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Radiance

LIGHT SHINING IN THE DARKNESS.

(John 1:5)

TO BE QUEER
AND CATHOLIC

SEX & THE SINGLE
CATHOLIC GIRL

POWER & HUMILITY

A MONK'S GUIDE
TO TRUE REST

FAITH FOR FREE
THINKERS

**SHE
TRIUMPHED
OVER HER
TORTURERS**

VOL. 2, 2025



Many people think that to “convert” to a religion means to adopt a new, ready-made belief system. Catholic theology uses a more precise word to capture the experience of becoming a follower of Jesus: *metanoia*. *Metanoia* comes from Greek “to think again” or “to change one’s mentality or outlook.” Here are eight provocative reflections on Catholic *metanoia* that span sex, love, forgiveness, service, intellectual freedom, death, resilience, meditation, resting and the power of humility. We hope you find them packed with hope and renewal, the kind that comes from the power of *metanoia*.

— *Richard Wise*

RADIANCE

Published quarterly for searching minds and Catholic enquirers

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*Forgiveness beyond understanding:
the story of Saint Josephine Bakhita*

SHE TRIUMPHED OVER HER TORTURERS

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*In a world where hurt often calls for retribution, Saint Josephine Bakhita stands as a radiant example of a love that transcends suffering. Captured and enslaved as a child, she endured years of unimaginable abuse – yet found freedom not only in the courts but in her heart, choosing to forgive her captors. Her life is a testament to the healing power of faith, forgiveness, and love — an invitation to transform even our darkest wounds into a profound encounter with grace.*  
~~~~~

by *Harry Cooper*

Perhaps nothing is more unnatural than forgiving someone who has done evil to you. When we have been violated, when our dignity has been denied, when our minds and bodies have been degraded and abused - we experience this at a depth beyond articulation or explanation. And we naturally demand not just justice but retribution, violent retribution for the crimes committed against us.

And yet Christians are not only called to forgive those who do evil to us. We are commanded by God to love those who do evil to us. To a person who has suffered real and deep injustice, this appears not only a gross moral distortion but also

simply impossible. Even if we wanted to, how are we to forgive, when we are so full of righteous hate and fire?

St Josephine Bakhita provides us with an answer.

Born in 1869 in the Darfur region of Sudan, the eight-year-old Josephine was kidnapped and captured by Arab slave traders, marking the beginning of a decade of torture, degradation and abuse. She was bought and sold so many times that she forgot the name given to her by her parents. While the property of a Turkish general, Josephine had 144 patterns sliced into her skin, into which was poured salt and butter to ensure the scars remained visible.





A close-up of “Let the Oppressed Go Free,” a sculpture of Saint Josephine Bakhita by artist Timothy Schmalz which has been displayed on Saint Peter’s Square in Rome.

Her situation improved markedly when she was purchased by an Italian consul in 1883. After a few years, her owner moved her back to Italy to work as a nanny and in 1888, due to business obligations abroad, had her temporarily placed in a convent of the Canossian Sisters, a religious order of nuns focused on looking after the vulnerable.

It was during this stay that she first encountered Christianity and, as a result, asked to be baptised and confirmed. When her owner returned, Josephine refused to leave the convent. Her legal status as a slave was, the courts found, invalid and she was free to move on with her life. However, Josephine, of her own free will, chose to remain with the Canossian Sisters, becoming a novice in

1893. For the rest of her life, until her death in 1947, she remained with her sisters, known for the gentleness and care she showed to those around her.

Of the men and women who abused and tortured her, St Josephine Bakhita said the following shocking words:

“If I was to meet those slave raiders that abducted me and those who tortured me, I’d kneel down to them to kiss their hands, because, if it had not been for them, I would not have become a Christian and religious woman.”

To our modern ears, this may sound like madness. Evident-

ly, she was brainwashed or lying. However, for St Josephine, who had a real and ongoing encounter with the God of love and mercy, this was her reality. Madness? Yes, by the world’s standards, complete madness. But to a person who had spent decades in the loving embrace of her God, what other response to past suffering can there be?

St Josephine was grateful for all that had happened to her because, in the end, it had brought her into the arms of her Lord.

And while we may never be able to forgive those who have hurt us in the way that St Josephine Bakhita truly forgave those who hurt her, we may consider her example and pray for her assistance as we acknowledge and deeply nurse our own wounds ♦



How the sexual revolution has failed women

SEX AND THE SINGLE CATHOLIC GIRL

~~~~~  
*Famed costume designer Edith Head's "How to Dress for Success", though dated, gives advice on husband hunting which raises the question: have we truly progressed? Despite the sexual revolution's promises, dating apps and social norms often leave women dissatisfied. Louise Perry's "The Case Against the Sexual Revolution" argues that, in loosening sexual mores, we've tilted power toward men seeking quantity over quality. Meanwhile, Catholic teachings on marriage prioritises commitment, stability, and support, a framework that might better serve women's needs in the long run. Perhaps Edith wasn't entirely wrong after all.*  
~~~~~

by *Marie Moore*

While perusing the shelves of the local library a couple of months ago, I came across a book written by the famed costume designer Edith Head.

How to Dress for Success was the book's promising title. Here was the woman who had worked with nearly every Old Hollywood actress - winning eight Oscars for it - offering me advice. As someone fond of clothing and not adverse to a bit of success, I checked it out.

It quickly became clear that this was more rela-

tionship than fashion advice. I found entire chapters devoted to how to dress to get a husband, and how to dress him and your children once you have them. How quaint! The book was originally published in the 1960s, at the cusp of the sexual revolution but before its effects on dating and relationships had been felt. The tone is much more *Sense & Sensibility* than *Summer of Love*.

Initially I thought it took itself far too seriously. The husband-luring sections didn't exactly advise deception, but Edith does recommend much more

editing of one's personality than any contemporary agony aunt. If you find a man you want to become your husband, adopt his interests as your own, she says.

But why should a woman in search of a spouse be obliged to pretend to like outdoor sports or hang around business convention centres (two genuine examples from the book)? It all seemed so burdensome and unfair. Men did well out of marriage too, especially in this era when it often meant getting the services of a housekeeper and secretary in addition to companionship, yet what were these potential suitors doing while I was supposed to be buying hiking boots? Reading the book made me glad to be a young woman in the 2020s rather than the 1950s.

A New Kind of 'Freedom'—But for Whom?

And yet, do we really have it any better? Three generations into the sexual revolution, with all its social and technological changes, are young women generally more satisfied with what they need to do in order to get and maintain a long-term relationship?

Of course, not every woman wants one, but the regularity with which articles like 'The Best Dating Apps for Serious Relationships' (*Cosmopolitan*, June 2024) and 'The Best Dating Apps for Marriage' (*The Knot*, January 2024) appear suggests plenty do. So, how to snag a man in the 2020s?

The author and journalist Louise Perry would say that whatever progress we think we've made since social mores loosened and contraception and abortion became available is more of a mixed bag than we care to acknowledge. In her book *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution*, Perry argues that on the whole, women's interests have not been well served by the social changes brought about by these technologies.

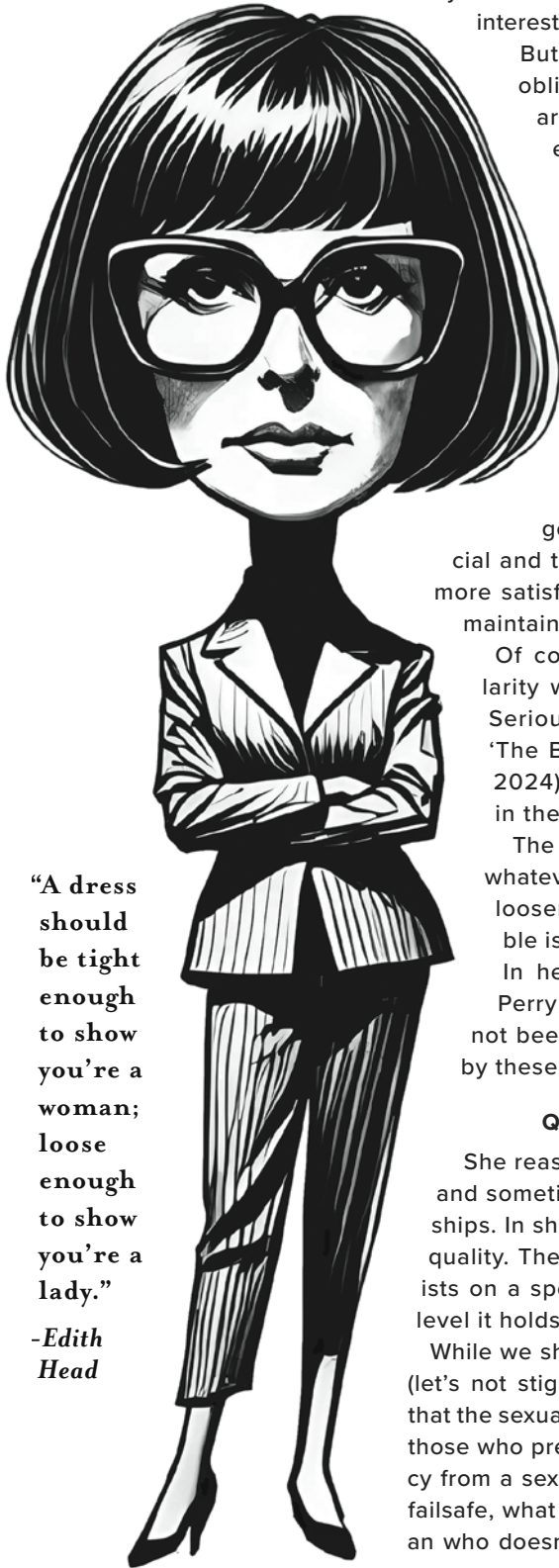
Quantity vs. Quality: What's Really on Offer?

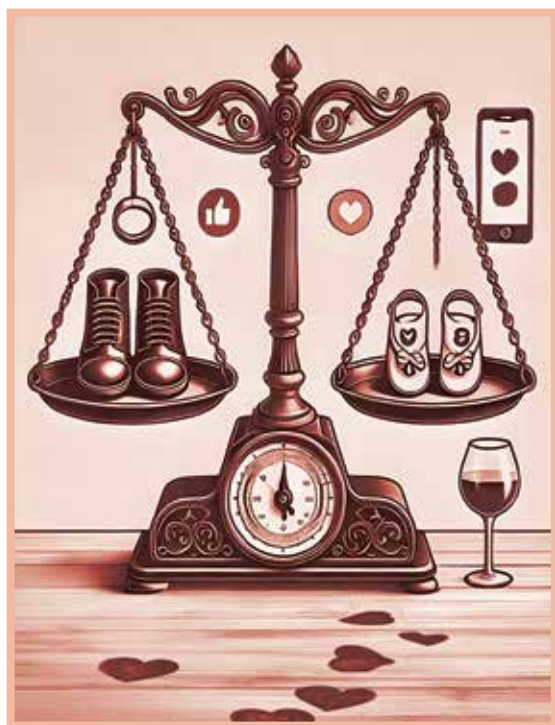
She reasons that men and women evolved to have different, and sometimes competing interests when it comes to relationships. In short, men tend towards quantity while women favour quality. These are generalisations and each individual case exists on a spectrum, but she demonstrates that at a population level it holds true.

While we should not favour a return to the morals of yesteryear (let's not stigmatise divorced and unwed mothers), Perry shows that the sexual revolution has swung the balance of power towards those who prefer quantity (mostly men). With little risk of pregnancy from a sexual encounter and abortion available as an ultimate failsafe, what good reason for saying no is left to the young woman who doesn't want to have sex with a man she is interested in

"A dress should be tight enough to show you're a woman; loose enough to show you're a lady."

-Edith Head





but only recently met? She could simply say no, but our decisions are never made in a vacuum and she knows that contemporary social norms would make her the odd one for refusing, rather than him for expecting. If she says no, someone else will say yes.

And so women do have sex with men they don't know particularly well, sometimes having met only once or twice, out of politeness and a fear of missing out as much as anything else. That doesn't mean they enjoy this aspect of modern dating though.

As Perry notes, the Me Too movement was revealing in that among the stories of coercive and criminal behaviour, we also heard women recount situations in which they felt uncomfortable with a (theoretically consenting) sexual encounter but did not see a way out.

As if to demonstrate her point, shortly after re-reading Perry's book I was seated on a bus one Saturday night near a trio of friends discussing their dating lives. None of them seemed particularly satisfied. One woman complained of unknowingly wasting three weeks on a guy who was cheating on his girlfriend with her. The sadder remark came from another woman, who reflected that, in a risky innovation, she now waits

for three dates before sleeping with a guy. She didn't used to, she explained, and would sleep with a guy on the first date because it was expected, but she eventually realised she didn't like how it made her feel.

This is obviously anecdotal evidence, but perhaps a society which presumes sex before a relationship has time to form is not really one that serves women's needs and desires?

Old Wisdom or Outdated Rules?

The Catholic Church has long known that traditional structures like marriage are the best way to protect women's interests. While historically women have borne the brunt of Christianity's stigmatisation of sex outside of marriage, the reality is that the risk of pregnancy and, before the modern welfare state, destitution, was uniquely ours.

The Church's insistence on marriage and the boundaries it places on sex mean that a woman is much less likely to find herself pregnant and alone. According to Catholic teaching, men are meant to have as much sexual activity before marriage as women, which is to say none. In this sense it arguably requires more of a sacrifice from the average man than woman.

We often frame the idea of the sexual revolution's benefits for women as fundamentally based on freedom. Reliable contraception and legal abortion freed women to have the sort of consequence-free sex men always enjoyed. The popular understanding of freedom as being synonymous with individual autonomy means that Christian teachings on relationships consequently seem at the very least unadventurous, if not outright restrictive. If one is looking for the freedom to have a wide variety of partners without the pretence of a relationship then that's true. If, on the other hand, one is looking for the conditions that would allow you to find a lifelong partner with whom to settle down and potentially have a family, then the Catholic Church's approach provides you with far more possibilities to do so.

Writing this piece, I was reminded that despite my borderline contempt for the sport now, for two weeks I once pretended to have an interest in football as an excuse to text a guy I liked about an international tournament. I ended up married to him a couple of years later, so perhaps Edith's advice isn't so far-fetched after all. ♦

Translating desire and the yearning for God

TO BE QUEER AND CATHOLIC

By delving into the delicate, often unspoken space where faith and desire intertwine, we discover how the heart's deepest yearnings can lead us toward God. Through the lens of queer experience and the poetic words of St. John of the Cross, we are invited to see longing not as something to overcome, but as a sacred path — a journey where human love reflects the ultimate divine love.

by **James Austen**

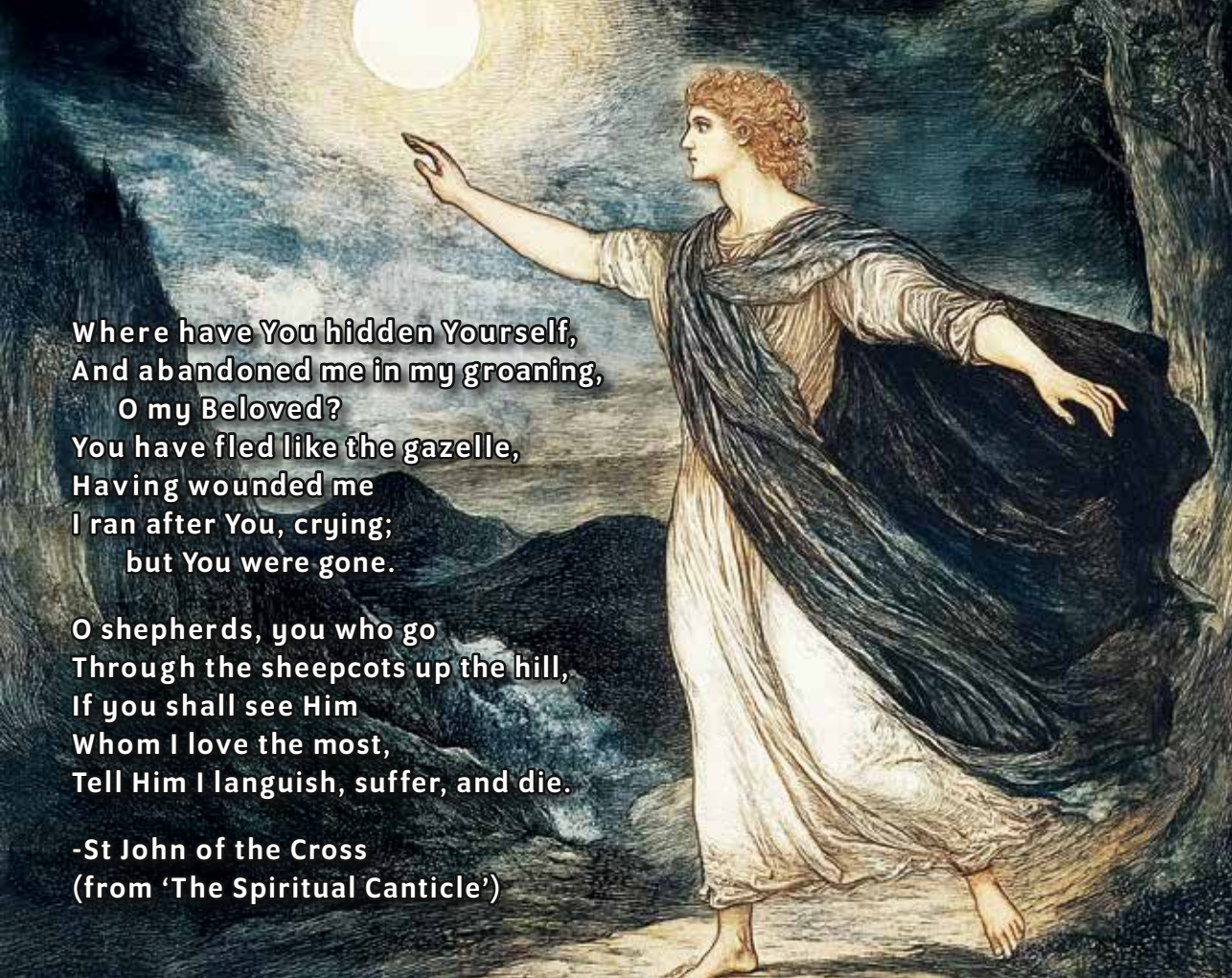
Without context, *The Spiritual Cantic of St John of the Cross*, could well be read in terms of the first experiences of love as a queer youth. A young man lies feverish at night in a valley, wounded by a fleeing stag. His breath is shallow, his heartbeat delicate. Pierced with the first flowers of love, his newly found desires blossom out from under his chest, pooling into the now sticky ground. To be young is to be bled with desire, and to desire is also to hunt: for those who would understand, and feel, and delight. How many hours will he spend yearning in hope, seeking out the shadows of his beloved between the thickets of a wild wood? But what, ultimately, is he longing for?

Desire and longing appear as integral aspects

of human nature. Indeed, in the place where God took one of our ribs for the creation of another, an absence remained. We yearn for someone - or something - outside of ourselves to fill the recess that we feel within. Most of us spend our lives searching for it, often without ever finding complete satisfaction. Wherever we go, gazelles abound in the shadows, glimmers of light suggesting their presence in the night. But as we turn to hunt what we long for, the sought after eludes our grasp, receding ever further into the darkness.

Desire is the Path to God's Heart

Do we stalk our desires or do our desires stalk us? When our desires do not fit neatly into the paradigm that we, or others, would like them to



Where have You hidden Yourself,
And abandoned me in my groaning,
O my Beloved?
You have fled like the gazelle,
Having wounded me
I ran after You, crying;
but You were gone.

O shepherds, you who go
Through the sheepcots up the hill,
If you shall see Him
Whom I love the most,
Tell Him I languish, suffer, and die.

-St John of the Cross
(from 'The Spiritual Canticle')

fit, the temptation is to try to sever them from ourselves. Why are we drawn to one sort of person over another? Why for some the shape of the other sex and the desire to bring forth new life, and for others, the feel of a body more akin to our own? The causes and reasons for the shape of our deepest yearnings are a mystery known only to the heart of God. As humans, our desires inhabit our lives within us; to deny their existence is to deny our humanity. We can attempt to elude them, but they remain, following in the footsteps of our pretence. The monastic fathers of 4th century Christianity went to the desert in order to gain mastery over their desires, but they were never foolish enough to declare themselves free of them.

There is no need to attempt to stamp out the desires of our heart. To have a heart that longs is to be human, and every story of human longing is a vital experience of a creature of God,

participating in the universal longing that exists within all of us.

Whatever our sexuality, as finite creatures longing for the infinite, our yearnings will always point beyond us, for longing itself is by nature oriented towards the transcendent.

Yet as Christians, we understand that the desires of our heart for one another point beyond the physical. They reach towards a satisfaction that we can only find in God alone. Whatever our sexuality, as finite creatures longing for the infinite, our yearnings will always point beyond us, for longing itself is by nature oriented towards the transcendent.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church opens with the following consideration: "The desire for

God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for". The mission of the church is to lead all people to an encounter with Him who satisfies the deepest longings inside of us. When we seek the infinite in the embrace of another person, we will most likely find that we are left with the same hunger that we thought we could quell. Consequently, we are to pursue our quarry beyond the realm of the merely sensual and venture into the territory of Love itself. Nothing else will suffice.

To do so, we must become lovers and poets in equal measure. *The Song of Solomon*, a Jewish love poem of the Old Testament written in 1000 BC, is an example of how the images of desire that inhabit our hearts can ascend from the physical to the divine encounter. The poem abounds with the the poetically erotic. In the imagery of roving stags, sweet nectar, and hidden fruit it speaks of the love and longing between a bride and her beloved. Yet for both Jews and Christians, it is also a poem that speaks profoundly of the experience of the longings and encounters between man and God. The prayerful reading of this text takes us on a journey in which the desires that we experience in the flesh begin to reveal their deeper and ultimate orientation. The (often passionate) longing that we feel for another begins to reveal itself as a manifestation of the deeper longing for God that is inside ourselves. Similarly, we awaken to the fact that the beauty that we see when we gaze at the beauty of another is always a reflection of the beauty that we seek in God. This translation of our desires from the language of physical sensuality into one of divine love is the vocation of every single one of us.

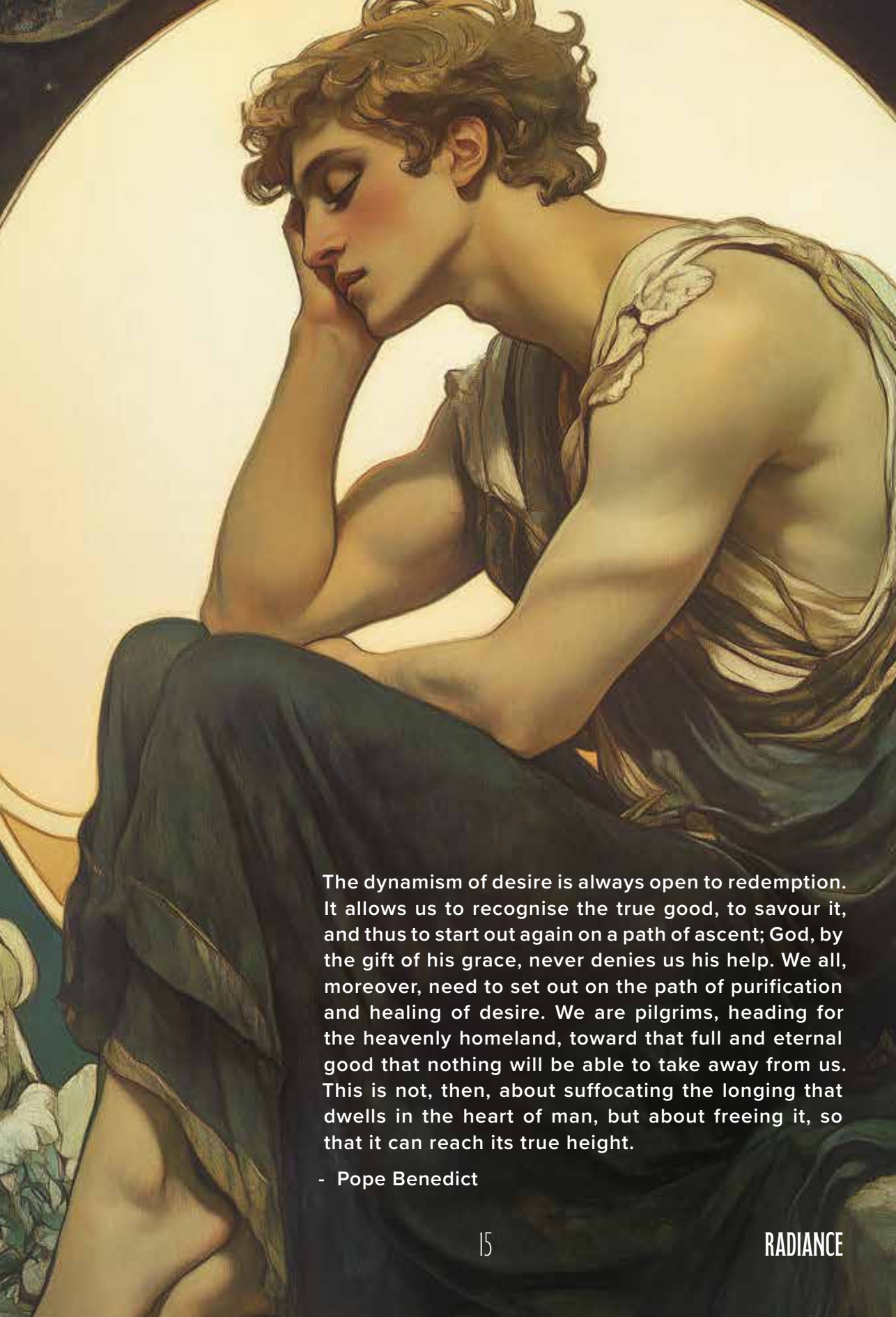
Longing and Belonging

The immediate difficulty of such a pursuit is that it appears highly abstract. God is indeed all transcendent, all mystery, ever beyond our grasp. But as we are made for longing, so we are longed for. This is the truth of the Christian faith. Regardless of the shape of our desires, we find that the desires of God for ourselves are deeper and more intense than any that we could ever feel towards another person. And knowing that we need a body to love, He comes to us in the flesh: in the person of Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

The church teaches that Jesus was not only present two millennia ago, but is also present here today wherever the Mass is being celebrated. To those who are queer, and to those who hunger deeply for love, know that the Lord longs for you. His church welcomes you. Bring nothing but your hungry heart to place before his altar. For upon it, in the Eucharist, we discover that our heart does not bleed in vain: the person that we long for reveals himself within the dark night of the present day. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus's body becomes truly present on the altar, for us. At every mass, He gives himself, and trembling before his glorious body, we become one flesh with He whom we long for. In that moment, our deepest desires are realised in an act of divine love. The longings that we first felt in youth are here consummated in eternity. ♦

The Song of Solomon 5:5-6,8

"I arose to open to my beloved,
and my hands
dripped with myrrh,
my fingers with
liquid myrrh,
on the handles of
the bolt.
I opened to my
beloved,
but my beloved
had turned and
gone.
My soul failed me
when he spoke.
I sought him, but
found him not;
I called him, but he
gave no answer.
I adjure you, O
daughters of
Jerusalem,
if you find my
beloved,
that you tell him
I am sick with love."



The dynamism of desire is always open to redemption. It allows us to recognise the true good, to savour it, and thus to start out again on a path of ascent; God, by the gift of his grace, never denies us his help. We all, moreover, need to set out on the path of purification and healing of desire. We are pilgrims, heading for the heavenly homeland, toward that full and eternal good that nothing will be able to take away from us. This is not, then, about suffocating the longing that dwells in the heart of man, but about freeing it, so that it can reach its true height.

- Pope Benedict

Faith for freethinkers

HOW CATHOLICISM OPENS MINDS

St John Henry Newman's "The Idea of a University" reveals how Catholicism champions the pursuit of truth across all fields of knowledge, from science to philosophy to the arts. Rooted in the Church's tradition of fostering some of the earliest universities as havens for free inquiry, Newman's vision shows how faith and intellectual openness are deeply intertwined. If you're drawn to the richness of Catholic worship but hesitant about its intellectual horizons, Newman offers a compelling look at why Catholicism might be the open-minded path you've been seeking.

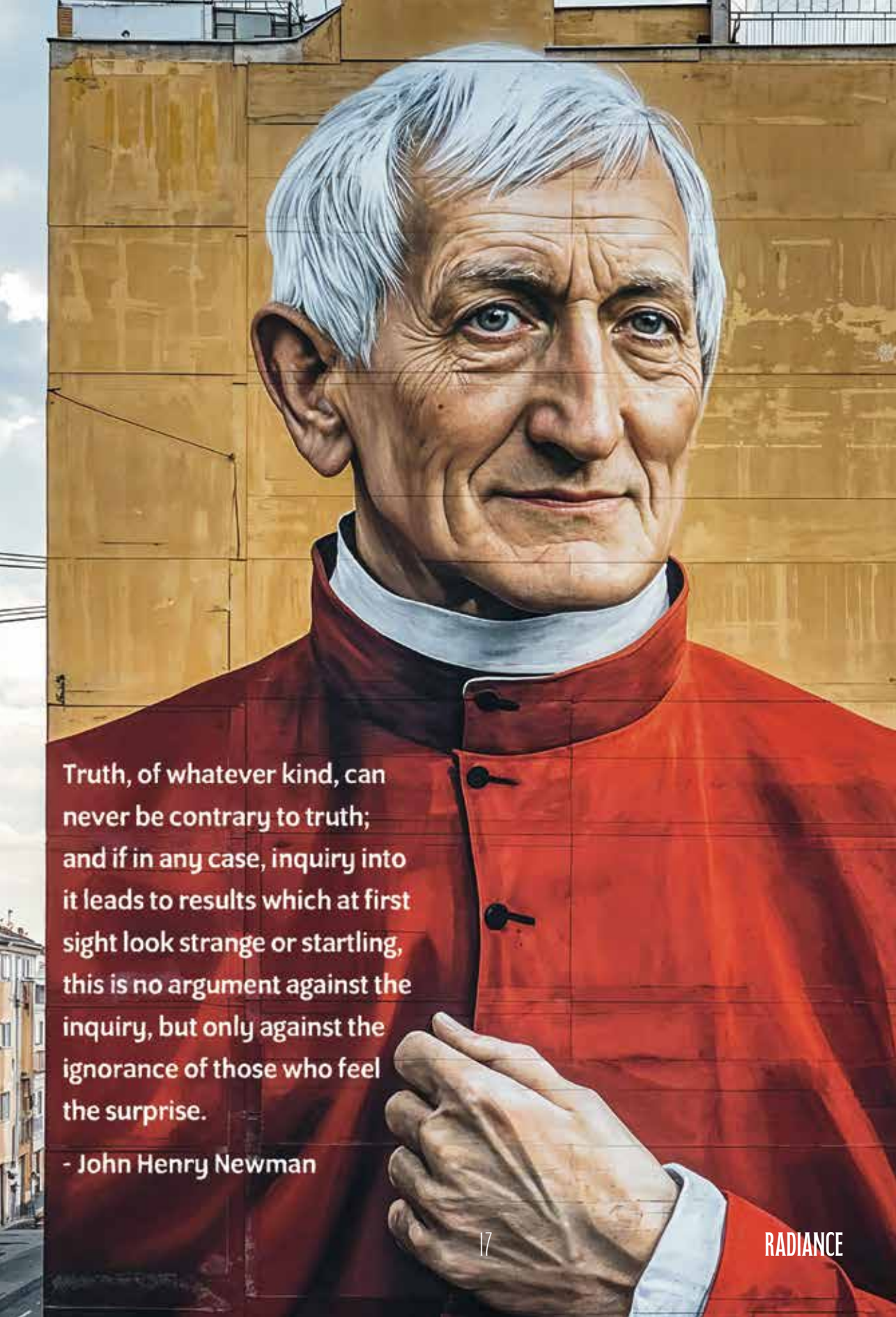
by **Richard Wise**

For those intrigued by the beauty and depth of Catholic worship but worried that joining the Church might narrow their intellectual horizons, *The Idea of a University* by John Henry Newman offers an eye-opening perspective. In this classic work, Newman, a 19th-century theologian and Catholic cardinal (now proclaimed a saint), lays out a vision for higher education that places intellectual freedom at the heart of the Catholic tradition. Far from being at odds with free inquiry, Newman argues that the Catholic faith can be a fertile ground for the pursuit of truth in all its forms. For readers who appreciate deep thinking

and are concerned about the increasingly closed atmosphere in modern academia, Newman's work remains remarkably relevant today.

The Birth of the University

Before diving into Newman's arguments, it is worth reflecting on the origins of the university itself. The earliest universities, such as those in Bologna, Paris, and Oxford, were established in the medieval period under the auspices of the Catholic Church. These institutions were created as places where scholars could explore the frontiers of human knowledge freely and safely.



Truth, of whatever kind, can
never be contrary to truth;
and if in any case, inquiry into
it leads to results which at first
sight look strange or startling,
this is no argument against the
inquiry, but only against the
ignorance of those who feel
the surprise.

- John Henry Newman

Protected by the Church and by the surrounding culture, these universities became spaces where ideas could be debated, discoveries made, and intellectual rigor pursued without fear of political or social retribution.

In their earliest forms, universities were homes for what Newman would later call “universal knowledge.” This wasn’t limited to theology but extended to philosophy, mathematics, the natural sciences, literature, and the arts. The goal was not to push a single doctrine or perspective but to create an environment where truth could emerge through study, dialogue, and debate. Thus, the medieval university was fundamentally a place of intellectual freedom.

Today, universities are built on this very tradition of inquiry and openness. However, in recent years, many critics have argued that universities have strayed from this founding mission. As contemporary campuses become increasingly influenced by the pressures of political correctness and the demands of ideological conformity, some fear that the free exchange of ideas has become stifled. Controversial opinions are silenced, and certain subjects become taboo, ironically undermining the very freedom that universities were designed to protect.

In this context, Newman’s *The Idea of a University* provides a refreshing counterbalance. His vision of higher education is not just one of accumulating knowledge, but of cultivating a mind that can think freely and deeply. He would likely see the rise of censorship and ideological conformity as antithetical to the true spirit of the university.

The Pursuit of Intellectual Freedom

Newman’s central thesis in *The Idea of a University* is that education should be about more than simply transmitting information or preparing students for careers. It should be about training the mind to engage with complex, diverse ideas critically and thoughtfully. He believed that the university’s purpose was to develop a well-rounded intellect, capable of pursuing truth in all its dimensions. And this, for Newman, is where Catholicism and intellectual freedom intersect.

At the heart of Newman’s vision is the idea that truth is ultimately unified. He argues that religious truth, scientific truth, philosophical truth, and artistic truth are not isolated domains but are all parts of a greater whole. Catholicism, in his view, is not about closing the mind but about opening it to the full range of human experience and knowledge. In fact, he believed that the Catholic faith encourages believers to seek the truth in every field, confident that all genuine knowledge ultimately leads back to God, who is Truth itself.

This is why Newman advocated for what he called “liberal education,” meaning an education that is broad, open, and free. He was convinced that by studying a wide array of subjects—literature, history, philosophy, science—students would cultivate the intellectual virtues of reason, curiosity, and critical thinking. Far from fearing the challenges posed by new ideas, Newman believed that Catholicism

Protected by the Church and by the surrounding culture, universities became spaces where ideas could be debated, discoveries made, and intellectual rigor pursued without fear of political or social retribution.



equips individuals to face those challenges with confidence and openness.

Catholicism and Free Inquiry

Newman's belief in the compatibility of Catholicism and intellectual freedom is rooted in the Church's longstanding tradition of engaging with the world's greatest thinkers. From Augustine and Aquinas to Descartes and Pascal, Catholic scholars have long participated in the great debates of their times, drawing from both faith and reason to grapple with the most profound questions of existence. This tradition reflects the Church's belief that faith and reason are not opposed but are complementary paths to understanding the truth.

Newman's Catholic vision of the university also embraces the idea of dialogue. He believed that universities should be places where people of different perspectives and beliefs come together to debate, learn, and grow. In a world where ideological echo chambers are becoming more common, Newman's commitment to open, honest dialogue feels particularly urgent. He warns against the dangers of intellectual isolation, arguing that the university should be a place where students are exposed to a variety of perspectives, learning to think for themselves rather than simply accepting pre-packaged ideologies.

Today's Academic World

The concerns Newman raised in the 19th cen-

tury about the purpose of education resonate with today's critiques of modern academia.

Many worry that universities are moving away from their role as havens for free thought, becoming places where certain views are promoted while others are suppressed.

This shift represents a betrayal of the university's original mission: to be a place where all ideas can be explored and examined critically.

Newman's *The Idea of a University* stands as a powerful reminder of what higher education can and should be: a space for the free pursuit of truth. For those who are drawn to the intellectual richness of Catholicism but fear that it may limit their thinking, Newman offers a compelling counterargument. Far from closing the mind, Catholicism can inspire a deeper, more comprehensive engagement with the world of ideas. For the curious reader, *The Idea of a University* opens up a vision of faith that values intellectual freedom as a vital component of the search for truth.

In a time when universities seem to be grappling with their own identity, Newman's work challenges us to reclaim the original purpose of education: the cultivation of a truly free and open mind, one that is not afraid to pursue the truth wherever it may lead. ♦



Objects of devotion

RELICS AND THE SPARK OF JOY

Just as Marie Kondo's method values possessions that "spark joy," Catholics venerate relics, believing certain objects carry spiritual significance and connect believers to the saints and the divine. In this way, faith and the material world intertwine in both surprising and sacred ways.

by *Harry Cooper*

Marie Kondo, the perennially smiling Japanese tidying expert pointed to an ancient truth when she published her best-selling book *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. In it, she describes her KonMari Method, a six-step process according to which people are encouraged to throw out all possessions — save for those that "spark joy".

To identify which possessions a person should keep, she recommends a simple test. When you pick up an object, you must pay close attention to how your body responds. Not your mind, but your body. For Marie Kondo, she knows that the object she's holding matters to her because she feels "a little thrill as if the cells in my body are slowly rising."

We can all relate to this kind of encounter with a possession. A prized family antique, passed down through generations, becomes the most precious object we own. A wedding ring — worn by a mother, a grandmother, a great-grandmother — seems somehow to have absorbed the commitments made by generations past. Even a Polaroid of two smiling friends taken long ago becomes impossibly valuable, irreplaceable — capturing on a piece of paper a moment of pure joy.

And yet these very same objects mean nothing to a different person: an old bit of furniture is just that, an old bit of furniture; a ring is a ring, even if it's been owned by others. And a Polaroid of two smiling faces may be pleasant to glance at but of no great significance.

*“There is evidence,
therefore, that
one of the central
building blocks of
western thought —
that matter is dead
— is perhaps not
the whole truth.
If matter were truly
dead, material
objects would
have no effect on
us. By owning
this antique, by
wearing this
ring, by looking
at this Polaroid,
I am changed
— emotionally,
physically
and possibly
spiritually.”*

The story becomes more interesting when we recognise the fact that a human being is simultaneously a subject and an object. As Michael Jackson argues in *The Cultural Power of Personal Objects*, “Not only do objects obdurately remain objects, regardless of the ways in which we subject them to our thinking; we, as thinking subjects, are so deeply influenced by the world of which we are a part that we too are, to a degree, objects.”

And surely the objects we love the most, that give us the spark of joy of which Marie Kondo speaks, are those linked to our loved ones or, in some cases, the bodily remains of our loved ones, which we should rightly value above all else.

Sacred Encounters

A half-hour drive south of Gatwick Airport stands St Hugh’s Charterhouse at Parkminster. It is home to a few dozen Carthusian monks — a Catholic monastic order established over a millennium ago — who live in silence as hermits next door to each other, meeting at various points in the day to chant ancient psalms and hymns.

Up a flight of narrow stairs, opposite an overflowing library full of leather-bound priceless books, is a chapel containing the bones and possessions of hundreds of men and women who have died in the last 2,000 years. Those who visit the chapel venerate these relics by praying with them, touching them lightly or perhaps even kissing them.

They do this because certain objects affect us deeply. And whilst the kissing of a skull or bit of cloth worn by a long-dead saint may seem macabre at best or idiotic at worst, consider the value we all place on certain objects, especially those which belonged to a deceased loved one. Aside from the profoundly normal human desire to touch the belongings and bodies of the people we have loved, there is a divine component to such encounters, but one that can only be accessed by those who have faith in things unseen.

Matter Made Holy

This is especially the case for Catholics, who — along with their Orthodox brothers and sisters — have venerated the remains of their saints for millennia. For them, it is a real encounter with something of great spiritual significance. This is grounded in the Catholic belief that matter is good because God made it good. This includes the matter that encloses the human being — a totally united entity of mind, body and soul. The body of a Christian becomes a temple of the Holy Spirit — and therefore sacred and inviolable. And for those who have become united to God whilst living, known as saints, it is not just their souls that bathed in the love of God. It is also their bodies: hair, blood and bone.

Like many Catholic traditions, the veneration of relics began spontaneously amongst communities of believers. And over time, the Catholic Church recognised the value in encouraging these practices, not only for the spiritual value that they hold for each individual, but also because they bind the community together. That is why millions, with the backing of the Church, have made



months-long pilgrimages across Europe to visit the relics of St James in the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Spain or the catacombs of martyred Christians in Rome.

It is also no secret that many relics are forgeries and fakes. This is why the Church has for hundreds of years placed such importance on ensuring the authenticity of the relics she guards. Detailed rules and regulations were introduced

to ensure believers were not being tricked and manipulated. But even for those relics known to be fakes, the Church permits their veneration on the basis that, as Marie Kondo highlighted, these objects are changed by the love they receive.

To venerate a relic that once belonged to the living body of a saint is, therefore, to speak directly with a soul now gazing on God in heaven. At the very least, that should induce “a spark of joy.” ♦



Deo Gratias Anglia

~An English Paradise

The damp fog and the dry fog felted,
down into winter's press of ground:
sheep, sad and soft and silent on a
green field, bramble edged and waterdrops
like sweat on the silver barbs of wires
whilst light-like lances points the sun into
fire and sharp are the fences and creosote air

Gabriel Olearnik





RADIANCE

The ultimate power

HOW TRUE HUMILITY WORKS MIRACLES

True humility isn't self-deprecation or self-abandonment but a clear-sighted focus on others over self. This openness allows for divine love to transform lives and guides authentic leadership, where service, not status, defines true power.

by *Maria D. Carvalho*

Quick. Can you name the Popes that were in power when St Francis of Assisi was alive? Not to worry if you can't - even the most devout Catholic will struggle to name a single one of the six Popes who lived during St Francis's life, 1182-1226.

So does it matter to know who the Popes were when St Francis was alive? No.

But the question itself beggars an insight into the difference between how we perceive who is powerful - in a worldly sense - to who actually is powerful by extending influence beyond the boundaries of history and geography. For whilst you may not know who St Francis of Assisi is, it is highly likely you will have heard his name.

Why does remembering a person's name even matter? According to Jewish tradition, a person

dies twice. The first time is when their physical bodies die. The second time is when their name and memory are uttered and thought of for the last time - perhaps three or four generations after they have lived.

Power Beyond Position

Following this line of reasoning, we could argue that the name of St Francis of Assisi is truly powerful, for his name is known 800 years after he lived. In contrast, not being able to remember the names of the Popes during St Francis of Assisi's time shows the limits of their power and influence - despite being the heads of the Catholic Church.

So what is it about St Francis of Assisi's life that makes him so well remembered?

For non-Catholics, it is likely his name conjures

*True humility is not thinking
less of yourself, but thinking
of yourself less, freeing you
to be filled with divine love
to serve others with a heart
unburdened by ego.*

images of a man, clothed in a simple brown tunic with a monk bowl haircut, in conversation with birds.

For Catholics, it is the staggering story of a carousing and self-posturing young man whose life was completely transformed after hearing the voice of God in a dream. And in that radical encounter, the young Francis found the worldly pleasures that once excited him left him hollow. Instead it was Christ's love that filled him with joy, leading him to very publicly and literally stripping himself of the rich garments that his father had given him, and in pure nakedness, dedicating his life, soul, and survival to his heavenly father.

His ascetic life meant he could only rely on the charity of others and shared whatever he received with those who were even poorer than himself. He was the most joyful of men, living in harmony and service for every creature - including birds.

His example of living out the radicality of Christ's message inspired thousands of followers across Europe to join or emulate him in their renouncement of worldly possessions, so they could be part of his mission of prayer, chastity, poverty and charity. The most famous was St Clare of Assisi - who led the women's contingent of St Francis's movement to pursue a life of loving Christ and sharing this love with the most neglected and poor of society.

Detachment and Divine Love

So what is it about St Francis that so inspires us? It is the radical power of humility.

Humility is a term that is often mis-defined and therefore misunderstood and misapplied.

Does humility mean that we must give up all worldly goods and pleasures? Not necessarily. But it does mean having a healthy detachment towards them so that they do not rule your life, of determining where your self-identity, self-worth, and sense of power comes from. It is not surprising that an overdependence on worldly pleasures as a way to fulfil the emptiness, and treat the brokenness within oneself, is the avenue into addiction.

It is also why the first step for people struggling with addiction is actually admitting to themselves that they have a problem. This act of honesty can only happen when one is humble enough to stop deceiving oneself, and face the truth of the addiction, and be willing to seek help. In this way, humility is powerful.

Another false definition of humility is thinking less of yourself by putting yourself down. In its more benign form, it's self-deprecation or false modesty. In its more malignant form, this interpretation is hurtfully and unnecessarily self-destructive. This false definition of humility is a contradiction to how God sees us, which is a gift of life.

Do you see your life as a cherished gift from God? Do you even realise that you are cherished by God? According to Christ, you are so valued that even the hairs of your head are all counted and valued - including those that end up in the shower drain. If our lives are gifts from God, then we are worthy of love, dignity, respect and value. So stop putting yourself down.

Humility allows you to empty yourself of all the false ways you try to reassure yourself, and instead allows you to open up to the healing love of God.

What, then, is true humility, and how do we cultivate it in ourselves?

True humility is not thinking less of yourself. It is thinking of yourself less. Humility grants you the power to detach yourself from having to maintain or promote your self-image and ego. Humility also allows you to detach yourself from being overanxious about your problems. Instead, humility allows you to empty yourself of all the false ways you try to reassure yourself, and instead allows you to open yourself up to the healing love of God.

Consistently, every saint understood that they could not rely on false notions of self-reliance to overcome the brokenness within them, or even to fulfil the missions God was calling them to serve. Instead, they were open to divine love filling them first. This divine love reassures and anchors you, giving a true form of identity as a beloved child of God. This divine love also provides you with a deeper confidence that you can rely on God to navigate any storms.

It is why prayer as a spiritual meditation is such an important practice of humility. Prayer is the process of emptying your mind, heart and soul of self so that you can give God the chance to fill those empty spaces with divine love and grace.

The Divine Path to Influence

By clearing your mind's focus on self, and instead on receiving and returning God's love, you are freer to notice and empathise with others.

You are even freer to notice what problems they face and see how you can be of service. It is why Jesus's message of leadership is one centred on service. Jesus warns that those who put themselves first in terms of self-promotion and stature will come last, whilst those who put aside their selfish desires by serving God and others first will be the leaders of His Church.

This is wisdom we intuitively understand. We are less likely to trust leaders who seek power and riches. But we will inherently trust those whose sole mission is to serve others, and we are willing to support their cause and even follow their example. Authentic leadership is humbly in the service of others.

Humility also grants the grace for authentic leadership to be able to confront opposition not with anger or retribution, but with peace.

St Francis lived at the height of the Crusades, and he journeyed to Muslim lands in the Nile Delta to preach and convert them to Christ's gospel. He was captured and brought into the court of Sultan Al-Malik al-Kamil Nasir ad-Din Muhammad of Egypt. Through what could be the first interreligious dialogue between a notable Christian and Muslim, both were impressed by each other's nobleness, chivalry and faith in God.

The Sultan granted safe passage for St Francis to return home. The openness to listen to one another's perspective with respect could not have happened without humility.

In comparison to institutional power, humility is greater due to an egolessness that enables authentic power. It does not mean authentic power needs to necessarily tear down existing institutions, but its authenticity gives it the power to reform it.

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It is why Christ's voice reached out to St Francis - rather than the Popes - to rebuild his Church, which was falling into ruin with its politicking and corruption. Funny enough, even Pope Innocent III - the Pope who approved the establishment of St Francis's religious order - recognised St Francis as the figure in his dream who would hold up a collapsing Church. It is why St Francis had the power to reform the Catholic Church through his inspirational example of living the radicality of Christ's Gospel, rather than someone who tore down the Church.

800 years later, the current Pope was the first

to choose St Francis as his papal name, inspiring his mission to guide the Church in the 21st century - particularly in caring for the planet earth as our common home. Carrying on with St Francis's tradition of interreligious dialogue, Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahmed Al-Tayeb co-signed the Document on Human Fraternity in 2019. This meeting was commemorated with the Zayed Award for Human Fraternity, which each year recognises individuals and organisations that work to promote human connection and peaceful co-existence.

A true testament to the power of humility. ♦



How therapy culture lets us down

BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH LOVE AND SERVICE

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*In a world that often views resilience as mere toughness or constant self-care, here's a different path: resilience through faith, community, and service. Moving beyond therapy culture and the competitive narratives of victimhood, true strength comes from looking outward, supporting others, and finding meaning in something greater than ourselves.*  
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by **Leo McGrath**

Are you a resilient person? It's a harder question to answer than you might think.

Traditionally, resilience meant having a thick skin, the ability to tough it out and bounce back from setbacks. But today, resilience implies more than just endurance; it suggests an ability to deal with hardship with emotional maturity and a grounded, balanced way of navigating life. It's less about "keeping a stiff upper lip" and more about "working on myself."

Scrolling through social media, resilience seems to be in short supply. Many young people report a sharp decline in mental health, fewer friendships, and a rising sense of isolation. Terms like "hikikomori" (a Japanese phenomenon of social withdrawal), "quiet quitting," and "lying flat"

highlight how more individuals are stepping back from the usual grind, finding ordinary struggles too exhausting and feeling disconnected from the support they need.

How should we respond to this? Compassion is the obvious answer, but how to go beyond merely treating symptoms? What about the cause? Let's look at how we treat those who are struggling. We rightly give them our attention and empathy, encouraging them to open up to us. This approach is undoubtedly healthier than the 'tough it out' attitude of yesteryear. People who share their hardships online often receive empathy, support, and sometimes admiration for their courage.

However, this approach can take strange turns.

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If you search for #sadgirl videos on TikTok, for instance, you'll find many troubled individuals sharing their deepest pain and anguish. Often this borders on the voyeuristic. Why do they do this? Perhaps they simply want to be heard, and it's hard to look away when someone opens up in this way. But is there something else going on?

In a culture where dramatic displays of trauma attract attention and empathy, perhaps we have allowed hardship to become a form of social currency. Their videos are so graphic because that is more valuable to them. The greater the struggle, the more validation received. If you've experienced a friend trying to one-up your tale of woe with a greater complaint of their own, you know a little of this dynamic.

In many online communities, ranking suffering has become second nature, shaping a "contest of victimhood." Sadness gets likes. But more than that, the application of trauma narratives to normal life is gradually changing our social norms. We see this in how we talk about trauma, using psychotherapeutic language to describe everyday interactions such as "triggered," "self-care," "boundaries," and "processing". We use these words reflexively, perhaps without realising what it implies about our sense of vulnerability and passivity.

Millions may not wish to be victims, but without realizing it, the culture of "trauma talk" keeps many fixed within this frame of mind. And as the definition of trauma expands, our capacity for personal resilience is eroded.

Therapy Culture and the Limits of Trauma

Therapy and self-help are on-demand these days. Apps make it easy to call a therapist anytime, on your own terms. As the customer, your interpretation is always right and it is in their interest to keep you coming back. They will rarely say 'no'.

Therapy can be incredibly helpful — but its expanded scope reflects a broader shift. We've reached a point where even everyday problems are pulled into the orbit of "trauma," requiring professional support. Common life challenges — breakups, job stress, social anxiety — are increasingly viewed as traumas needing "healing."

This perspective is reinforced by the on-demand therapy industry itself. Consider some lines from ads for one popular service:

- ❖ "Therapy is the best way to help you get over a breakup."
- ❖ "It's so much easier to open up on a Zoom call than face-to-face with a therapist."
- ❖ "I can talk to someone whenever I want."

Commercialised therapy culture encourages us to see many ordinary struggles as "traumas" requiring professional intervention in a depersonalised and transactional way. As journalist Freya India points out, this shifts the focus of agency away from the individual and towards external things that act upon the person, making the process seem merely mechanical, and that further 'management' is





needed to handle the fall out. If so many aspects of our lives need “healing,” we lose confidence in our ability to handle them ourselves. More importantly, by outsourcing our support networks to the market, might we also be losing the connections that could genuinely support us?

Looking Outwards

If the logic of everyday trauma can be isolating, how can we satisfy the deep human need for empathy, compassion and real connection (such as after a breakup)?

The Catholic tradition offers a different path toward resilience — one that may seem counter-intuitive today: look outward and upward, rather than inward.

It suggests that resilience isn’t just about managing our feelings or “coping.” We are not machines which just need the right input to work correctly. Instead, it’s about finding purpose and strength in something greater than ourselves, better equipping us to deal with life’s struggles.

Jesus’s words offer a challenging but powerful vision: “If anyone wants to be a follower of mine,

let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Rather than shrinking from difficulty, he suggests that we engage with it directly, facing it square on, not in isolation but by joining with others who seek Him.

Seeking Him through Love and Service

The 19th-century English Cardinal Herbert Vaughan had a life motto: *amare et servire* — ‘to love and to serve.’ More than just a motto, it was a radical commitment to focus relentlessly on others. He believed that by loving and serving others we also learn about ourselves and grow stronger. Rather than focusing inward, we are strongest when we orient our lives toward radical service.

This approach may feel strange in a world that celebrates self-care and introspection. But consider this: in loving others, we become a more whole and complete version of the person God wants us to be. Christians believe that we are all made in God’s image. What does this mean? Simply, that we are called to be of the same nature as Christ, sharing in His infinite integrity, strength, and humility.

Volunteering in hospitals, joining community projects, or simply being there for friends and family fulfils this calling and gives us meaning and connection. By trying to be like God to others, we enable them to be sources of grace, strength, and support for us in turn — connected not through transactions but true companionship.

Practical Steps toward Building Resilience

You don't have to change your life overnight to begin building resilience. Here are a few small steps to start practicing resilience through connection:

- ❖ Look for ways to serve — help someone in need, whether it's a friend feeling down or a neighbour who could use assistance.
- ❖ Reconnect with friends — authentic friendships are hard and increasingly rare, yet they are powerful sources of resilience. Take time to strengthen those bonds.
- ❖ Get involved in your community — join local initiatives, volunteer, or find causes that matter to you. Seek God in other people and serve Him by loving them.
- ❖ Talk to God — spiritual exploration can be a powerful anchor, whether through prayer, meditation, or simply listening in silence for His voice. You never know what you might hear.

Finding Resilience beyond Trauma Culture

Today's trauma culture keeps us stuck, but Catholic ideas offer a way forward. By focusing on love and service, we can build a resilience that doesn't require professional help or endless introspection. Instead, it's rooted in community and spiritual purpose.

Social activist and radical Dorothy Day, who founded the Catholic Worker movement, understood this deeply. She committed her life to serving the poor, believing that helping those in need was a profound devotion. Day's resilience came not from therapy or self-reflection but from the strength she drew from serving others. For her, suffering was not to be feared; she trusted God and saw every person she helped as a testament to His presence.

Being human is hard. But as the Church teaches, in every difficulty, there is a chance to help, to serve, and to grow. This is resilience in its purest form — a resilience that doesn't just survive hardship but is forged by it.

Imagine a life where resilience means more than just “coping” and “bouncing back.” It means seeing challenges as part of a greater story, one in which we're called to ask God for the strength to help one another and trust that he will provide. By following this path, we find that resilience is not only possible but deeply fulfilling. The paradox - that it is in freely giving that we receive - allows us to pass our strength on to others as a gift that never runs out. ♦

“If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Rather than shrinking from difficulty, Jesus suggests that we engage with it directly, facing it square on, not in isolation but by joining with others who seek Him.

A monk's guide to true rest

HOW SHABBAT TEACHES US TO TRULY LIVE

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*In a world that pulls us into constant busyness, what if we reclaimed one day for true rest? The sacred rhythm of Shabbat and its Christian counterpart, the Sabbath, are paths to reconnecting with what truly matters. With insights from both Jewish tradition and life as an Orthodox Christian monk, the author shows how stepping back from our routines and screens opens us to deeper joy, presence, and connection — with others, ourselves, and the Divine.*  
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by *David Copan*

Friday evening, as dusk begins to settle over the bustling European capital of Brussels, I make my way through the park. Normally, my face would be buried in my phone, “dealing” with notification after notification.

This time, however, my hands are free, my pockets empty. I see happy couples lounging on the grass in the late summer glow, flowers waving to passerby in the breeze, and in that moment, I feel life bursting forth from this often dark and bureaucratic city. Instead of hurrying from one thing to the next, ignoring whatever “obstacles” may come across my path, I see the beauty and humanity of my city. I feel alert, calm, and

content. I realize that people are never obstacles, but the salt of the earth, life itself.

This is not just a regular Friday night, this is the beginning of Shabbat, and I’m walking the ten minutes from my house to my local shul, or synagogue. Millennia before the labour movement came along in the late 19th century and created the weekend, the Jews were among the first peoples of the world to set aside one day each week to do literally nothing. Based on the Old Testament verse that “On the seventh day, God rested,” we not only don’t go to work, but we avoid anything that gives even the slightest hint of work. We don’t cook (everything is made during



the day on Friday), clean (which makes Saturday night a massive dish pile up), and a Rabbinical code of 39 basic principles for Shabbat means we can't use our phones, or even carry them with us (even turned off!). The most pious Jews even tear toilet paper in advance. This is how seriously we take rest. There is nothing to worry about on Shabbat, because everything is already taken care of, and if it isn't, we make the choice to set it aside and not be bothered by it, at least for a day. We must enter the Queen of Days entirely unencumbered, empty even.

Disconnect to Reconnect

On Shabbat, we are commanded to be joyful; even mourning a recently departed relative is suspended on this day. Instead, on Shabbat, we sing, eat the best foods for the whole week, wear our nicest clothes, spend time with loved ones, and celebrate the blessed rest by which God has honored us. Shabbat is interpreted as a sign of royalty and of freedom. However, it is also to remind us that we are no longer slaves, as we were in Egypt.

Only those who are truly free, who possess a profound dignity, can afford the privilege of resting from all work for a whole day. At the same time, it is a sign to us that our projects in this world, no matter how important, are not our ultimate concern, and that somehow, our focus on

work will miss its mark if we do not stop, step back entirely, and celebrate. Shabbat invites us to recognize that we are worth so much more than we could ever produce or consume.

This day is so important that in the Jewish tradition, Shabbat is personified: we call it our "Queen" and "Bride," and the Talmud teaches that on this day, God is so imminently present that we each receive another soul. On Friday night, one of the ancient songs we sing intones, "Come, my beloved, to meet the bride, let us receive the presence of Shabbat... Come, O Bride, Come O Bride!" Emptiness becomes the ultimate presence, and by disconnecting, we connect.

While I have Jewish roots, I was also an Orthodox Christian monk for twelve years. One thing I appreciated in that context was how seriously Orthodox Christians take the concept of a day of rest. For Christians, however, this day has been moved to Sunday, in honor of "the eighth day." In Judaism, the eighth day is a promise for the future: when the Messiah comes and the world is perfected, there will be no more work for us to do as everything will finally be as it should. For Christians, this is both a promise and something that has already happened. With His resurrection, Jesus broke down the gates of death and misery, and opened for us the gates to eternity. As this took place on a Sunday, Sunday has come to be honored in the Christian tradition, since its earli-

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est days, as the day on which we celebrate the eternity into which we have already entered and will enter more fully by....doing nothing.

The Ancient Art of Doing Nothing

The ancient laws of the Church likewise prohibit work on Sundays and holidays, albeit with somewhat more lenient rules on what that entails. However, in the Orthodox Christian villages of rural Kosovo where I lived as a monk for eight years, where life is today still much as it was centuries ago. There, the Christian concept of rest is taken very seriously. Regular work is out of the question, food is best prepared the day before, and I wasn't even allowed to turn on a washing machine to wash my clothes. Even if it was a machine doing the work, it's still work.

While people in the village in Kosovo may not have much materially, whenever someone manages to get a special food, it is saved for Sunday. Like my Jewish ancestors, the day of rest had to be honored with the best of what we have. In the monastery, we even had special habits just for Sundays and holidays: black like all the other days, but made of silk.

Finding Freedom in Stillness

But what is the point of all this preparation, all these rules, all these restrictions? How could rules make us more free? It seems like a contradiction.

Look inside yourself a bit deeper: doesn't all the hyper-connection of our modern technological world make you feel suffocated sometimes? Too much information, too much "connection." This is

one of the things that Shabbat is precisely about: ridding ourselves of superfluous information and a cheap, elusive "connection" so that we can ground ourselves in what is real. We put down our phones and their incessant messages. We revel in real, in-person conversations with friends and family in which we have no concerns except enjoying a song and savoring a meal.

By cutting out what doesn't really matter or can wait until later, we gain time and energy to be truly present. Life is no longer whizzing past us at a speed we can never catch up with. Instead is at an almost standstill, where we find that our daily lives actually have a lot of beauty, joy, and reasons to be happy with the other six days of our week. To appreciate those other six days and to live them more fully, we have to take a day where we just stop.

I am reminded of what a contemporary Coptic monk often says to lay people: look up! In a more immediate sense, he means to look up from your phone and actually live. In a deeper sense, he means to look up to God, to the heavens, to eternity, and realize what great, awe-inspiring mystery we are already living in.

For many in the modern world, it's easy to forget this sacred rest. Though the Church still calls for it, it is often more like a whisper. This whisper often gets lost in the noise of modern life. But my Jewish roots and my years as a monk in Kosovo remind me to listen to that "still, small voice." Once a week, I make the choice to turn down the volume of my life. I disconnect, so that I can reconnect — to beauty, joy, and to a deeper presence. ♦



Beyond mere mindfulness to encountering the divine

THE POWER OF CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Explore a journey not only within but outward, into a profound relationship with God, who invites us to be more than just aware — to be loved, transformed, and deeply connected. Discover how Christian meditation, through ancient practices like *Lectio Divina* and the sacraments, offers a pathway to peace that embraces both self-understanding and the boundless presence of the Divine.

by *Fr Kevin O'Donnell*

In recent years, Mindfulness meditation has gained immense popularity, especially among those searching for peace, clarity, and a deeper understanding of themselves. Besides the many books, methods and daily disciplines, the movement has become established in schools and in hospitals as well as health centres.

One of the leading figures in this movement is Eckhart Tolle, whose book *The Power of Now* has become a cornerstone for many on this journey. Tolle introduces readers to the concept of living fully in the present moment. He argues that the mind's constant chatter about the past and future creates a false sense of self, which leads to suffering. By practicing Mindfulness, or the art of paying

attention to the present moment without judgment, individuals can begin to detach from this false self, accessing a state of inner peace and clarity. For those who have read and practiced the Mindfulness meditation techniques described in *The Power of Now*, the benefits are often immediate: reduced stress, increased focus, and a heightened sense of awareness. These features are common to all forms of the discipline.

Beyond Self

There can be a more mystical, even spiritual, aspect, though. Tolle moves beyond a sense of calm de-stressing and encourages an inward journey toward self-awareness where the deeper

self is part of the mystery of being. Deep within is the Source of our life. He does not ever use the term 'God', referring to this as a 'closed concept' with many prejudicial applications. However, the inward focus of Mindfulness meditation, while valuable, can sometimes lead to a kind of spiritual isolation. In seeking to detach from the ego, one might inadvertently become overly self-contained, missing out on the opportunity to connect with something greater than oneself.

Other forms of meditation lead to a further awareness of the world and those around you as you move beyond the ego in a different way from Tolle's more inward path. The mystery of life takes us outside of ourselves into our relationship with others, the beauty of nature, and the vastness of space. One mundane example catches a glimpse of this where even a coffee cup on a table is linked to all the meanings of the universe. In a wonderful (literally) way, all life is part of an infinite flow. Oshiri Hilzenrath in *How Does It Feel To Be You?* advises, "Perceive the universe. Perceive yourself."

The Power of Encounter

Christ, in such a world view, can be fascinating and important as a Teacher, a Philosopher and a Mystic. Yet, for Christianity, he is much more. He is God-made-man, incarnate, the Beyond come into our midst. There is that which we respond to that is not just within.

For those intrigued by the depth of Mindfulness meditation, the Christian tradition offers a path that not only deepens self-awareness but also leads to a transformative relationship with the Divine. 'Someone' reaches out to you.

For those navigating the complexities of modern life, Tolle's teachings can be incredibly appealing. By focusing on the present moment, practitioners find a sense of grounding and calm that transcends the chaos of daily life. This is why Mindfulness meditation has become so popular; it provides a tangible, immediate benefit that feels accessible and practical. To move beyond this, Christian meditation offers a profound and complementary perspective. Christian meditation builds on the Mindfulness practice of being present but takes it a step further by inviting practitioners into a relationship with God. Rather than simply observing the thoughts and emotions that arise in the mind, Christian meditation encourages a dialogue with the Divine, a conversation rooted in love and trust. This practice is not just about becoming aware of oneself but also about becoming aware of God's presence in every moment that requires a response and gives a blessing.

One of the key differences between Mindfulness meditation and Christian meditation is the focus on encounter. In Christianity, meditation is not merely an inward journey but also an outward one. This encounter is made possible through prayer, liturgical worship, reading the Scriptures and many devotions, all of which are integral to the Christian spiritual life. Words or phrases (often from Scripture) can be repeated as a mantra, even just the name "Jesus". Praying the rosary helps to stimulate a sense of calm and a time of seeping into, of bathing in, the mystery

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encounter you.*



and beauty of the repeated words of the ‘Hail Mary’ prayers. Through prayer, Christians open their hearts to God, sharing their joys, sorrows, hopes, and fears.

A Sacred Path to Divine Communion

The sacraments, especially the Eucharist, provide a tangible connection to God’s grace, offering a physical and spiritual sustenance that nourishes the soul. And through the reading of Scripture, Christians listen to God’s word, allowing it to guide and shape their lives. These practices create a rhythm of life that continually draws the believer into a deeper relationship with God, fostering not just inner peace but also a profound sense of purpose and belonging. God is not a closed concept, but a personal content in Being, Source, Mystery and the Infinite. The Creator cannot be less than the wonder of consciousness and personality, though far beyond what we understand, too.

One of the most treasured practices in Christian meditation is *Lectio Divina*, a Latin term meaning ‘Divine Reading.’ Reading the Bible can be hard sometimes and there could be a

hundred and one questions and confusions going around in your mind – did this really happen or is it symbolic? Who wrote what? What do these words mean? – but the Scriptures are spiritual and alive.

Lectio Divina is a way of calming the mind and tuning into that life. For many who are more familiar with the Scriptures, passages which are well known may suddenly leap out at you and speak to the heart when you least expected it. This ancient practice, perfected in the monastic traditions over the past millennium, offers a structured way to meditate on Scripture, allowing the words of the Bible to speak directly to the heart. There are specific times of meditative silence, prayer, reflection and reading. To put it simply, you take it slowly.

To be more specific, *Lectio Divina* is typically divided into four stages: *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation). Each stage is designed to deepen the practitioner’s engagement with Scripture, moving from an intellectual understanding of the text to a personal, intimate encounter with God.

Christians listen to God's word, allowing it to guide and shape their lives. These practices create a rhythm of life that continually draws the believer into a deeper relationship with God, fostering not just inner peace but also a profound sense of purpose and belonging.

1. Lectio (Reading): In this first stage, the practitioner reads a passage of Scripture slowly and attentively, paying close attention to the words and phrases that stand out. This is not just an intellectual exercise but a spiritual one, where the reader is open to what God might be saying through the text.

2. Meditatio (Meditation): After reading, the practitioner reflects on the passage, allowing it to resonate in the mind and heart. This stage is akin to Mindfulness meditation, where the focus is on being present with the text and allowing it to speak to the inner self.

3. Oratio (Prayer): In response to the meditation, the practitioner enters into a conversation with God, offering prayers that arise naturally from the reflection. This is where the encounter becomes personal, as the practitioner speaks to God from the heart.

4. Contemplatio (Contemplation): The final stage is one of resting in God's presence. Here, the practitioner moves beyond words and thoughts into a state of quiet communion with God, experiencing the peace and love that come from being in His presence.

An example: "Come to me all you who are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my

yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Jesus, in Matthew 11:28-30)

Through *Lectio Divina*, the Scripture becomes more than just a text to be studied; it becomes a living word that guides and transforms the believer.

For those who have found value in the Mindfulness practices of Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*, Christian meditation offers an opportunity to take their spiritual journey to the next level. While Mindfulness provides a powerful tool for achieving inner peace and clarity, Christian meditation invites practitioners into a relationship with a loving God. By embracing practices like *Lectio Divina*, prayer, and the sacraments, searching minds can experience the fullness of what meditation can offer—a peace that not only comes from within but also from without. This encounter with the Divine is not just a fleeting moment of tranquillity but a transformative relationship. In the end, the journey of meditation is not just about finding peace within oneself but about opening oneself to the boundless love of God, who waits eagerly to meet us where we are. To look into the eyes of Jesus is to look into infinite love. ♦





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