

## **Preface**

*Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. - Luke 16:24*

I aimed to fix what ails the Church. For twenty years I toiled at it. A few friends helped, but how do you explain that you have a goal that sounds so grandiose? But it is really the smallest thing, because what ails the Church is very small. It is that we do not follow its architect's plan. His burden is easy and His yoke is light: He told the truth, but very few have ever picked His burden up. I suppose they thought they had to set theirs down, first.

I have tried these twenty years to be heard, but few ever noticed that I had anything to say. I dreamed that together we could do amazing things. I dreamed of a world where a few of us — by no means *all*, though I *could* dream — did as much as we could, supporting and encouraging each other as we went. More than anything I needed help. The few who read me out of kindness gave me a little feedback but my message never caught. There was a time when a madman could rant in the marketplace: Now God's prophets keep blogs that no one reads. My family cannot suffer me to be one of them.

Those within the Church have their answers already. Those outside are put off by Christian terminology. Who did I think would listen? I know already that no one reads it strategically; they do not ask what the effect of my suggestions would be. And that is the whole point. A decentralized design is evident in Jesus' teachings, and it really would work, coupled with formal institutions that work (on the surface level) exactly as they do now. Why change the pipes when you can just change the water?

My sense of principle kept me going: What is the waste of one man's life in the face of God's cascade of grace? It brought turbulence to my marriage and alienation from my friends. Now I have to put my burden down. This is not my task to do. To the friends I have lost, I am sorry. Let's catch up some time.

This is a record of the testimony I testified.

The predictable consequences of our actions will come upon us all. We could have stopped it. May the LORD have mercy on us.

## **A Fierce Christianity**

*The road to Hell is paved with the bones of priests and monks, and the skulls of bishops are the lamp posts that light the path.* - Saint John Chrysostom

I offer up a vision of the Church. It is my conviction that I am laying out the ancient creed, which the well-intentioned reasoning of men has undermined. This is a Christianity that will meet the unbeliever in his unbelief, that will accept you even if you cannot confess Jesus as Christ, that will wait for your faith to grow. Discuss it with people who remember how to argue. I do not ask for a conversion; I simply ask that you position yourself adjacent to this Christianity, if I persuade you.

All things are lawful for us, we are told by Paul (though not all are good); we are joint heirs with Christ, and no longer live in fear (fear! of *our* good Father?); the whole law hangs on love, and God Himself *is* love; man is not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man. A true Christianity is a sleek, lionlike thing — innocent, yes, like a lamb — but fierce.

Pharisaical attempts to *expand* the law are doomed, like zooming in on an image of a fractal: the thing has its own internal logic, which must be used to apply it to new cases. (If you zoom in on an image of a fractal, instead of using its rule to generate it, it no longer resembles the fractal itself.) The law is a tutor, we are told: and we can use it in that spirit, applying the more fundamental law to each case, and checking our work against it. *Love your neighbor as yourself*: In what circumstances would each law have embodied that principle? Like a lioness, loving and sweet, teaching her cub to hunt, is the law to us: Only our prey is the chance to show love. One must be lionlike and decisive to show love when the chance arises.

You learned, perhaps, that sin is rule-breaking: It is not. It is only and precisely unlovingness. Do not be swift to break the rules you were taught, but begin to learn from them, as tutors, and replace the dead edifice of rules with a living heart of love. Do not fear death; we all die young. Yes, even if you are now uncertain of your soul's immortality and the resurrection of the dead, have no fear of death. Learn to rise up and *act*. Fear sin: Fear letting your neighbor down or marring God's world. Fear nothing else, whether death or hell, scorn or shame, poverty or ugliness, pain or bitterness. But from sin, *flee*.

I testify that everything I write here conforms to scripture and tradition. It speaks also to the concerns of those outside the Church, whom churchmen disregard. It is intended to edify, exhort, and console. "Speak for yourself," you may say, and I *do*: I speak for myself. Judge for yourself. Call out my error, by scripture or tradition. But please, do it in the spirit of expressing Christianity better than I do.

Here is Christianity as I express it: You are joint heirs with Christ. Love God and love your neighbor. Be baptized and take communion. Let love reign in your heart, do Jesus' sayings, and beyond that you are free. In so doing you will *become* God's work of art. Learn to give and receive loving criticism and practice it constantly. Flee sin.

God is not a respecter of persons. Each of us is different from all the others, but nothing in that difference excludes us from God's love. Young and old, gay and straight, no matter the gender and no matter the race, God calls us out of sin and into life.

### **Schism and the Church**

*Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.* -  
Philippians 2:2

The Church is a divine institution. Schism is a human one. That is as much to say that, whatever we prefer to believe, there *is* only one Church, and a very strange body she is. Therefore do not refine your preference for a church so far down as a denomination; go to the closest church where your voice will be heard and you will be challenged. (It is fine to hold out for a church that believes in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, which has no seating, or which worships ad orientem, for instance, but as far as possible, go to a church that is as near as possible.)

Break down schism with your body.

The Christian is not a *consumer* of the Sunday service. If you drive past a struggling little church to a big one, consider whether you are in error. Pick your friends however you like, but let your church challenge you. You are an artist painting a life and you need honest criticism to do it beautifully. See your church as a mission field, if you must. Break down schism with your voice.

Break down schism with your scholarship. It took Catholics and Lutherans four hundred years to issue a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. How many more misunderstandings wait to be discovered? Not even the Pope claims to have authority over doctrine, being himself a servant of servants, and subject even to the dead. Pray for the Saints, that they be permitted to intercede, as the Catholics believe they do.

Break down schism with your communication.

Find distant friends to argue with lovingly, to hone your skills and learn from each other. Study the Bible and the Church fathers. Share this letter and others like it with friends and discuss them. Start writing, not voluminously, but deeply. Communicate.

Break down schism with your tastes.

Learn to like what *those people* like. Learn to understand its production and its motivation. Listen through the sound of anger to hear calls for redress of grievances. Look through signposts of death to understand a grappling with life. See in rich High Church vestments the beatific vision, and in drab Quaker dress the perfection of humility. Understand the deep Catholic acceptance of eternity, which makes the dead as present in their death as in their life, and the fierce Puritan grasp of life until death. With the Methodist, go on to perfection. With the Covenanter, ask *Where is it written?* and dive deep in scripture.

### **Criticism**

*All that I have written appears to be as so much dung after the things that have been revealed to me.* - St. Thomas Aquinas

Acknowledgement of beauty and truth is the reception of love, which labors for the good of an alien soul. The best acknowledgement is engagement. Learn to give true and loving criticism and to acknowledge what others have said. Read bad poetry and find the good in it. (Yet always prefer the good.)

Learn to love criticism. Every time you learn a lesson, step back and ask why you did not learn it sooner, and learn from that, too. Learn to react sweetly and to tolerate others' bewilderment and anger serenely. Develop your aesthetic sense relentlessly. Never ask *whether* something is beautiful, but rather ask *how* it is beautiful. There are many kinds of beauty and many ways to fit.

You might say, "You give the most useful criticism." You might say, "That is a timely correction." You might say, "Can you help me understand why my way won't work?"

For the job of a critic is to understand how art is produced, to connect that to how art is experienced, and reflect on what is beautiful in the production of the art as much as in its final form. This accounts for our preference for defects in art; defects reveal the process of creation. We are not meant to look with pity on bodies and minds formed differently. We are meant to see in them the creative genius of God. We are meant to be art — God's art.

Better criticism yields better art. First appreciate. Better criticism begins with a recognition of what is good. Only when it understands what is right does it dig into mechanisms to understand how, in actual reality, it could be better. Criticism must be loving — not only spoken sweetly, which may be insincere, but steeped in admiration for what has been achieved.

## Literacy

*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. - 2 Timothy 3:16-17*

To read written words, the reader must keep in mind a model of how the writer wrote them. It is not enough to consume a meaning: The generative principle must be felt. Communication demands a union between writer and reader. The writer strives to make this union possible. The reader consummates it.

Here is how you see scripture used: *I have a meaning already in mind; I find a passage that seems to express it; I quote it.* How badly I mangle its meaning! It is not only the loss of historical context, but the unnoticed awkward wording; if we believe the typical quotation, writers of scripture do not say what they mean in straightforward language. This is nonsense, of course; scripture is clear, direct, and simple. Stubborn pre-Christian, non-Christian, and anti-Christian beliefs hide behind these misreadings.

The goal with scripture is to submit to it, as to law, by understanding the generative principle. And the generative principle for scripture, as for law, is love. When I understand how the whole passage, in its textual and historical context, functions as a perfect vehicle for love, then I understand the text and may apply it well. It is with good reason that this letter quotes scripture parsimoniously — though it could well reference chapter and verse.

Get out from under talking points. They are a political tool designed to drive a wedge between you and your neighbor (with whom you largely agree) by making you appear a bigot and a fool. This is the cynical political calculation behind their production, and they serve the political classes well. Jesus taught us not to prepare what we will say before a magistrate; how much more before a friend? Be wary of clever rebuttals, and do not be convinced by a flattering argument. Do not engage in mockery.

"Opposites" are a fairy tale told to children. Good is not the opposite of evil, nor black of white. There are a few opposites, like up and down, but they are mathematical and the result of intentional definition. Most apparent opposites can coexist.

Do not let meanings like "bad" and "good" and "shameful" tag along with other words — whether *scrawny* or *fat*, *feminist* or *white*, *sex-worker*, *harlot*, or *whore*, *true* or *false*, even *good* and *evil*, do not let extraneous meanings hitch a ride. Push back against euphemism, which creates secret meanings for words. The taboo on certain words (though you yourself need not use

them) is a pretext to mistreat children and cut off neighbors. Subject matter, not word choice, makes for vulgar speech. As for meaning, rely on etymology. Understand that other subcultures use words and signs at cross-purposes to yours, and that it is *your* responsibility to decode them, and *at once* your responsibility to keep your own communications clear and simple.

### **The Skeptic's Worldview**

*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.* - Psalm 14:1

The better the skeptic the greater the doubt. A pretty sorry skeptic accepts the evidence of his senses and rejects received witness. A much better skeptic doubts his own senses and his own judgment. How can he know where his sense experience comes from? The gnostics had the demiurge for their big bad deceiver. Descartes talked about the possibility of being deceived by a devil. Modern technophiles discuss living in a computer simulation.

But where does the demiurge live? How does the simulation run? There is a tower of doubt: Perhaps the simulators are themselves dreams of some larger entity. The demiurge must worry that there is another demiurge above him. And who can say that something we think of as small, no more complex than a butterfly, might not be "large enough" to be that larger entity?

Oh dear. Our poor skeptic has a problem. With no certainty about the world, how is it possible to act? The good news is that it is possible. The bad news is that it is terribly messy. What our skeptic must do is this: He must take the perspective simultaneously of every tower of gods and simulations that might be running him. He must reason, for instance, that if other people do not really exist, or if they experience pain when they insist they experience pleasure, this is the business of someone above him in the hierarchy. *His* business is to conduct himself as well as possible according to what *is* apparent, and love his neighbor.

But it is against this doctrine of devils, this belief that apparent reality may not be real, that the doctrine of the Father first emerged. Beneath any apparent reality, there is always one silently supporting and maintaining it. This is the Father. Notice this: Any apparent demiurge may exist under a loving Father and not have quite the power it imagines. In fact the experience of mystics has taught that it is only over the mind that one has power at all.

Moreover, if the state of affairs were to be random or arbitrary, there would be needed a substrate on which to encode the random or arbitrary decision, and some kind of structure to make the choice.

The wily skeptic now finds the simple truth: His thoughts and senses are as trustworthy as the thing behind his reality. Are they good simulators or cruel? Is there a benevolent or a maleficent

demiurge? Is there a Father, who bottoms things out, or at least a fundamental reality that is neutral? (But if there is a fundamental reality, why doesn't it also exist in a simulation, in a much more powerful reality again?)

This skepticism captures matters from the human point of view, and it informs half of Christianity. But another worldview is needed, for Christianity must be wholly human and wholly divine.

### **The Divine Worldview**

*And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi ("my husband"); and shalt call me no more Baali ("my master"). - Hosea 2:16*

In the divine worldview we ask from the beginning what reality must look like from a divine perspective. What does it mean to create a world? A bewildering array of options present themselves as possible before the divine mind. One is chosen to be actual. Its entities are endowed with being, consciousness, subjectivity, call it what you will. What was once a mathematical possibility is now experienced from within. Life has been breathed into dust.

In the case of this world, the mathematical possibility seems impossible to every mind but God's, who chose to complete it with His own being, His own spirit, and His own son.

One thing the divine mind clearly understands is that most of us will not understand *it*. We think in terms of sense experience, like the skeptic, never noticing (like a *good* skeptic) the problems that come with that. The Christian inverts this animal sensibility and puts the divine worldview first. Even if I am in a reality defined by human and spiritual powers contrary to the Father, nonetheless the whole edifice is His. I am in no real risk of harm — if by harm I understand what my Father means by harm.

There is the Father, which is the bedrock, the being that fundamentally emerges rather than nothingness. There is the WORD, which is self-consistency, the very power by which things are permitted to be themselves. And there is the Holy Spirit, which emanates from them, suffusing their creation. Indeed, the mathematical object which they have chosen as the real one is so sublime and complicated, that the power of God is everywhere active in it.

You have heard it said that if God is not, then anything is permissible. We deny this. If God were not, everything good would yet be good for the reasons He now holds them good. We would not reason them out correctly, without God's help, and our efforts to do good may be in vain. The absence of God would make the pursuit of Him a folly. Let us affirm that if there were no God we would pursue Him still, as indeed He pursued us when we did not exist.

## **This Miraculous World**

*Would God that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!* - Numbers 11:29

This cosmos is a miracle. The emergence of reality is befuddling. Reality's lynchpin is a historical event, and it happened *here* on Earth, not elsewhere in the infinite cosmos. The death and resurrection of Jesus join time to eternity. Resurrection power is creative power. An umbilical cord comes from the middle, after all, not from the feet. Our reality is impossible because of sin; the resurrection squares the circle.

The miracles attested to in sequence with that event, before and after, are like birth pangs. So are the plagues and famines and predations and wars. Reality itself, and the Kingdom of Heaven with it, is being born, and it happened under our insignificant sun to these bewildered men and women. The angels are in awe.

We affirm that if Jesus' resurrection were a falsehood and our cosmology were wrong, we would follow his commands to the grave. We will love, whatever the consequences; and if there were no God, either, even so, let us carry our crosses. "Let us love our neighbor diligently, for tomorrow we die."

But we do not believe we die for good. We affirm that Jesus was raised by the spirit that was in him, and that (through Him and through His words) that same spirit is also in us.

If this cosmos be bleak, or if it be bright, let us no matter the case, cling to love.

## **A Christian Worldview**

*Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?* - Amos 3:6

The LORD hates doing evil, but he must: when you pull the trigger, out of love for you the bullet flies; you have made a contradiction between you and your victim. The LORD cannot show love to you both. This grieves Him.

We act to offer up options for the LORD, without concerning ourselves with which option He takes. Therefore we wash our hands and wear masks to keep *our neighbor* safe. We keep smoke alarms to offer our houses up, if it should come to that, for we believe no harm will come to us. When we wake up, we credit the LORD for it. We keep pets to shower them with God's love, and to learn to love like God. We do not fear any evil (which is to say, *harm to us*) but rather trust the LORD and give thanks in all things. We roll with the punches and embrace serendipity even when



it frustrates our plans. If our hands are tied, even literally, we trust that it is integral to the unfolding of a story and wait eagerly to see its outcome. We see the best in all things even as we work to correct the worst. We no longer try to bargain with God, but meekly ask God to help us keep our promises. If someone misinterprets us for the better, we live up to it.

When we experience frustration we suck it up. In the face of mockery we laugh with the mocker. In the face of death, we smile as at a friend, or whistle a merry tune. Commanded at gunpoint we judge for ourselves whether the command be just. We fear doing evil, but not having evil done to us. Our lives are burnt offerings to Him.

*The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.* - Proverbs 16:33

We do not need to know the future. We already know the only fact about it that matters to us, which is that it is determined by the LORD. We renounce the use of stress to meet impossible demands. To the world we seem turned around. Indeed we are! For we have turned our backs on the world. Jesus taught us to disregard the things the world calls good and store up treasure in heaven.

Therefore we study Jesus' words with an eye to doing them, and we pray that in the moment of trial, we will love with Jesus' love. We consider ourselves powerless to overcome fear, and nearly powerless to love; so we pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the vine; we are the branches; apart from Him we can do nothing.

### **Acting on the World**

*I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and how I wish that it were already kindled!* - Luke 12:49

As this is your Father's world, it is *yours*. Act on it. Do not be too careful. Provided that your will is love, you may impose your will as you see fit. But because your will is love, you will diligently check your work. You will build the best model you can of how things work and live by it as if your beloved's life depended on it, because it *does*. Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. Bathe the disabled. Cure the sick.

Yes, this is your Father's world: But you must learn to operate it. Let go of childish things — wishful thinking, impulsivity, ignorance of consequences, imprecision, boastfulness, presumption, and pettiness. Hold tight to childlike curiosity, innocence, openness, playfulness, and simplicity.

The rich and the powerful live assertively already, but they are tied up by the dynamics of wealth and power. You are free. Take responsibility for everything you dare to and administer it well. Learn what you must learn to live up to that responsibility. Be cooperative and orderly, but decisive and assertive. There will be time enough in eternity to catch up on missed media.

You *must* act. You are joint heirs with Christ, with the awesome charge that suggests. But you need not act alone. Build a network of Christians (of anyone who follows the royal law, the law of love) to have ready to call upon. Start with your church or start with me.

Criticize yourself and take criticism and criticize your criticism and do everything you can to do *better*. You will make mistakes. Confess them, learn from them, ask why you did not see them coming, and move on. Let an honest mistake be better to you than inaction. Be ready and willing to lose. Laugh when you do, as if only you got the joke. If no one will go with you, go alone, until they do.

## **Money**

*Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.* - Matthew 22:21

Money is a token for Very Serious Games people play. On its own it is worthless, whether it be gold, silver, paper, or cryptographic coins. It takes its value, after all, from what people are willing to do for it. And there begins the problem.

The games people play with money are all the activities they only partake in *for* money. For the Christian, if he could, would render any service for free. But he will also play a game willingly so long as it is just. And at the surface level, money is a game of resource allocation, which is just. But it is not what happens when there is money that makes problems — it is what happens when the money runs out. For the poor are subject to eviction, starvation, indignity, and neglect. These are man-made calamities dressed up as natural. And it is the terror of these punishments that pushes people into sex work, fuels black markets, and forces employees to make bad bargains with employers.

And that is very much the point.

So long as money is deadly serious, the Christian must scoff at it like the trifle it is. To value it is to accept the source of its valuation, which is the oppression of the poor. The system can be made just, and the Christian must work toward that end. Yet it is not by patching holes with charitable giving that the system can be made just; the fix must be fundamental, or all efforts will sustain it and project power through it, for we are gamed and double-gamed. Until it is fixed, the

Christian must never use money except instrumentally, must often work (for the poor) for less than is due, and must let money go easily when asked. If no one has money to pay you, then work for free.

Money paid by a corporation may rightly be valued less than money paid by the poor. Try to calibrate it so that every person has an equal influence over you, and not every dollar. To demand to be paid is to demand permission — the permission of the payor.

Policy undervalues resources. (It does this to bribe us from our own treasure, force-feeding us from our children's inheritance). Prices do not, therefore, reflect the cost of things. Care must be taken to be frugal in the ways that matter — not in dollar amounts but in real world impact, time taken by labor, and resources denied to our descendants. Money could be made to reflect these things — the policies will be resisted by those to whom money is a serious matter, but are easily defined.

The equilibrium of supply and demand is not always just, for one side or the other may be making compromises out of desperation, and that desperation may be engineered. So the poor work for low wages, so as not to end up on the streets and starve; but why are these the consequences? Money launders coercion: Imagine someone at gunpoint, held ransom for \$1000, who has the power to earn it from you; they will do anything you ask (unless they have learned how not to be coerced) to earn it. In this way your money is given its value.

A Christian cannot desire to coerce his neighbor, even indirectly. Allowing someone else to make the threat does not wash it clean. Neither does arranging things so that the punishment will appear to be a fact of nature. Make no mistake: Man punishes poverty. Money enters the economy through low interest loans to favored banks and rolls downhill, drawing goods and services upward towards the banks, until it bottoms out in the unprivileged poor, who must serve or die. The profits are unjust.

Slavish servitude to money gives extreme wealth its value. "Every man has his price," we are told. Judas scoffed at the perfume poured on Jesus' feet because it could be sold and the proceeds given to the poor: But why must the rich be bribed with perfume before doing the work that is already theirs to do? Therefore scoff at money, despite the good it could do. Spend as little as you can afford to, to avoid needing more than you must.

When you work, imagine your real impact. When you buy, be as grateful as if what you bought was free. A monetary system without a basic income is contrary to the grace of God and must be overturned like the tables in the temple.

## **Intimacy and Love**

*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: for thy love is better than wine.* - Song of Solomon 1:2

Marriage, gender, and modesty, all have pre-Christian roots, and the early Christians saw what was good in them and kept them. They are not established in or by scripture (Jesus even says that there will be no marriage in the Kingdom of Heaven) but are useful, advisable traditions. They are human constructions, to be sure, but we are the humans who construct them, and we rather like them. They are ours to keep or ours to change or ours to throw away.

The theory is deeply held that all roads lead to sex. The act is even called "going all the way," as though the rest of intimacy were nothing but foreplay. Simply denying the accuser this identity — the identity of all intimacy with sexuality — frees the Christian to engage in all non-generative acts of affection. The sexual revolution has not been a liberation; it has made all love-making into penetration. Try cuddling. Try holding hands. Try sleeping chastly together.

The Christian has always understood that pleasure is a good thing and God-given. He has also understood that there are good reasons to abstain from it, such as greater pleasures, higher priorities, and the pursuit of perfection. Anticipation is greater than satisfaction, and there is a right fear of lust, which is desire's evil twin. Man is not an animal born for comfort, pleasure, and death.

Baalam fell from grace for teaching the congregation fornication. I will not follow his example. But the congregation has already been taught. I recommend chastity where it is possible, if only because the generative act is powerful and not a toy. The issue of abortion would be no issue for a congregation that could practice chastity. But the door has been left open and the horses are out of the barn. Be innocent, therefore: Do not foster speculation as to who has had sex with whom. Do not heap shame on sexual behavior (you do the work of blackmailers when you do this); discern but do not judge. Commit to a consort as to a husband or a wife. Care for all children as though they were your own.

Abortion, again, is a secondary question to a belief in sex as the inevitable outcome of mutual affection. This inevitability must be challenged. A woman may well have a right to an abortion, as I have the right to shoot an intruder: but this is a right I pray never to exercise. So I keep no treasure in my home, nor any gun, and hope no intruder will come. If one does come, I will welcome him as a guest. The man and woman to whom abortion is a priority will make sacrifices to avoid it. The point is to avoid the generative act, even with precautions (which often fail), unless the child will be welcome and loved.

Abortion scrubs a person from history. It maims the tree of life. It denies responsibility for the generative act. It kills, and beyond some stage of development, it murders, too. (Perhaps it will help to imagine being in the womb, aware of your parents' voices, and then torn out.) It may be uncomfortable to acknowledge these things.

The Church *must* act powerfully to address the underlying feminist grievances that justify abortion. Except for control over one's body — which cannot be absolute for anyone — most can be met by other measures, such as by reducing pressure to have sex and by offering massive practical support to pregnant women and parents.

Prospective parents face serious impediments, and some for reasons of health or other circumstances may literally have no way to overcome them. What if it were illegal to evict a mother in the first years after birth? What if a basic income for new parents were put in place? The lack of creativity is astounding; the lack of Church involvement in advocacy is shameful; the present reality is nothing but applied eugenics. Here is how you tell a eugenicist: "If we help parents, the wrong people will breed."

Some mothers are sure they simply cannot survive in a cutthroat culture with a baby, and the baby won't make it either. This is the calculation. Targeting abortion itself to change this reality is a miscalculation. Those who have tried directly to restrict abortion have done as much for the practice as its proponents on account of the predictable political backlash.

### **Desire**

One never misses a desire one does not have, though when we have a desire we would not give it up: Desire is good and God-given. It is good to cultivate desire and good to frustrate it. Desire is distinct from lust in that it is not covetous or controlling: It is merely a vulnerability left open for love to satisfy. Yet it is not always good to pursue a desire; it is better, often, to appreciate it when its satisfaction comes without our planning it ahead. Strengthen desire and resistance to desire simultaneously, so that desire neither overruns you nor peters out. "There are souls more sick of pleasure," writes Chesterton, "than you are sick of pain."

Mindless desire is sinful; it is the kind inculcated by advertisements and cultural norm enforcement. But mindful desire, coupled with self-control and love, is always good. God does look out for the satisfaction of our desires, but not on our time tables or the way we want it.

Nudity in itself has no moral content. We play a great game around it to make it exciting: We wear clothes in no small part to take them off. It is good to be modest, for the sake of making it easier for an onlooker to avoid lust; but it is the onlooker who has an obligation to gouge out his

eye, if it cause him to stumble. Retain modesty and embarrassment but do away with shame. It is our commitment to clothing that makes nakedness such a thrill. Why spoil the game?

There is no greater joy in love than to be the satisfaction of another's need. Do not be ashamed of anyone.

### **The Law**

*Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 5:19*

We are joint heirs with Christ. Therefore the law is a friend and a tutor, not a master. We must be attentive to it in all things and we must not be too quick to explain it away. Just as the Sabbath is made for man, we might say that "Thou shalt not kill" is made for man — for who could desire to kill one he loves? So we simultaneously accept the right to neglect the law (for it is not over us) and deny any desire to do so. Indeed we attempt to keep the heart of the law with perfect scrupulosity: We will love God and neighbor no matter the cost to us.

So we look at "Thou shalt not kill" as a promise that we will not have to kill. We hold tight to our love for this neighbor in our crosshairs, and we will only pull the trigger if we must — and we do not have to, for we can choose to endure shame, poverty, torture, or death instead. When it is time to kill an animal, we do so with remorse.

We keep the Sabbath always, but especially on Sunday. How? By noting that what was forbidden was irksome labor and preparation for the future. Work must bring joy, or a challenge, or peace, or some other intrinsic good. What is being accomplished must be meaningful. Work must be an expression of love. We cannot work, or ask others to work, in a spirit of slavery. Until money is made just, it is a violation of the Sabbath to pay money for insipid, demeaning, or vapid work. (Some people may actually like that kind of thing; it will be fine to pay them to do it when money is just. But for now we participate in their coercion when we pay for dismal work.)

We seek to remedy the injustice represented by usury (which was forbidden) not, perhaps, by forbidding lending at interest (for we are free to play any social game we like), but by controlling the way collection and default do harm to a borrower. In the same way we would restrict evictions and require landlords to help with the move. This is the effective way to advance the love that lay behind the ban on usury. The monetary cost of this will ultimately be taken up by renters and debtors, it is true, but the real world costs will change in their favor, because they will no longer be cornered by usurious lenders and landlords.

Bearing false witness against a neighbor is forbidden by the law. Lying is not. Earnestly wishing not to lie, we conduct ourselves so as not to need to. But we understand that others may create the circumstances for it. Though we may be forced to dissemble, we never compromise sincerity. We will never be forced to bear false witness against a neighbor, however minutely.

We affirm that Jesus declared all foods clean: We also affirm that this is not how we decide which foods to eat. Gluttony is a matter of the inherent worth of a food; just as cannibalism is detestable, so is the eating of certain meats, because of *who* has been consumed. This is not a matter of cleanliness. Deuteronomy says, "Thou mayest eat flesh, whatsoever thy soul lusteth after." Yes! But who can stand to eat the flesh of a neighbor?

We tithe from our excess; our lives are consecrated as gifts to God. Only ravening wolves solicit large cash donations from the poor. Neither does God engage in *quid pro quo*. Give because you love your neighbor.

It will sometimes be time to rip out evil from among you. This is not a matter of punishment or vengeance. Do not hesitate. Do not rejoice when it is done. We renounce harsh words, harsh tones, harsh looks, the imputation of harshness, and all harsh deeds. Vengeance is His.

As heaven and earth have not passed away, every jot and tittle of the law remains for us, though all be fulfilled. What was written "thou shalt not" becomes a promise: a promise that the LORD will keep us far from harming those we love.

We recognize that we live in vast eternity even now, and that time is its sprouting seed; that the Kingdom of Heaven has come, and Christ is its King forever; that we must merely keep His sayings to live in it completely. The promise of a resurrection is His alone to keep: And what He has begun, He will be faithful to complete.

☛ *Joshua, @paleoludic*

*My desire is that this will spread, should God will it, from friend to friend.*

*Please share it if you can, and consider reading two other letters of mine:*

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