “Morning by morning he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious” (Isaiah 50:4-5).

There are two very different ways of reading Scripture: informational reading and formational reading. We generally approach informational reading as a subject we wish to master. We approach the text with an analytical and critical mind so we can form our own opinion and judgment on the subject. In a formational approach to reading Scripture we allow the text to master us so we can grow in our understanding of God's mind, heart, and plan for us as it is revealed in his word. Formational reading requires a humble, detached, and loving approach that is also open to God's mystery.

Jesus offers us a great promise, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32).

[Don Schwager is a member of [The Servants of the Word](#) and author of the [Daily Scripture Reading and Meditation](#).]

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*“The Father will give you another Counselor”  
– John 14:16*

## The Holy Spirit Reveals the Merciful Father

by Raniero Cantalamessa

### 1. A Year of the Lord's Mercy

Returning to his home in Nazareth after his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus solemnly applies the words of Isaiah to himself:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovering of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4:18-19)

It was thanks to the anointing of the Holy Spirit that Jesus preached the good news, healed the sick, comforted the afflicted, and performed all his works of mercy. St. Basil writes that the Holy Spirit was “inseparably present” with Jesus so that his “every operation was wrought with the co-operation of the Spirit.”<sup>78</sup> The Holy Spirit, who is love personified in the Trinity, is also the mercy of God personified. He is the very “content” of divine mercy. Without the Holy Spirit, “mercy” would be an empty word.

The name “Paraclete” clearly indicates this. In announcing his coming, Jesus says, “And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever” (John 14:16). “Another” here

implies “after having given me, Jesus, to you.” The Holy Spirit is, therefore, the one through whom the risen Jesus now continues his work of “doing good and healing all” (Acts 10:38). The statement that the Paraclete “will take what is mine and declare it to you” (John 16:14) also applies to mercy: the Holy Spirit will open the treasures of Jesus’ mercy to believers in every age. He will make Jesus’ mercy not just be remembered but also experienced.

The Paraclete is active above all in the sacrament of mercy, Confession. “He is the remission of all sins,” says one of the Church’s prayers.<sup>79</sup> Because of that, before giving absolution to a penitent, a confessor says, “God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son, has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace.”

Some Church Fathers considered the oil the Samaritan poured on the wounds of the man who was robbed to be a symbol of the Holy Spirit.<sup>80</sup> A beautiful African-American spiritual expresses this thought with the evocative image of the balm in Gilead: “There is a balm in Gilead, / to heal the sin-sick soul / . . . / to make the wounded whole.” Gilead is a place mentioned in the Old Testament that was famous for its perfumed healing ointment (see Jeremiah 8:22). Listening to this song we could almost imagine a street vendor shouting out a list of his merchandise and their prices. The whole Church should be this “street vendor.” The balm the Church offers today is no longer the medicinal ointment of Gilead; it is the Holy Spirit.

## **2. The Letter and the Spirit, Justice and Mercy**

The Holy Spirit is the key to solving the very tricky problem of the relationship between the law and mercy. Commenting on Paul’s saying that the letter kills but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:3-6), St. Thomas Aquinas writes, “The ‘letter’ refers to every written law that exists outside of man, including the moral precepts of the gospel. The ‘letter’ of the gospel, even of its precepts, also kills without the inward presence of the grace of faith that heals us.”<sup>81</sup> Shortly before that statement, the holy doctor explains what he means by “the grace of faith”: “The new law is primarily the same grace of the Holy Spirit that is given to believers.”<sup>82</sup>

This is a bold assertion that none of us would dare make if it did not come from two very great doctors of the Latin Church, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. It finds confirmation earlier in the very words of Christ and the experience of the apostles. If a proclamation of the beatitudes and the moral teachings of the gospel were enough for us to have eternal life, then there would have been no need for Jesus to die and be raised for us to receive the gift of the Spirit. That is why he tells the apostles it is good for him to go away so that he can send the Paraclete upon them (see John 16:7). Look at the experience of the apostles: they had listened to all the precepts of the very author of the gospel, but they were not able to put them into practice until the Holy Spirit came down upon them at Pentecost.

The conclusion that emerges from all this is clear: if even the gospel precepts without the Holy Spirit would be “the letter that kills,” what can we say about ecclesiastical laws, monastic rules, and the canons in the canon law, including those that regulate marriage? The Spirit does not abolish or bypass the law;<sup>83</sup> he does, however, teach at what point the law should move aside and yield to mercy. Obviously, not every “letter” kills but only the one that claims, all by itself and once and for all, to regulate life or even substitute itself for life.

## **3. The Holy Spirit Reveals the Merciful Father**

An essential work of the Holy Spirit with respect to mercy is also that of changing the picture people have in their minds of God after they sin. One of the causes—perhaps the main one—for the alienation of people today from religion and faith is the distorted image they have of God. It is also the cause of a lifeless Christianity that has no enthusiasm or joy and is lived out more as a duty than as a gift, by constraint rather than by attraction.

What is this “preconceived” idea of God in the collective human unconscious that operates automatically (in computer language, we would say “by default”)? To find that out, we only need to ask this question: “What ideas, what words, what feelings spontaneously arise for you before you think about it when you come to the words in the Lord’s Prayer ‘May your will be done’”? In general, people say it with their heads bent down in resignation inwardly, as if preparing themselves for the worst.

People unconsciously link God's will to everything that is unpleasant and painful, to what in one way or another is seen as destroying individual freedom and development. It is as though God were the enemy of every celebration, joy, and pleasure. People do not take into account that in the New Testament, the will of God is called "*eudokia*" (see Ephesians 1:9; Luke 2:14), meaning, "goodwill, kindness." When we pray, "May your will be done," it is really like saying, "Fulfill in me, Father, your plan of love." Mary said her *fiat* with that attitude, and so did Jesus.

God is generally seen as the Supreme Being, the Omnipotent One, the Lord of time and history, as an entity who asserts his power over an individual from the outside. No detail of human life escapes him. The transgression of the law, disobedience to the divine will, inexorably introduces a disorder into the order willed by God from all eternity. As a consequence, his infinite justice requires reparation: a person will need to do something for God so as to reestablish the order that was disturbed in creation, and this reparation will involve a deprivation, a sacrifice. However, since people are never able to be certain that the "satisfaction" is enough, anxiety arises over facing death and judgment. God is a taskmaster who requires being paid back in full!

Of course, these people do not leave out the mercy of God! But for them, mercy functions only to moderate the necessary rigors of justice. It rectifies the situation, but it is an exception, not the rule. In practice, then, they believe God's love and forgiveness depend on the love and forgiveness they have for others: if you forgive whoever offended you, God will be able in turn to forgive you. It leads to a relationship of bargaining with God. Isn't it true that people think they need to accumulate merits to get into heaven? And don't people attribute great significance to their efforts—to the Masses they attend, to the candles they light, and to the novenas they make?

Since all these practices have allowed so many people in the past to demonstrate their love to God, they cannot be thrown out the window but need to be respected. God makes his flowers bloom in all climates and his saints in all seasons. We cannot deny, however, that again there is a risk here of falling into a utilitarian religion of "*do ut des*," "I give so that you can give, so that I can receive." Behind all of this is the presupposition that a relationship with God depends on human beings. People unconsciously presume to "pay God his price" (see Psalm 49:7); they do not want to be debtors but creditors to God.

Where does this twisted idea of God come from? Let us leave aside individual and incidental factors like a bad relationship with one's earthly father, which, in some cases, puts a strain on the relationship with God the Father. The basic reason for this terrible "preconception" about God clearly appears from what we have just said: the law, the commandments. As long as people live under the reign of sin, under the law, God seems to be a severe Master, someone who is opposed to the fulfillment of a person's earthly desires with his mandates of "You should . . . You should not" that comprise the commandments: "You should not covet other's goods, others' spouses," and so on. In this situation, carnal human beings store up bitterness against God deep in their hearts. They see him as an adversary to their happiness, and if it depended on them, they would be very happy if God did not exist.<sup>84</sup>

The first thing the Holy Spirit does when he comes to dwell in us is to reveal a different face of God to us. He shows him to us as an ally, as a friend, as the one who "did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32). In brief, the Holy Spirit shows us a very tender Father who has given us the law not to stifle our freedom but to protect it. A filial sentiment then arises that makes us spontaneously cry, "*Abba*, Father." It is like saying, "I did not know you, or I knew you only from hearing about you. Now I know you, I know who you are, and I know that you truly wish good for me and that you look upon me with favor!" A son or daughter has now replaced a servant; love has replaced fear. This is what happens on the subjective and existential level when a person is "born anew of the Spirit" (see John 3:5, 7-8).

In addition to the law, there has been another reason in recent times for resentment against God: human suffering, and especially the suffering of the innocent. A nonbeliever has written that human suffering "is the rock of atheism."<sup>85</sup> The dilemma is that either God can overcome evil but does not want to, so he is not a father; or that he wants to overcome evil but he cannot, so he is not omnipotent. This is a very old objection, but it has become deafening in the wake of the tragedies of World War II. "No one can believe in a God as Father after Auschwitz," someone has written.

I attempted to explain in the first chapter the answer the Holy Spirit has given the Church about this problem, which is that God suffers alongside people. He is not a far-off God who looks with indifference at a person suffering on earth. To the objection above, one can thus respond that God can overcome evil but does not choose to do it (at least in a general or normal way) so as not to remove people's free will. God wants to overcome evil—and

he will—but with a new kind of victory, the victory of love in which he takes evil upon himself and converts it to good for all eternity. It would be a magnificent fruit of the Year of Mercy if it served to restore the true picture of God that Jesus came to earth to reveal to us.

#### 4. Making Ourselves Paracletes

The title “Paraclete” not only speaks about God’s mercy toward us but also opens for us a whole new field of acts of mercy for one another. We need, in other words, to become paracletes ourselves! If it is true that the Christian needs to be an alter Christus, “another Christ,” it is just as true that he or she needs to become “another paraclete.”

The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (see Romans 5:5), whether it be the love with which God loves us or the love that has made us in turn capable of loving God and our neighbor. When applied to mercy—which is the form love takes in the face of the suffering and sin of a person who is loved—the following saying from the apostle tells us something very important: the Paraclete not only comforts us; he also comes to comfort others and makes us able to comfort them and be merciful. St. Paul writes, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all *comfort*, who *comforts* us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to *comfort* those who are in any affliction, with the *comfort* with which we ourselves are *comforted* by God [italics added]” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). The Greek word from which “Paraclete” is derived appears five times in this text, sometimes as a verb and sometimes as a noun. It contains the essential elements for a theology of consolation. Consolation comes from God who is “the Father of all comfort”; he comes to whoever is afflicted. But he does not stop with that person; his ultimate goal is reached when those who have experienced consolation use that experience in turn to comfort others.

But console how? This is the important point. With the very consolation with which we have been consoled by God—a divine, not human, consolation. That does not happen when we are content to repeat empty words about circumstances that leave things the way we found them: “Don’t worry; don’t get upset; you’ll see that everything will turn out for the best!” We need instead to communicate authentic consolation, which comes from “the encouragement of the scriptures [so that] we might have hope” (Romans 15:4). This also explains the miracles that a simple word or gesture in an atmosphere of prayer can accomplish at the bedside of a sick person. God is giving comfort through you.

In a certain sense, the Holy Spirit needs us in order for him to be the “Paraclete.” He wants to comfort, defend, and exhort, but he has no mouth, hands, or eyes to “embody” his consolation. Or better, he has our hands, our eyes, our mouths. Just as our soul acts, moves, and smiles through the members of our body, so the Holy Spirit does the same through the members of “his” body, the Church and us. St. Paul recommends to the early Christians, “Therefore encourage one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:11); translated literally the verb here means “make yourselves paracletes for one another.” If the consolation and the mercy we receive from the Spirit do not flow from us to others, if we selfishly want to keep it for ourselves, then very soon it stagnates.

Let us ask for grace from Mary, whom Christian devotion honors with two titles that together signify “paraclete”: “*Consoler of the Afflicted*” and “*Advocate for Sinners*.” She has certainly made herself a “paraclete” for us! A text from the Second Vatican Council says, “The Mother of Jesus shine[s] forth on earth, until the day of the Lord shall come (cf. 2 Peter 3:10), as a sign of sure hope and solace to the people of God during its sojourn on earth.”<sup>86</sup>

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#### Notes

<sup>78</sup> St. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, XVI, 39, in *Letters and Select Works*, trans. Blomfield Jackson, vol. 8, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 25; see PG 32, p. 140.

<sup>79</sup> Roman Missal, Tuesday after Pentecost.

<sup>80</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Luke*, 34, trans. Joseph T. Lienhard, vol. 94, *Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), pp. 139-140; see SCh 87, p. 401.

<sup>81</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I–IIae, q. 106, a. 2.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 106, a. 1; see also St. Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter*, 21, 36, pp. 221–222.

<sup>83</sup> St. Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter*, 19, 34: “The law was given that grace might be sought; grace was given that the law might be fulfilled” (p. 220).

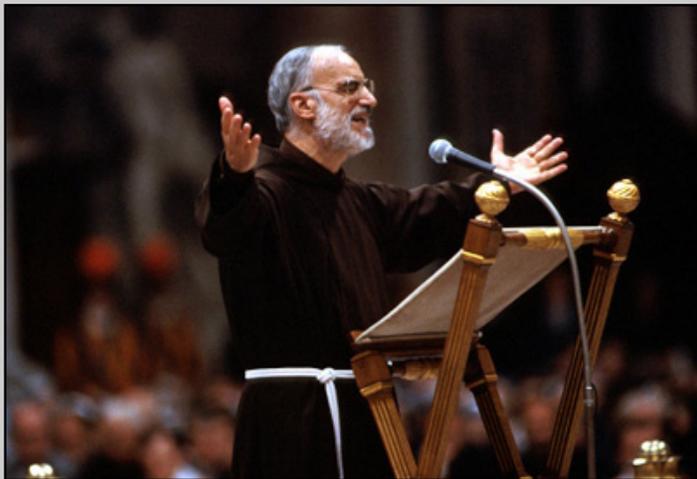
<sup>84</sup> See Martin Luther, “Sermon for Pentecost,” *The Sermons of Martin Luther*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 2000), pp. 273–287.

<sup>85</sup> The phrase comes from a 1835 drama by the nineteenth-century German author Georg Büchner, *Danton’s Death* [*Dantons Tod*], trans. Howard Brenton and Jane Margaret Fry (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 43. In Act 3, a character asks, “Why do I suffer? That is the rock of atheism.”

<sup>86</sup> *Lumen gentium*, n. 68

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



*Judas returning the 30 pieces of silver, painting by Rembrandt, 1629*

## On Giving – and Forgiving

by Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz

[Note: This article is excerpted from a longer essay, [Forgiving the Unforgiveable? On Guilt and Pardon](#), published in (c) Plough Quarterly Winter 2016 and translated from German by Peter Mommsen. See full essay online at [Plough](#).]

### Pure Gift: A Prelude to Pure Forgiveness

In order to understand *forgiving*, not least in its biblical depth of meaning, we must first reflect on *giving*. The basis of any economy is exchange – a fair balance of giving and receiving. Exchange represents a pragmatic justice that evens things out. In its drastic form, the concept of exchange is linked to the rule of “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.”



detail of Rembrandt painting above

Yet where human beings are balanced against things, where value is balanced against price, and where life itself is balanced against money and commodities, the blurry and debasing nature of exchange shows up clearly. To take a well-known example: “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price...” (Matt. 27:9). Thirty coins are the “balance” that is exchanged for the Son of Man; when these coins are thrown back into the temple, they can just as easily be used to buy a potter’s field. Exchange breaks down when things that are unlike are treated as if they were alike. As this relates to our topic here: can murder ever be “balanced out,” or atoned for, or forgiven – even in exchange for remorse?

The opposite of exchange is the “pure gift.” Such a gift is supererogatory: it is above and beyond any price, any equivalent value, or any debt owed. Such a gift is gratuitousness itself, it is pure grace. “If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile” (Matt. 5:40–41). A pure gift is not given according to the logic of the Roman motto *do ut des* – “I give that you might give to me” – but rather in another sense: “I give because I have received.” Exact repayment is transformed into an attitude of free and unselfish giving-on to others.

The clearest example of this is love. Love cannot be balanced out through justice; love exists only when it is *not* owed, when it is freely offered. This pure gift is the heart of creation, and for Christians, it’s more: it is the heart of the still greater redemption to come.

### Pure Forgiveness: A Bridge to the Divine

Taking stock of the horrors of the twentieth century, Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) proposed a heightened form of “pure *giving*”: he called it “pure *forgiving*.” (Derrida plays on the French terms *don pur*, “pure gift,” and *pardon pur*, “pure forgiveness.”) He did this expressly to oppose Jankélévitch’s bitter essay “Should We Pardon Them?,” arguing against putting conditions on forgiveness and thus turning it into a commodity to be exchanged.

Derrida speaks instead of the necessity for “pure absolution” from guilt: absolution as unconditional forgiveness, offered without receiving anything in exchange. *For-giving* doesn’t depend on balancing guilt with expiation. That’s why forgiveness cannot be a provision in criminal law: it must remain outside of any balancing of legal rights. After all, to pardon a criminal means setting aside the law, and can only ever be done as an exception; but the act of pardoning arises from the transcendent “mystical foundation” of a justice that legal justice cannot catch up with.<sup>1</sup>

Derrida takes aim at Jankélévitch’s first thesis – that forgiveness may only be granted (if at all) in a one-on-one encounter of perpetrator and victim. If the possibility of forgiveness really ended with the death of the victim, then the perpetrator’s remorse would come too late; the perpetrator would no longer have an active role in the drama. Remorse and forgiveness would then be logically separated: *forgiving* would no longer have a *giver*, indeed forgiveness itself would become mortal. Derrida asks: can forgiveness really be so time-bound, so finite? And even more seriously: is forgiveness then actually something that is “exchanged” for remorse?

Derrida also detects in Jankélévitch’s second thesis a concealed logic of exchange, here in negative form: for certain crimes such as crimes against humanity, no adequate compensation could ever be offered. What sort of remorse could ever free a concentration camp commander from his guilt?

Derrida concludes that it must be possible – perhaps it is even necessary? – to break this cycle of guilt and expiation. To that end, he turns to the biblical story of the original sin: the Bible speaks of the great sin of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3), but it speaks too of Yahweh’s a priori forgiveness, granted already before the first sin was committed (see Exod. 6–10). Grace is more than a concept, a speculation, or a wish – grace “already is.”<sup>2</sup>

Forgiveness then, according to Derrida, must extend to forgiving the unforgivable:

It is necessary, it seems to me, to begin from the fact that, yes, there is the unforgivable. Is this not, in truth, the only thing to forgive? The only thing that *calls* for forgiveness? If one is only prepared to forgive what appears forgivable, what the church calls “venial sin,” then the very idea of forgiveness would disappear. If there is something to forgive, it would be what in religious language is called “mortal sin,” the worst, the unforgivable crime or harm. ... There is only forgiveness, if there is any, where there is the unforgivable. That is to say that forgiveness must announce itself as impossibility itself. It can only be possible in doing the impossible. ... What would be a forgiveness that forgave only the forgivable?<sup>3</sup>

In other words: absolution is only possible in the sphere of the *absolute*, not in the *relative* sphere of human score-settling. What lies concealed behind this “absolute”?

Derrida’s argument accords with the biblical way of thinking: the Abrahamic faiths all recognize the possibility of an unimaginable forgiveness. Indeed, Derrida mentions the Catholic church, which actually offers such forgiveness. (Although Derrida, as a Jew, does not belong to the church, he is likely thinking of the Catholic practice of confession.) Pure forgiveness, in his view, can only come into being when the confrontation between two people (even if both are dead) is resolved through the presence of Another: a Giver of forgiveness who is not bound by time. The dimension of this Other transcends the realm of human possibilities while drawing them toward the horizon of what is impossible, yet nevertheless imaginable:

Is forgiveness a matter for human beings, something belonging to humankind and within the scope of human capability – or is it reserved to God? ... Is it divine/otherworldly or this-worldly, consecrated/holy or not? All debates about forgiveness have to do with this boundary and with trespasses of this boundary.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to rituals of political renewal, then, forgiveness involves something more.

### [Sending Guilt Back into Nothingness](#)

Can what has been done be undone through forgiveness? Certainly, the mystery of evil cannot be solved by erasing history (2 Thess. 2:7). Augustine’s insight is relevant here: according to him, sin serves to build up a false reality (he calls it the “privation of good”). Fundamentally, evil can exercise its power only by using a stolen mask – it works only under the false pretense of being good. The lie consists of inflating evil, as if it *were* something good.

In no way does this deny or diminish the horrible reality of guilt or the irretrievable absence of the victims. Forgiveness means neither undoing the crime nor belittling its horror. Face-to-face with the absolute, something else happens instead: evil is exposed as futile, void, nonsensical, even miserable – and it is then sent back (*remissio*) into the nothingness out of which it emerged. Evil disappears in the nothingness of its usurped power, extinguished in its claim to be “something.” What does this mean?

*Indulgentiam, absolutionem et remissionem peccatorum nostrorum* – so runs the prayer for forgiveness in the Roman Mass, which literally asks for “*clemency* for, *freeing* from, and *sending back* of our sins.” *Remissio* refers to an objective process: sending evil back into its nullity, returning the lie back into its non-being. Forgiveness directs our gaze toward the past, but only in order to allow the past to vanish by itself into its own nothingness.

Forgiveness takes away from the past its power to remain present – to remain in the appalling “eternal now” of which Jankélévitch speaks.<sup>5</sup>

Forgiveness frees the present and the future from the corpse of what has been.

Forgiveness, then, doesn’t remember the past in order to keep it eternally present. Rather, the past is sent back and vanishes, and forgiveness forgets it. This is the sense in which God will, in the words of Psalm 103, “cast our sins behind us” – “as far as the morning is from the evening,” to translate Jerome’s rendering literally. As the Psalmist declares:

Bless the Lord ... who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy. ... He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.

Augustine remarks: “To the rejected he has promised glory.”<sup>6</sup>

Echoing this, the sinner can only say with Kierkegaard: “That you have forgotten and forgiven, I will always keep in remembrance.”<sup>7</sup>

Forgiving thus becomes a gift in an augmented sense: it means giving back (*remissio*) what is death-bringing into its own death.

## Happy Guilt?

According to Augustine, the most elementary meaning of life is summed up in the phrase *videntem videre* – to see the One who has always seen me. Or in Nicholas of Cusa’s words: “Your seeing is your enlivening. ... Your seeing is your working.”<sup>8</sup>

God’s gaze and our insatiable looking back to him are something far different than our relationship to anonymous abstractions such as justice or forgiveness. To see, to let ourselves be seen, brings a greater joy than dissolving into a Universal Everything or Universal Nothing. To forgive, then, does not mean sinking back into detachment, but rather it means entering into a new, exhilarating relationship: to another human being, but even more deeply, to the source of life, to God.

Seen this way, forgiveness is grasped not as the neutral cancelation of guilt, but in terms of a Person who is the source of forgiveness. One pebble does not forgive another pebble, nor does the second pebble experience remorse. To repent and to forgive are not mechanical processes. They are acts carried out by persons.

Each year on the night before Easter, the *Exsultet* hymn is sung in churches around the world. This joyous hymn includes the words of Augustine:

This is the night that with a pillar of fire banished the darkness of sin. This is the night that, even now throughout the world, sets Christian believers apart from worldly vices and from the gloom of sin ... when Christ broke the prison bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld. Our birth would have been no gain, had we not been redeemed. ... O truly necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the death of Christ! O happy fault (*felix culpa*) that earned for us so great, so glorious a Redeemer! ... The sanctifying power of this night dispels wickedness, washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners.<sup>9</sup>

C. S. Lewis once remarked that the apostle Peter, in his later life, would likely have told everyone the story of how he betrayed the Lord – and done so with a radiant face, since on that night he had been drawn into an unimaginable depth of love through a single glance: “The Lord turned and looked at Peter. ... And he went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:61–62). Only in this light can we grasp the decisive statement: *Guilt is only felt where there is forgiveness.*

Normally we think that guilt comes first, then remorse, then forgiveness. This reflects ordinary human experience. But it is not true of God: it is Jesus’ glance of forgiveness that prompts the pain of remorse, which in turn brings about an awareness of guilt.

In God’s way of redemption, remorse is not made a condition for “pure forgiveness.” The “happy fault” not only dissolves this chain of connection, but it also puts the remorseful person’s insight into his guilt onto a different basis. The divine goodness that eternally sees every moment in time has already – long before there was any guilt – opened up a place where guilt *is permitted* to speak itself out and be confessed. Confession is already the first fruit of forgiveness. The glance of love is itself the basis on which evil is repented of. In other words, guilt can only truly be confessed when it comes *face-to-face with forgiveness.*

What is more, when guilt is confessed, it has already begun to disappear. One might say that guilt only becomes evident when it comes within reach of divine forgiveness. Only as our burden is being lifted do we feel its weight.

Divine forgiveness is an unconditional gift that “overtakes” remorse. Remorse isn’t what brings on forgiveness, but the opposite: forgiveness draws out remorse – not as a *condition* for finding freedom, but as a *result* of an overwhelming experience. It is in this moment that guilt becomes happy, for it has found its liberator: “Wave upon wave gushes out of you inexhaustible, ever-flowing, billows of water and blood ... rushing over the deserts of guilt, enriching overabundantly, overflowing every heart that receives it, far surpassing every desire.”<sup>10</sup>

## Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, “Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority,” in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell et al. (Routledge, 1992), 3–66.
2. Jacques Derrida, *Pardonneur: L’impardonnable et l’impréscriptible* (Galilée, 2005), 70.
3. Jacques Derrida, “On Forgiveness,” trans. Michael Hughes, in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London & New York: Routledge, 2001), 32–36. See also Derrida, “Das Jahrhundert der Vergebung: Verzeihen ohne Macht – unbedingt und jenseits der Souveränität,” interview by Michel Wieviorka, in *Lettre internationale* 48 (Spring, 2000): 10–18.
4. Derrida, *Pardonneur*, 74–75.
5. Vladimir Jankélévitch, “Schuld und Vergebung,” in *Sinn und Form: Beiträge zur Literatur* 50, no. 3 (1998): 378.

6. Aurelius Augustinus, *Enarratio in Psalmos*, 110 (109), 1.
7. Søren Kierkegaard, "Love Hides the Multiplicity of Sins," in *Taten der Liebe* (1847), GW 19 (1966), 309ff.
8. Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione Dei* 4,13, 5,18, in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Arthur J. Banning, 2001), 685–687.
9. *The Roman Missal, Third Edition* (ICEL, 2010).
10. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Heart of the World*, trans. Erasmo S. Leiva (Ignatius Press, 1979), 153.



Hanna-Barbara Gerl-Falkovitz is professor emeritus of philosophy at Dresden University and head of EUPHR (European Institute for Philosophy and Religion) at Hochschule Heiligenkreuz. Her book on forgiveness is titled *Verzeihung des Unverzeihlichen? Ausflüge in Landschaften der Schuld und der Vergebung* (2013)

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## Thy Mercy Free

Hymn by Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Out of the depths we cry to thee.  
Lord, hear us, we implore thee.  
Bend down thy gracious ear to us.  
Let our prayer come before thee!  
On our misdeeds in mercy look.  
O deign to blot them from thy book,  
And let us come before thee.

*So let thy people hope in thee,  
And they shall find thy mercy free,  
And thy redemption plenteous.*

Thy sov'reign grace and boundless love  
Show thee, O lord forgiving.  
Our purest thoughts and deeds but prove  
Sin in our heart is living.  
None guiltless in thy sight appear.

All who approach thy throne must fear,  
And humbly trust thy mercy.

*So let thy people hope in thee,  
And they shall find thy mercy free,  
And thy redemption plenteous.*

Thou canst be merciful while just.  
This is our hope's foundation.  
In thy redeeming grace we trust.  
O grant us thy salvation.  
Upheld by thee we stand secure.  
Thy word is firm, thy promise sure,  
And we rely upon thee.

*So let thy people hope in thee,  
And they shall find thy mercy free,  
And thy redemption plenteous.*

Like those who watch for midnight's hour  
To hail the dawning morrow,  
We wait for thee, we trust thy pow'r,  
Unmoved by doubt or sorrow.  
So let thy people hope in thee,  
And they shall find thy mercy free,  
And thy redemption plenteous.

*So let thy people hope in thee,  
And they shall find thy mercy free,  
And thy redemption plenteous.*

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## There's a Wideness in God's Mercy

by Frederick William Faber (1814-1863)

There's a wideness in God's mercy  
like the wideness of the sea;  
there's a kindness in God's justice,  
which is more than liberty.  
There is welcome for the sinner,  
and more graces for the good;  
there is mercy with the Savior;  
there is healing in his blood.

There is no place where earth's sorrows  
are more felt than up in heaven;  
there is no place where earth's failings  
have such kindly judgment given.  
There is plentiful redemption  
in the blood that has been shed;  
there is joy for all the members  
in the sorrows of the Head.

For the love of God is broader  
than the measure of the mind;  
and the heart of the Eternal  
is most wonderfully kind.  
If our love were but more faithful,  
we should trust God's every word;  
and our life would be thanksgiving  
for the goodness of the Lord.

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## God Calls Sinners to Make Them Saints

*the Lord can transform our weakness into strength*

by Jeanne Kun

How often God chooses the most improbable people to move forward his purposes! A cowardly Jonah fled from God's commission to preach to the Ninevites (Jonah 1:1-3). Israel's great King David committed adultery (2 Samuel 11:2-5). Again and again God has manifested his power by transforming weakness into strength and sinners into saints. And so God chose a brash fisherman to become his instrument to "catch" men and women for his kingdom (Luke 5: 10). For Simon Peter, what began with the invitation to become "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19) would result in the spreading of Jesus' message far beyond the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

Simon BarJona, that is, son of Jona or John (Matthew 16:17; John 1:42; 21:15), and his brother Andrew were originally from the village of Bethsaida on the northeast side of the Sea of Galilee (John 1:44). At some point they moved to Capernaum on the lake's northwestern shore, where Simon lived with his wife and in-laws (Mark 1:29-30). It's likely that he ran one of the commercial fishing cooperatives that flourished then around the Sea of Galilee (also known as Lake Gennesaret) and sold their catch to local salters and to wholesalers in Jerusalem. Famous throughout the Roman Empire, Galilee's fisheries generated a prosperous export trade.

Now Galilee was astir with the extraordinary deeds of a young rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, who was going about the region declaring, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe in the

gospel” (Mark 1:14-15). One day while Jesus was preaching to the crowd that had gathered near the lake to hear him – so Luke recounted vividly, perhaps drawing on the disciples’ own memories – he used Simon’s fishing boat as a “floating pulpit.” When he ceased teaching, Jesus told Simon, “Put out into the deep and let dawn your nets for a catch” (Luke 5:1-4).

### *At your word*

Simon Peter was an experienced fisherman who knew his business well. He had worked unsuccessfully the whole night – the best time for net fishing – and didn’t think that he’d catch anything now. Nonetheless, he did as Jesus directed, saying, “At your word I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5).

Simon’s obedience was remarkably rewarded as he took in a great shoal of fish. So huge was the catch that the nets were breaking, and he beckoned to his partners’ boat for help (Luke 5:6-7). Overwhelmed and astonished, Simon “fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord’” (5:8). In his study of the apostles entitled *The Twelve*, C. Bernard Ruffin wrote of the fishermen’s reaction “Peter’s awe and that of his companions James and John was so immense that it bordered on fear. They knew the sea well enough to know that there was no natural explanation for their extraordinary catch.” A devout Jew, Simon Peter “realized that he was in the presence of a higher being and felt totally inadequate,” added Ruffin.

### *Peter’s fears and failings*

But Jesus calmed Peter’s fears – “Do not be afraid” (5:10) – and seemed to simply ignore Peter’s declaration that he was a sinful man. When Jesus called, Simon and his fishing partners left everything – the fresh catch of fish, their boats and nets, even their families. In following Jesus, they entered into a unique personal relationship with him as his disciples and began to participate in his mission.

The miraculous draught of fish was only one of the remarkable experiences that Simon Peter shared with his Lord. Peter, James, and John made up Jesus’ intimate circle of followers and were present at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8), the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:51-56), and Jesus’ prayer at Gethsemane (Mark 14:33-42). Additional events in the gospels show Peter as a man of great love and loyalty, but also one with very human failings. He was the first to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, and Jesus entrusted to this “rock” the keys of the kingdom (Matthew 16:13-19). But that didn’t mean that Peter understood the Lord: Appalled at Jesus’ prediction of his passion and death, Peter cried, “God forbid, Lord!” and Jesus sharply corrected him (16:21-23).

By nature Peter was bold and confident, proud and outspoken. He frequently acted impetuously, as when he exclaimed, “Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water” (Matthew 14:28). “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death,” he rashly boasted (Luke 22:33). Then he was quick to reverse his brash assertion under pressure, claiming, “I do not know the man” (Matthew 26:72). Indeed, a fearful Peter denied knowing Jesus not only once but three times. Art historian Sr. Wendy Beckett wrote of Peter’s fall:

“Will he lose all heart, perhaps even kill himself, as Judas did (another man wracked by grief)? But while Judas felt only remorse, which consumed itself in pointless repining, Peter feels contrition, a healing sorrow that will lead to repentance and a change of heart. (Sister Wendy’s Nativity)

### *Accepting the grace to pick ourselves up*

When the cock crowed and Jesus looked at him (Luke 22:60-61), Peter realized again – as he had earlier in Galilee – that he was a sinful man. But he also knew that Jesus loved him unconditionally, and his humility

saved him from despairing of forgiveness. We can learn from Peter to face our sins and failings humbly and cling to the Lord: “Peter shows us how to respond to our inevitable stumbles and falls along the way: by accepting the grace to pick ourselves up, stick close to Jesus, and exchange self-reliance for trust in God” (Louise Perrotta, “From Fisherman to Friend of God”), After the resurrection, Jesus encountered Peter again at the Sea of Galilee. There the risen Lord provided his fishermen – disciples with another wondrous haul of fish (John 21:1-14). There too he gently probed the heart of the man who had denied him, three times asking “you love me?” and calling from his humbled friend a new declaration of love. Accepting Peter's affirmations – “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you” – Jesus entrusted to him the work of shepherding his flock: “Feed my lambs....Tend my sheep” (21:15-17).

Filled with the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter proclaimed the gospel far and wide and cared for the fledging church. During the final years of his life, the chief apostle – “the rock” – headed the Christian community in Rome and, true to his master's call to the end, was martyred there during the reign of the emperor Nero. Even with his imperfections, Peter faithfully fulfilled the commission Jesus had given him.

### *God wants to transform our weakness into strength*

Becoming a follower of Jesus led Simon Peter on many journeys, but the most significant one was, as author Louise Perrotta noted, “his inner journey of transformation from. . .one who was convinced of his own strength to one who learned that he could only please the Lord as he learned to draw strength from Jesus, his beloved Master.” We are called to be disciples of the same master as Peter was –and we can do much for the Lord if we, like the fisherman-apostle, acknowledge that we are not perfect and rely on the Holy Spirit at work in us.



Jeanne Kun is a noted author and a senior woman leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. This article is excerpted from [My Lord and My God: A Scriptural Journey with the Followers of Jesus](#) by Jeanne Kun (Copyright © 2004 by The Word Among Us Press). Used with permission.

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## Hearing God in Suffering *How to Live a Dying Life*

by Sam Williamson

I had a high school friend whose life overflowed with compassion. The rest of us were obsessed with college-prep, extra-curricular activities, and jobs. But he, like a lion, could sniff out a wounded schoolmate from a thousand yards. And like a lamb, he sat with them in their grief.

One day we heard a lecture on handling pain. Most of the class was indifferent—bored even—but my friend listened quietly with fixed attention. My preppy class asked how to deal with a poor score on a college-entry exam; my friend wondered how he could cheer a suicidal sibling.

My friend suffered from cerebral palsy. Everyday his infirmity slapped him in the face, and every night throbbing muscles threatened his sleep.

His walk was awkward, his dialog at times incomprehensible, his body wracked with pain; while his mind remained sharp. But mid-day waiters asked me what “he” wanted for lunch; classmates overlooked him for team sports; and the difficulty of his spastic speech meant few people invited him for an evening dinner. Yet he always sought out others in sorrow.

Oswald Chambers observed that, “Suffering burns up a lot of shallowness in a person.”

### **Why do we resent it?**

We all know a few of our “foibles”: we are easily offended when corrected, we talk more than we listen, we barely know how to spell “joy” (much less live it), and past conversations consume us: “If only I had said ‘X’ instead of ‘Y.’”

We wrestle with our anxiety, condescension, and insensitivity. And they pin us to the mat. We chase self-improvement mostly to avoid the humiliation of looking stupid, uncaring, and high-maintenance. Failures drive us to avoid more sorrow at any cost.

We want healing *from* suffering; but Scripture says we get healing only *through* suffering.

God uses sorrows as spiritual chemotherapy, poisoning cancerous cells so that healthy cells can thrive. “He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity” (Job 36:15).

We avoid passages like that.

## **To live a dying life**

Jesus is called a man of sorrows, and to follow him is a walk of sorrows. Through them, we meet God. The way of Jesus is the road to Calvary, planting daily our crosses, as little by little the cancerous cells perish, and as little by little his life in us takes root. In our sorrows, we begin to discover true joy.

The way of Jesus is to live a dying life.

Each new sunrise screams of brutalities, ethnic cleansing, sexual carnage, heartbreaking divorce, rejection, and loneliness. What kind of God do we want? A God indifferent to suffering, exempt and untouched? Or a God so moved with compassion at the slaughter of his people that he enters creation to absorb into himself the anguish of a heartbroken world?

## **God's voice in our affliction**

Our experiences of loneliness and pain leave us feeling barren and empty, joyless and wasted; but it is precisely in times of wounded-ness that God speaks to us:

The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;  
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;  
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,  
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone. (Edward Shillito)

Rather than flee agonies, let's seek his voice in the heartbreaks of our sorrows; if we are rejected, hear him whisper that he was discarded so we can be cherished; in our loneliness, hear his pledge that he was forgotten so we will be treasured; in the aches of our withering bodies, hear his shout that we are nearly home.

The same sun that hardens clay also softens wax. Which will we be? Will the sufferings of life turn us callous and harsh, or will we let the blood-soaked lashes of Jesus speak to our wounds?

Like my high school friend, let us stumble awkwardly into a world of anguish, anointing the griefs of others with the balm of a wounded God. Let us live a dying life.

Sam

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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.beliefs-of-the-heart.com](http://www.beliefs-of-the-heart.com), and can be reached at [Sam@BeliefsOfTheHeart.com](mailto:Sam@BeliefsOfTheHeart.com).

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## What Is the Sound of God's Voice When We Sin?

by Sam Williamson

I once told a friend of a recurring temptation of mine. Over the next month, he shared my secret with a dozen other friends, spicing up the tale with the fib that I had *yielded* to the temptation—even though I hadn't. His betrayal shocked me. I skipped several lunch and dinner appointments, unsure who had heard and what they thought.

His disclosure also angered me. I obsessed over his treachery: *How could he have divulged my secret temptation? And why worsen my shame with the sneering proclamation I had done it! I would never have betrayed a friend like that.*

One day, as I fumed over his relational-adultery, I sensed God's voice speak into my seething self-pity: *Sam, why are you so angry?* I thought the answer obvious: *My friend had stabbed me in the back!* Then I remembered a verse:

“I tell you, when one sinner repents, there is joy among the angels of God.” (Luke 15:10)

I thought, *Sure, I suppose there would be joy in heaven if this jerk (I mean, friend) repented. His public confession might even bring me a bit of joy here on earth.*

And I sensed God say, “I'm not talking about his sin; I'm talking about *yours*.”

**But we hate to admit our own wrongs**

What's so bad about what I did? My friend *actively* told people of my faults, I only *thought* about his.

But my thinking was equally active. I wholeheartedly imagined friends discovering his duplicity, and I visualized his humiliation. I poked pins in my mental image of him, and I caricatured him: he hadn't just broken faith, he was *faithless*; he hadn't just lied, he was a *liar*.

Imagining his crimes was like enjoying a feast. I savored every mental morsel. I relished each thought. The very idea of his eventual discovery tasted like desert.

A recent Facebook post claimed that Christians no longer need to repent. The writer said, "We have already died to sin [Rom. 6:2]. So how can a dead man repent?"

But when we reject personal repentance, we reject a chance to hear God's voice.

### **What does God's voice sound like when we sin?**

We tend to think God speaks only to the Mother Teresa's of this world. But that notion is just false. Think of Adam and Eve's first sin of all time. Every evil you've ever seen or experienced—every rape, betrayal, ethnic-cleansing, and marginalization—resulted from their action.

But God didn't send an avenging angel to wipe them out. He didn't stew over their betrayal nor simmer in his wrath. Instead, God came to the Garden for conversation.

Before that first sin, we see God speaking to himself ("Let us make man in our image") and giving direction ("You can eat of any tree but one"). After their world-changing sin, we see God initiating conversation with a question: "Adam and Eve, where are you?" It's the pattern of God, pursuing the lost us with kind questions:

- He asks Cain, "Where is your brother?" after Cain murdered Abel;
- He asks Job, "Where were you when I formed the earth?" after Job doubts God's justice;
- And he asks Jonah, "Are you right to be so angry?" as he smoldered in self-pity.

What does God's voice sound like when we sin? Invitational. He seeks a divine dialogue with us even when we stumble.

### **We hear his voice then join the party**

Jesus tells of a shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep to look for the one stupid sheep that ran away. He concludes: "I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

Our repentance ignites a feast of celebration in heaven.

We don't need to wait for personal perfection before we hear God's voice. We need only be willing to listen as God ask us, "Where are you?" and "Why are you so angry?"

When we admit, "I'm stewing on the wrongs of others," and "I care more for the world's praise than yours,"

we begin to participate in this divine dialogue, and we sit down to a divine dinner.

Maybe we'll see that friend who wronged us; together we can toast to our own stupidity.

Sam

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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.beliefs-of-the-heart.com](http://www.beliefs-of-the-heart.com), and can be reached at [Sam@BeliefsOfTheHeart.com](mailto:Sam@BeliefsOfTheHeart.com).

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CHALLENGES IN LIVING TOGETHER AS COMMUNITY



## Standing Firm to the End

by Tom Caballes

***“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.”***

***- Ephesians 6:13 ESV***

Standing is a position of attention, alertness, and vigilance. It is not a posture of rest or relaxation where we can put our guards down. It is easy and convenient to ‘spiritually slouch’ and that is when we are most vulnerable. Paul is saying we should stand firm – because we are at war. The onslaught of the enemy is all around us. *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* [1 Peter 5:8] We are under attack – why? Because Jesus has won the war through His death and resurrection. We are on the winning side. The enemy is determined to undermine what Jesus has done. He knows he is losing and wants bring as many people as he can down with him. We on the other hand, are soldiers fighting for the cause of Jesus, for our own souls and others’. As the song asks: Are you sure of your calling? Will you fight for Jesus the King?

### ***So How Do You Stand Firm to the End?***

1. Are you ready to die for Jesus – daily and through martyrdom? If not, now is the time to do it. Look also at your long term commitments and relationships. Have you made permanent decisions about

them?

2. Grow in “spiritual endurance.” Trials, hardships and temptations are opportunities for your faith to get stronger. *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. [James 1:2-4]* Make the most out of your trials, for they will surely come as long as you live. Let those challenges in life bring you closer to God.
3. Grow in forbearing with one another in love. Your brothers and sisters in the community, your spouse, your parents and your children are not perfect – and neither are you. Differences, disagreements, and misunderstandings are part of relationships – and so should love, forbearance and forgiveness be as well.
4. The enemy’s goal is one thing – for you to give up. It may mean giving up on your faith, commitments, and relationships. The enemy has many weapons to do this – lies, discouragement, works of the flesh, misunderstanding, and so on. Financial problems and relationship difficulties are prime areas where the enemy works. Know the plans of the enemy and avoid them. Know your own weaknesses as well.
5. Standing firm, although mainly a defensive posture, also means we take the offensive. In Ephesians 6, there are two weapons that can attack the enemy: the shoes of readiness to share the gospel and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. You need to share Jesus to those around you who don’t know Him. You need to love the Scriptures – imbibe and live out what it says. Live under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. For many people, you will be the only Gospel they will be familiar with. Be the credible 5th Gospel to those around you. Aim to rescue those around you from the clutches of the enemy!

### Other Scripture references:

1. *As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry. [2 Timothy 4:5]*
2. *Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. [1 Corinthians 16:13]*
3. *Other references: Romans 8:31-39; Ephesians 6: 11-19; Colossians 3:12-14; Revelations 21:7.*

### For personal reflection or group sharing

1. Where do I see myself in the spiritual war that is raging on? Am I on God’s army or just an observer?
2. Am I a credible 5th gospel to those around me? In what ways can I be a better witness?



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.



## The Teen Years - Blessing or Cursing?

by Johann Christoph Arnold



A noted speaker and writer on marriage, parenting, and end-of-life issues, Johan Christophe Arnold is a senior pastor of the [Bruderhof](#), a movement of Christian communities. With his wife, Verena, he has counseled thousands of individuals and families over the last forty years. This article is excerpted from (c) [Plough](#) 2016. Used with permission.

There is a saying from Mark Twain that typifies the attitude many adults have toward teenagers: “When a child turns twelve you should put him in a barrel, nail the lid down and feed him through a knothole. When he turns sixteen, plug the hole!”

The teen years are often the most difficult in a person’s life. They involve intense struggles, feelings, and changes, many of which teenagers have a hard time verbalizing. Yet I believe that despite the turbulence of adolescence, these years can be a truly wonderful time. It may be a difficult period of life, but why should it be an especially negative one? I wonder if psychologists, sociologists, and the media have so overemphasized the downside of adolescence that today’s youth cannot help living out the stereotypes put on them?

### **An age of opportunity**

Teen years are an age of opportunity instead of a test of parental endurance. Besides, there is something about youth that we adults need to learn from. It is often young people who push for real changes.

We have seen this time and again all over the world: the White Rose movement in Hitler Germany, for example, or the young people who demonstrated in Tiananmen Square in China, or the growing movement of activism against war, racism, and environmental exploitation here in the United States. Actually, the youth of our nation are not being given enough credit for the many positive things they have done and are doing, especially in light of all the outside pressures they have to deal with.

But all teenagers also struggle with certain emotional, physical, intellectual, and social challenges. Their internal worlds consist of a jumble of tensions: emotional highs and lows, a desire to be left alone and to be included, a need for freedom and a longing

for greater responsibility, a feeling of invincibility and a fear of failure, questioning authority and the need to fit in, submitting to peer pressure on the one hand and adult authority on the other.

### **Extra-big hearts for young people**

For this reason parents and teachers need to have extra-big hearts for young people. The battle around them, as well as in them, rages in full force. Very few teenagers pass through these years without at least a few bumps and bruises. Many are wounded for life. But this is all the more reason to see it as a privilege to be with youth: to work with them, to share their joys and struggles, to be a friend to them, and to guide them to what they are meant to become.

Teens share most easily with adults who have an understanding and acceptance of themselves. By revealing who you are, by sharing about the struggles you have had, and by reflecting on your own life experiences, you are inviting the young person under your care to do the same. Teenagers appreciate it when an adult is candid and up-front with them. For a teen, honest sharing means “I trust you enough to tell you the whole story.”

This doesn't mean they will automatically share what they are thinking and feeling. Teenagers in general resent having to communicate on demand. It is rarely helpful to say: “Why don't you ever share with us? Why won't you say something?” This only makes teens clamp up even more. Our role is to express care and interest in their lives, and to do so through deeds, not by peppering them with questions.

### **Humility to reach a teenager's heart**

Also, a good dose of humility can go a long way to reaching a teenager's heart. Teens need parents and adults who will admit their own limitations and say they are sorry. Teens need to see that adults are human. One young woman wrote to me:

Most kids growing up naturally think that their parents are “the best.” At least this is how it was for me. They knew best and that's why they had the final say. But when I got into my teen years, wow, everything turned upside down. I became very rebellious and was determined to fight my parents tooth and nail. The day came, however, when I realized that my parents were not perfect people. When I realized that my parents were just like me, that they had their own problems to deal with, that they made mistakes and wrong decisions and would also say they were sorry, my relationship with them began to relax. I could start to open up. It wasn't just them against me.

I am glad young people question things. And they tend to question everything – especially if it's something Mom and Dad hold to. They often think they know it all, and thus it is tempting to try and put them in their place. Granted, it is not always easy to determine if a child's rebellion is serving the cause of good or of evil, and teenagers still have a lot to learn. But we can kill our relationship with a teenage son or daughter – and teachers can erect instant walls between themselves and their students – if we fail to really listen to them. We should never talk at young people, but with them.

There is nothing worse for a young person than to be treated like a kid. When we treat a young person like an intelligent, thoughtful human being, that teen will eventually respond and most likely start acting like one! Out of love for young people, we need to do everything we can to help them formulate their thinking and express their ideas.

### **Listen non-judgmentally**

As teens open up, it's important to listen non-judgmentally. This doesn't mean expressing agreement. It only means that you are eager to know what they are thinking and feeling and that you don't get all worked up in response to some outlandish or contradictory remark.

Adolescents are thinking about life, questioning and processing the values that have been instilled in them. They often try on different ideas, much like the different clothes they wear. The feeling that “now I am an adult and I can do it better than you” plays a bigger role than we realize. They are in the process of formulating their own opinions and ideas. They want to become their own persons and for this reason will often gravitate towards viewpoints that differ from their parents and the adults around them. In fact, they often would rather have their own opinion than be right. This should not be read as a sign of rejection.

### **Keep an open relationship with our teens**

The main thing is to keep an open relationship with our teens. If they feel understood, valued, supported, and trusted, they will respond – even if begrudgingly at times – to our guidance. To nurture a relationship doesn't mean we forgo speaking a straight word when it is needed or hesitate to set clear boundaries where necessary. In fact, despite complaints to the contrary, teenagers need and want limits. The issue is how best to set and enforce them. Teens, of course, will naturally push the limits. But clear boundaries communicate care and concern. Without rules and structure teenagers get the message that we adults do not love them or care about their well-being.

Again and again we need to find ways to let our teenagers know that we are there for them. We need to keep encouraging them. The word “encourage” comes from the French and literally means to give someone heart. Teenagers, like all people, need ten times more positive, supportive feedback than negative. Concentrate on their accomplishments, not on their failures.

### **Helping young people take up the challenge**

Harold Loukes, the Quaker educator, writes: “The young do not need to be preached at; they need to be given a task.” We need to entrust young people with meaningful responsibilities. They need to feel needed. Teenagers do better, and are happier, when they have useful and necessary tasks that demand something from them. They want to be counted on.

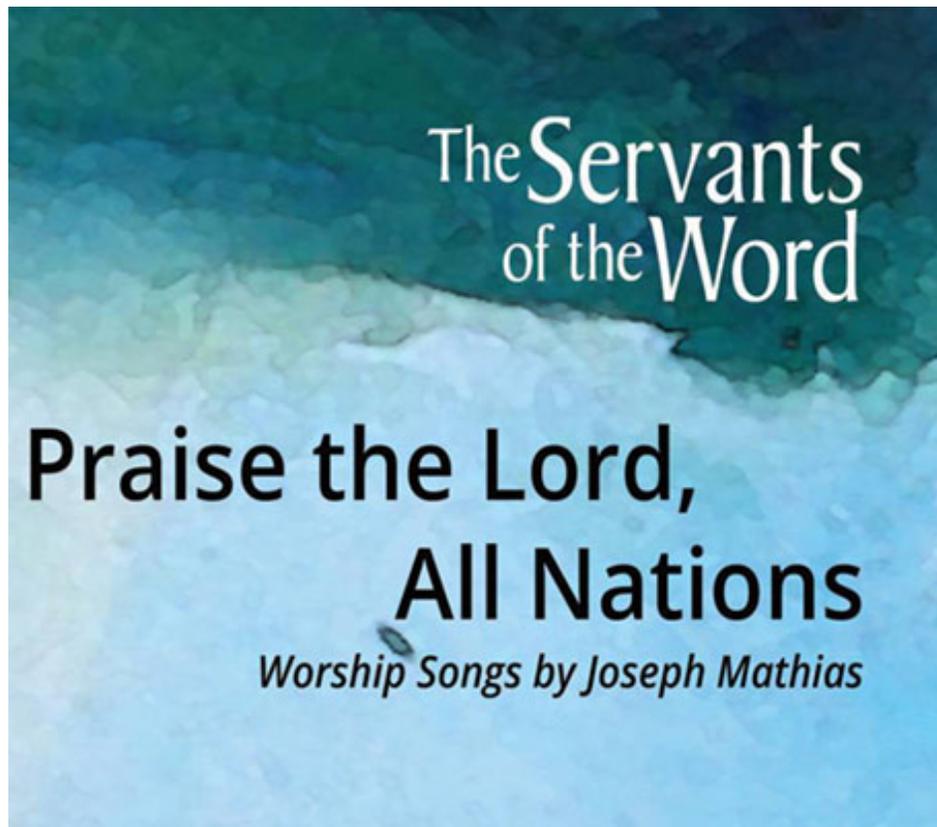
I will always be grateful for how my father kept pointing me to use every day to serve others; that my happiness depended not on what I could get out of life for myself but in considering others. Young people need to know that every seemingly tiny deed of love can have a tremendous ripple effect. An act of kindness, or standing up for one's convictions, adds goodness, instead of pain, to our world.

In my experience, young people will take up this challenge. It's not a matter of pressuring them to follow our path or of making choices for them so they will do “the right thing.” It's about helping them to see that only by turning to God and looking beyond themselves will their lives obtain true dignity and fulfillment.

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



## The Light Shines In the Darkness

a worship song by Joseph Mathias

Click to [listen](#) to an mp3 [audio clip](#) of the song

(c) Joseph Mathias

Album title: Praise the Lord, All Nations

Produced by The Servants of the Word

The song, *The Light Shines in the Darkness*, is the lead song for the album, [Praise the Lord, All Nations](#). The main theme of the album is Christ as the Light to the Nations. Light is a symbol of the knowledge of God, which is brought to us in Jesus his Son. Our goal in [University Christian Outreach](#) is to bring people to this knowledge of God, which draws them out of futility into purpose and hope. These songs anticipate the day when the people of every nation will come to know the Lord, and find their fulfilment and hope in him.

Joseph describes how the album of worship songs came about: The songs on this album were written for use during times of worship and praise in our campus ministry and life together in Christian

community. In arranging them with a group of musicians and singers, we sought a predominantly acoustic aesthetic, with parts that were beautiful without being self-consciously ornate - the goal being not to draw attention to the music itself, but to the Lord to whom it is offered. We hope you enjoy listening to them; but even more, that they will help and inspire you to pray and worship the Lord with joy and thanksgiving.

If you would like to view the album and to purchase a copy for download visit the online site [Praise the Lord, All Nations](#). You can also purchase the music CD from [Tabor House](#). [Sheet music](#) for "Praise the Lord All Nations" is available as PDF.

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Joseph Mathias is a gifted song writer and musician. He studied music composition at Interlochen Arts Academy and graduated with a degree in Russian Language and Literature from the University of Michigan in 2007. Joseph is a member of the [Servants of the Word](#), an international, ecumenical brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He serves full time in [University Christian Outreach](#) at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

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



*The Return of the Prodigal Son*, painted in 1669,  
now in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia

## ***The Prodigal Son* by Rembrandt**

- Master Painter and Storyteller

by Don Schwager

Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606 – 1669) lived in the Reformation era in the Dutch Protestant region of the Northern Netherlands (Holland). In 1631 he moved to Amsterdam and set up his studio and home there. He excelled as a portrait painter. He produced more than 300 paintings, a little under 300 etchings (prints made from engraved metal plates), and more than 2,000 drawings.

Rembrandt was a master storyteller. Whether painting portraits, scenes from daily life, or stories from the Bible, he delved into the mind and soul of his subjects. He gave flesh to spirit. For his biblical subjects he often used models from the Jewish population of Amsterdam.

A key characteristic of his work is his use of chiaroscuro, a strong and dramatic interplay of light and shadow. For many of his subjects, the intense light emanating from their faces seems to come more from within rather than from any external source. His style is lively and dramatic, devoid of rigid formality. He painted saint and sinner alike with deeply felt compassion, and irrespective of wealth, status, or age. His wife Saskia, his son Titus, and later his common-law wife Hendrickje, often figured prominently in his paintings, many of which had mythical, biblical, or historical themes.

In his painting *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, completed in 1669, Rembrandt focused on the dramatic welcoming home of the wayward son by the merciful father. Here we see at once the dramatic moment of Jesus' parable: the repentant son who humbly kneels as an unworthy beggar seeking mercy and the compassionate father whose outstretched arms convey the warm embrace of fatherly love and pardon. The elder son stands back in the shadows, staring in disbelief and holding a knife, a suggestive image of anger, resentment, and a desire to inflict punishment.



The dramatic light emanating from the father's face and hands conveys the warmth of redemptive love – an unconditional love that pardons, heals, and restores. Henri Nouwen, a Dutch-born Catholic priest and author of 40 books on the spiritual life, spent several days in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia to study, reflect, and draw out the spiritual significance of the painting. Here is an excerpt from his book, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Meditation on Fathers, Brothers, and Sons* (Doubleday, 1992):

"The longer I look at 'the patriarch', the clearer it becomes to me that Rembrandt has done something quite different from

letting God pose as the wise old head of a family. It all began with the hands. The two are quite different. The father's left hand touching the son's shoulder is strong and muscular. The fingers are spread out and cover a large part of the prodigal son's shoulder and back. I can see a certain pressure, especially in the thumb. That hand seems not only to touch, but, with its strength, also to hold. Even though there is a gentleness in the way the father's left hand touches his son, it is not without a firm grip.

"How different is the father's right hand! This hand does not hold or grasp. It is refined, soft, and very tender. The fingers are close to each other and they have an elegant quality. It lies gently upon the son's shoulder. It wants to caress, to stroke, and to offer consolation and comfort."

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> See Gospel reflection on the [Parable of the Prodigal Son](#) by Don Schwager

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## An Unstoppable Force?

### A Review of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*

by Michael Shaughnessy

#### **Epic Heroes**

*Star Wars: The Force Awakens* is full of magnificent themes: good and evil, faith, fatherhood, and herosim. If you see the movie, get the most from it: discuss it well!

The Star Wars franchise has not been a culture changer but it continues as a cultural carrier. It has followed the lines of the epic myths: the hero receives a call in a desolate (or desert) time or place – like a prophet called in the wilderness. He leaves his home in response and gets trained by a mentor to do what he must. He faces severe trials, and in the end, he emerges triumphant. That story-line is a compelling one, whether it is the story of Hercules, Moses, King Arthur, The Lord of the Rings, or countless sports movies. These stories live because they inspire dedication.

But who is the epic hero of *The Force Awakens*? Rey doesn't vanquish her foe. Finn is only a half-hearted convert. Leia Organa does nothing more heroic than admitting she didn't handle her son or his father very well. Poe, the pilot, finishes the destruction of the Starkiller, but it was a job Chewbacca and Han began. Han Solo, the reluctant, spontaneous, brash, lucky, funny, sardonic hero – Harrison Ford playing Harrison Ford – is the hero who dies in battle. But maybe Han had to die before the next hero could rise.

#### **The Nature of Evil**

In *The Force Awakens*, the evil of the dark side mainly gets conveyed superficially: deep bass voices, Dracula capes, and the Nazi based themes of storm troopers, red and black color schemes, and a massive staged rally.

The main goal of the First Order is simply that it wants order.

The film passes over a great chance to display the nature of evil when Finn merely reports that all storm troopers were kidnapped and indoctrinated as children. Imagine that horror depicted.

Kylo Ren has the potential to be a master villain. He is a Darth-Vader-wannabe with an anger problem, but his pure choice for evil through killing his father begs us to ask for the deeper cause to be revealed. He will need iconic music like Vader's Imperial March before he will be deeply, impressively, truly evil.

### **An Unstoppable Force?**

The Force remains a mystery of faith. Only the select believe. Most people in the film are agnostic. Periodically the Force goes out of balance toward the dark side. Fortunately, the good guys always show up with spontaneity and panache to bring balance back to the force. This is when all can see that the Force is the real power. Other weapons, powers, and technologies ultimately fail against it.

Interestingly, those who exercise the Force are all "orphans": Anakin, Luke, Leia, Rey, and Kylo Ren.

### **The "Snide-Side" of the Force**

(The Kairos staff poke some fun about the movie.)

Snoke, the Supreme Leader, is a cross between the Wizard of Oz and Gollum.

Carrie Fischer is better as a princess than a general.

So, how does Rey instantly master the force with no experience of it, no mentor for it, no training in it, and no understanding of it?

Rey has a Jedi distaste for hand holding, but like Anakin she might not master the romantic side of the Force...

R2D2 remains the most intriguing Star Wars character and C3PO is an all-time great sidekick. BB8 is an orange and white beach-ball with a bug-eyed fruit bowl on top and the person-ality of a child.

This was Mark Hamill's best performance so far.



Michael Shaughnessy is the [Kairos](#) director for the Sword of the Spirit both in North America and Internationally. He is the editor of the [Kairos Youth Culture Newsletter](#). Kairos is an international federation of outreaches to high school, university and post university aged people.

A selection of poems from *Songs of Hunger*, by Sean O'Neill



(c) Kevin Carden

## WEATHERING

by Sean O'Neill

Strange how the wind will welter through the slow, gaunt trees,  
how rain will seek out meadows and water will freeze,

how the hail finds the weak points in the city's song  
and the hot sun weakens the mighty and the strong.

I found tiresome tenants in the moods that dogged me,  
dark humors that came and when they left would dally

by the door, knocking loudly, begging to come in  
to debate my childhood, my merit and my sin.

But I am not inclined to death by slow degrees,  
to the constant carping or the droning reprise

of those bullyboys from the errors of my past,  
or the cool mantras of my youth that did not last.

All these fierce contraries will pile against my door.  
I will ignore the clamor and sink to the core

of the person I am, the sum of my many faults,  
my sore misperceptions, my many starts and halts,

the deceptions that I plied through turning seasons,  
and blank years, searching always for valid reasons

why my sentence should be lifted. The very breaths  
I take consume the power of those daily deaths,

till all the evil is destroyed and I am whole.  
Still, I ache for perfection of body and soul,

like a construction in brick that still needs pointing,  
or an old man who won't die without anointing.

And so, waiting in adverse weather, I will bless  
my days, instead of wasting what time I possess.

Suffering teaches the heart to reach for heaven  
to become the salt, the spark, the light, the leaven.

This poem by (c) Sean O'Neill is from [Songs of Hunger](#), a new collection of poems published in January 2016, available at [Amazon](#).

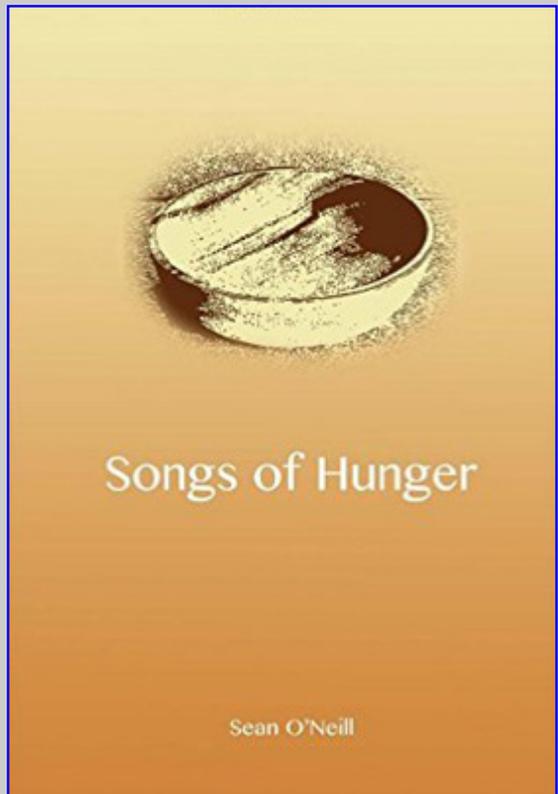
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Click below to read a selection of poems from *Songs of Hunger*, by Sean O'Neill

[ONE LIFE ONLY](#)

[WEATHERING](#)

## THE CROSS



Like great music, fine poetry has power that can infuse the soul, transform the mind, and transcend the mundane everyday experience of life with what is timeless and supreme.

*Songs of Hunger* is an exceptional collection of poems – rich in language, imagery, symbolism and breadth of thought, feeling, and place. Sean O’Neill is a poet of great skill and exceptional spirit. His poems take you on a quest of the soul in search of wholeness, healing, cleansing, and discovering a home for the restless heart. It is a journey of mercy and hope, love and faith in the One who paid the price that sets us free. You will find plenty here to feed and nourish both mind and spirit.

O’Neill has published five previous collection of poems. This book not only builds on the others – it soars to a new level of feeling and spirit, hope and joy.

- Don Schwager

See previous [poems](#) in past issues of *Living Bulwark*

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Sean O’Neill is originally from Glasgow, Scotland, and currently lives in Lansing, Michigan, USA. He has [published several books](#), including six novels, six books of poems, and a series of very helpful and instructive books on a beginner’s guide to writing, including [How to Write a Poem: A Beginner’s Guide](#).

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***Spiritual Warfare and Mission:***

***“Take the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God – Pray at all times in the Spirit” –  
Ephesians 6:17,18***

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2016

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***The Day Draws Near***

***“Let us encourage one another to love and good deeds – and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” – Heb. 10:24-25***

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***Listen to Him***

***“This is my Beloved Son, listen to Him” – Mark 9:7***

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***Forming Disciples – Building Communities***

***“Make disciples of all nations – teaching them to obey everything  
I have commanded you” – Matthew 28:19,20***

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***Communities United in Mission***

***“When the Holy Spirit has come upon you – you shall be my witnesses  
to the end of the earth” – Acts 1:8***

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2015

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### ***Jesus Christ – Hope for All Peoples***

***“He will cause justice to be victorious – and his name will be the hope of all the world”***

- Matthew 12:20,21 (NLT)

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### ***Christ’s Compelling Love***

***The love of Christ compels us...to live no longer for ourselves  
but for him who died for our sake and was raised*** -2 Cor. 5:14-15

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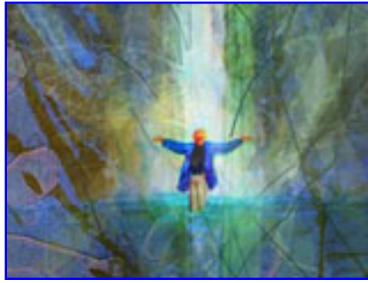
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### ***Love Unto Death***

***“And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their  
testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”*** (Revelation 12:11)

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***Baptized in the Holy Spirit***

***“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” – Luke 3:16***

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***God's Word Is Truth***

***“Father, sanctify them in your truth, your word is truth” – John 17:16***

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***Speak God's Word with Boldness***

***“When they had prayed... they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.” – Acts 4:31***

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2014

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### ***The Great Exchange***

*“If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation  
– the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” (2 Cor. 5:17)*

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### ***Saints and Sinners***

*“The wages of sin is death – but the free gift of God is  
eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23)*

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### ***Extending God's Kingdom on Earth***

*“This Good News of the kingdom will be proclaimed to the whole world  
as a witness to all the nations” (Matthew 24:14)*



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### ***The Fire of the Holy Spirit***

***“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16)***

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### ***Living Stones – Solid Foundations for Christian Community***

***“Come to the Lord Jesus, the Living Stone.. and like living stones  
be built into a spiritual house and holy priesthood” (1 Peter 2:4,5)***

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### ***Faith to Live By***

***“The life I now live... I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave his life for me” (Galatians 2:20)***



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***Jesus Christ – Hope for All Peoples***

***“He will cause justice to be victorious – and his name will be the hope of all the world”***

- Matthew 12:20,21 (NLT)

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2013

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***Call to Greatness***

***“I will show you a still more excellent way”***

***(1 Corinthians 12:31)***

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More of Him – Less of Me

***“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,  
if you have love for one another” (John 13:35)***



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***A Living Hope***

***“I am with you always, to the very end” (The Gospel of Matthew 28:20)***

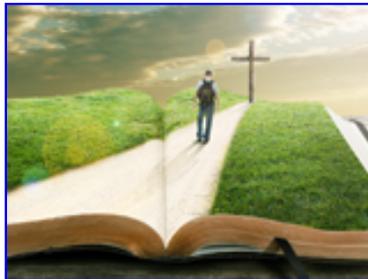


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***Sowers of the Word:***

***“Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!” (1 Corinthians 9:16)***



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***The Living Word of God:***

***“For the Word of God is living and active,  
sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12)***



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***Relationships in the Kingdom of God***

***“Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:50)***

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***The Great Exchange***

***“If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation – the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” (2 Cor. 5:17)***

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***Love and Friendship***

***A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity (Proverbs 17:17)***

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***Jesus Christ – Ruler of All***

***“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever” (Revelations 11:15)***

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