

Professor Allan Patience is an Australian lay Catholic presently working at Sophia University in Tokyo. Archbishop Denis Hart's recent apology to victims of sexual abuse has stirred him into penning this cutting response that argues the institution's present problems extend far beyond the present focus of the sexual abuse scandal.

Apologies for Sexual Abuse are now "Too Little, Too Late"

Archbishop Denis Hart's pastoral letter, apologizing for the suffering caused by clerical sexual abuse, is too little too late. It is unlikely to stem the rising tide of frustration and alienation that many contemporary Catholics feel towards the official Catholic Church, and especially towards the hierarchy. Archbishop Hart describes himself as "your Archbishop. This is his first error. He is not "our" Archbishop in any meaningful sense. He is "the" Archbishop of Melbourn appointed by the Pope and he remains in that office at the Holy Father's pleasure. His first loyalty is to Rome and to a distantly decided doctrinal orthodoxy that barely reflects the needs and interests of local parishioners and their priests. This orthodoxy is policed — often with breathtaking rigidity — by a Vatican bureaucracy with almost no compassion towards the very people it directly affects. Hence many contemporary Catholics have only grudging sympathy for their bishops, whether they are innocent of covering up (or engaging in) sexual abuse or not. Until the Church gives local Catholics an authoritative voice in the election of their bishops, the gap between the hierarchy and the people will continue to widen. For many thoughtful Catholics this gap is already at breaking point.

Archbishop Hart's second error is that he expects us to obediently believe that the words of his apology are sincere. However, given the attenuated history of the sexual abuse scandal — especially the cover-ups along the way — his Grace's letter is in danger of coming across as hollow to many people. This is because the scandal is being handled so ineptly and so defensively by too many bishops and by the Vatican. The hierarchy's credibility flew out the window a long time ago over this issue. Moreover, mere words are not enough. They need to be backed with effective actions. What is needed is a genuine and sensitive programme of pastoral care for the victims of clerical abuse and Church judgmentalism generally. The current predominantly legalistic approach is only making things worse. A more compassionate response must extend beyond the present arrangements. In the public domain those arrangements are tarnished because of police concerns about them, whatever the Archbishop says in their defence.

The third error implicit in Archbishop Hart's apology is that the sexual abuse scandal is the only really serious or sole problem bedeviling the Church at this time. However, sexual abuse is only the tip of the iceberg of anguish that is threatening the very viability of the Universal Church today. Many Catholics are painfully aware of the rampant hypocrisy that marks the actions of not a few members of the hierarchy and religious orders. Too many bishops are living extravagant life styles, flying to and from Rome in business or even first class cabins and wining and dining fabulously. Their sense of entitlement is out of all proportion to their proclaimed commitment to a life of Christ-like simplicity and their alleged "preference for the poor." The problem is that they stand loftily apart seemingly never accountable to the people they "rule" and who provide them with the means to live as they do. They have all the pretensions of corporate CEOs, and much of the hypocrisy, and most seem to have abandoned their primary duty of pastoral care for priests, religious and for the laity. Lord Acton's warning about power is as apposite as ever:

I cannot accept your canon that we are to judge Pope and King unlike other men with a favourable presumption they can do no wrong. If there is any presumption, it is the other way, against the holders of power, increasing as the power increases. Historic responsibility has to

make up for the want of legal responsibility. Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or corruption by full authority. *There is no worse heresy than the fact that the office sanctifies the holder of it.* [Italics added]

The sexual abuse scandal is evidence that the hierarchy's exercise of power (vis-à-vis conveying the love expounded in the Sermon on the Mount) has corrupted it at many levels. The humble Galilean would surely be shocked by the gilded presumptions of power of the Pope and cardinals in the Vatican and their acolytes in bishops' palaces around the world. In tandem with this corruption is a gross sense of entitlement that has penetrated much of the hierarchy and contemporary religious life. Lay people are left with the sense that they exist only to be used (and sometimes abused) while being expected to fund the hierarchy's needs and remain eternally obedient. Little wonder that alienation is setting in with a vengeance. The old joke that it costs the laity a fortune to keep the bishops true to their vow of poverty is no longer risible.

A misogynist Vatican...

Nor do lay people need to be told that there are some exceptionally good priests and religious. They know who these people are and they love them for their goodness — a selfless goodness that sometimes puts them at odds with the hierarchy. But they also know there are equally good men who feel a deep call to be priests but who also have a vocation to be married. Lay people know, too, that there are magnificent women among them who would be brilliantly pastoral priests and diocesan leaders. But a misogynist Vatican bluntly refuses to engage with the issues of a married and/or female priesthood — even though these issues are critical to the Church's very survival.

Meanwhile the majority of priests are old men struggling to keep up with the educational levels and complex every-day lives of their parishioners. Too many priests and religious are frankly not up to the job. Some are down right lazy or egregiously manipulative. Some are disillusioned and bitter. They fear they have wasted their years in a Church that is indelibly smeared by the sexual crimes of a few. Their rates of alcoholism and mental illness are disturbingly high. They are often over-wrought and over-whelmed by bewildering expectations and recriminations increasingly being heaped upon them. Loneliness stalks many a presbytery. Meanwhile too many in the hierarchy are simply turning their gaze away. The result is that the Catholic laity in Melbourne who do attend Mass regularly (at best, about 20% of the million or so nominal Catholics in the diocese) are too often being subjected to vacuously pious homilies, graceless liturgies, and a spiritual exhaustion that turns young people away in droves and tests the faithfulness of older people severely.

The issues of birth control and gay people are also caustic examples of a disconnected hierarchy trampling ruthlessly on the rights of ordinary people trying to live meaningful lives in a confusing and complex world. The fanatical length to which the Vatican goes in railing against most normal variations in human sexuality flies in the face of the massive injustices resulting from global inequality. If only the Pope and his cardinals would focus their moral energies on the truly evil fact that each day thousands of children die from malnutrition around the globe, or that torture is still being used on prisoners of war, or that more is spent on producing the technologies of war than on freeing the world from hunger. The Vatican's stunningly unbalanced approach to the fundamental immorality of the structuring of contemporary globalization simply beggars belief.

While sexual abuse is unquestionably a deeply serious issue, its resolution (when and if that ever happens) will not put an end to the crisis the Church is facing in the twenty-first century.

Only a radical rethinking of the faith, clearly focused on the Christian Gospel of unconditional love, can offer a way forward.

The following article, by Doreen Carvajal and Stephen Castle, appeared in the New York Times on July 12, 2010

Abuse Took Years to Ignite Belgian Clergy Inquiry

WESTVLETEREN, Belgium — Behind an aggressive investigation of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Belgium that drew condemnation from the pope himself lies a stark family tragedy: the molestation, for years, of a youth by his uncle, the bishop of Bruges; the prelate's abrupt resignation when a friend of the nephew finally threatened to make the abuse public; and now the grass-roots fury of almost 500 people complaining of abuse by priests.

The first resignation of a European bishop for abusing a child relative came unexpectedly on April 23. At 73, the Bruges bishop, Roger Vangheluwe, Belgium's longest-serving prelate, tersely announced his retirement and acknowledged molesting "a boy in my close entourage." The boy, not named, was his own nephew, now in his early 40s.

The nephew's story, pieced together through documents and interviews with him and others, shows that the nephew, acting after years of torment and strong evidence of church inaction, finally forced the bishop's hand when the friend sent e-mail messages to all of Belgium's bishops threatening to expose Bishop Vangheluwe.

For nearly 25 years, the nephew said, he sought to alert others that he had been molested by his uncle. Abuse started when he was 10, according to a retired priest, the Rev. Rik Devillé, who said he had tried to warn Belgium's cardinal, Godfried Danneels, about the Bruges prelate's abuse 14 years ago, but was berated for doing so.

It is not known whether Cardinal Danneels or others notified the Vatican, itself mired in allegations of inaction on sexual abuse, about the case at the time.

The Vatican accepted the bishop's resignation as the scandal erupted in April but said nothing about the case until the Belgian police raided church properties in late June, an act that Pope Benedict XVI called "deplorable." Now Belgium is unique in that civil authorities seized the documents that the church might have used to pursue its own investigations, apparently placing long-shrouded cases in the public realm.

Over the years, the nephew — who still does not want his name used publicly — channeled his rage into creating art: giant screaming images in gnarled wood or a montage of a boy being crushed by a mattress.

The resignation for sexual abuse sent waves through the Catholic hierarchy in Flanders, the northern Dutch-speaking part of the country, where religion is a powerful cultural influence. Bishop Vangheluwe, who retreated to a Trappist monastery, remains under investigation by the Belgian authorities in perhaps another child sexual abuse case and accusations that he concealed such complaints lodged against others.

A public pledge by Archbishop André-Joseph Léonard of Brussels that the Bruges resignation marked an end to cover-ups prompted more than 500 people — mostly men — to come forward in just two months.

“For the first time there is a generation of men who are telling that they were sexually abused by men,” said Peter Adriaenssens, a psychiatrist who led an internal church commission on sexual abuse but resigned last month after the police confiscated all his case files. Mr. Adriaenssens noted that many boys were beaten by parents who disbelieved their complaints. There was, he said, a “silencing of society.”

With so many new potential victims, the police staged extraordinary raids last month, holding bishops for nine hours at the church’s Belgian offices in Mechelen while scouring the premises for hidden material. They drilled into a cardinal’s crypt and confiscated computers and documents, searching for proof that the church had concealed evidence.

Bishop Vangheluwe’s nephew remains reluctant to speak extensively about what happened. “I’m scared, and the church has a lot of power,” he said, standing near a wooden image of two heads, one with a mouth carved wide into a scream.

Father Devillé, who was alerted to the bishop’s behavior by a friend of the nephew but had no direct contact with the abused youth, said: “For the nephew, it was impossible to say anything. He didn’t want anyone else to know because there was great pressure in the family to keep silent.”

Father Devillé said the abuse continued for about eight years. When he confronted Cardinal Danneels in 1996, he said, the cardinal listened impatiently, glancing frequently at his watch. Weeks later, Father Devillé received a letter from the cardinal. “Stop making unfounded public accusations against the church and its functionaries if you don’t have proof,” it read. Under Belgian law, a sexual abuse victim can lodge a criminal complaint for only up to 10 years after turning 18. The church contends that Bishop Vangheluwe cannot face prosecution because the case is too old.

Cardinal Danneels, who was questioned for 10 hours last Tuesday by the police, said through his lawyer that he did not recall Bishop Vangheluwe’s name mentioned in connection with abuse.

Mr. Adriaen

ssens, who specializes in working with sexual abuse victims, said he believed that the turning point for the nephew came when a 12-year-old niece took home a holy card with a message from the bishop presented as a remembrance of her confirmation.

“It was a little card with a nice picture on the front and inside text from him on the importance of a healthy childhood,” Mr. Adriaenssens said. “This made him enraged.”

A meeting was arranged in April between the nephew, his family and the bishop of Bruges. But the family was infuriated that the retired Cardinal Danneels was the only other cleric present. They were expecting the newly appointed archbishop to attend, according to Mr. Adriaenssens, who said the family feared that the church was maneuvering to “silence” it.

Those suspicions were rooted deep because Belgian church officials failed to cooperate with child abuse cases stretching back over many years, according to Godelieve Halsberghe, a retired magistrate who led the internal church commission from 2000 to 2008.

In those eight years, Ms. Halsberghe said, she dealt with 33 cases, with 15 or 16 outstanding when she retired and the other half resolved with compensation for the victims, generally tens of thousands of euros. Church officials said only four cases were left outstanding. They also said that all cases notified to them after 2001 were passed on to the Vatican in accordance with rules set then by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, named pope in 2005. She said she dealt only with the Belgian church.

By April 19 this year, the e-mail messages from the nephew's friend had reached all of Belgium's bishops. A day later, Mr. Adriaenssens received news of a call from the nephew making a formal complaint to the commission hot line about his uncle. Mr. Adriaenssens called the bishop.

"This is your first moment to be a real priest," Mr. Adriaenssens said he told him after the bishop admitted responsibility. Within an hour of calls to other commissioners, the view was: The bishop had to resign.

Now Belgian prosecutors and investigators must sort the hundreds of complaints that have emerged since.

Justice Minister Stefaan De Clerck said his nation was living through a period of soul-searching similar to what followed the scandal over Marc Dutroux, who was arrested in 1996 and eventually convicted in the kidnapping, torture and sexual abuse of six girls, including four who died even though the police searched his home while some victims were imprisoned there. "How can you explain that so many people didn't go to police, didn't go to justice?" Mr. De Clerck asked.

Mr. Vangheluwe is abiding by an agreement with the conference of bishops that he cannot grant interviews while living in St. Sixtus Abbey here in Westvleteren.

At vespers on Thursday, he stood out among 24 monks in homespun black and white robes. Holding a prayer book turned to Psalm 99, he was a stooped figure in gray trousers, a light short-sleeved shirt and sandals.

After prayers, half of the monks left; Mr. Vangheluwe stayed for an optional 10 minutes of silent contemplation.

The following piece, from www.heraldscotland.com, was published on July 14.

Why won't men in frocks let women wear the trousers?

Now let's see ...assorted wars still being waged?

Check. Famine, pestilence and poverty undefeated? Check. Inequalities in life expectancy unresolved? Check. Global warming still rampant? Check.

With that kind of in-tray, what else would the General Synod of the Church of England find to furrow its brow for two days of internecine warfare but that burning issue of the day: women bishops. If God wasn't so darned busy, she'd doubtless despair. What is it with these men in frocks that they won't let women wear the ecclesiastical trousers? Heaven knows they spent long enough letting them tiptoe from the kitchen to the pulpit.

By the time some 32 female priests were finally ordained in Bristol in the mid-1990s, 14 were well on the way to retirement and one was about to meet her maker.

Yet lots of the boys in the black stuff were still very unhappy.

Many, many toys were flung from the evangelical wing's prams. There were schemes for a sort of flying bishop corps who could swoop into dioceses contaminated by female ordination, so that no dissident member of a flock should be deprived that brand of clerical wisdom and pastoral care which can apparently be dispensed uniquely by men.

It wasn't dressed up as anything so crass as misogyny of course. It was a matter of the highest learned and theological principle. As it should say in the good book: "Aye, right." And the muttering went on when the numbers of women priests slowly rose until, good grief, there seemed to be hundreds of the besoms. Just as well a huge proportion of them couldn't actually find paid employment.

But just as you finally get an axe through one stained glass ceiling, as if by magic another one appears above. The monstrous regiment of women priests might have got to first base, but promoted posts?

Forget it.

Female bishops? An outrage too far.

And while the lads were working themselves into a decent lather over this proposition, the newish Pope popped up with a probably repeatable offer. Join the Roman Catholic Church. You know it makes sense. Some did. Some more will. And some have had the nerve to demand severance payments and compensation en route to a faith where women know their place. Or at least their menfolk know their place on their behalf.

Even this week, as the rows raged and the Archbishop of Canterbury ran round the pitch trying to quell the cloggers but seemed disinclined to issue yellow cards,

the forces of clerical darkness were still demanding the right to have their own breed of bishop, not just comfortingly male, but with a clean preaching licence which had no prior convictions ordaining women, or approving anyone else who did.

The far from unspoken fear was of schism and decline. Though, in fact, both are already a fact of life. The Church of England is effectively at war with itself and has been these many years, if not over women

getting ideas above their due station, then over its twin obsession on gay priests. Or, as we say in the lay world, persistent homophobia.

Church at war, and obsessively navel gazing. Dwindling band of the faithful.

Could these two by any chance be related? Neither are women bishops a done and dusted deal. It's a bit like finding yourself in the qualifying rounds for the Champions League and then

clocking you have two more stages to negotiate before you get to play with the big boys. So what they've signed up to is a sort of first draft which will bounce around the mini synods for a couple of years and needs to win majority support before it can be debated all over again in 2012.

Perhaps as an additional Olympic event: very high hurdles for dog-collared women. Just in case they manage to get to that finishing line, church law then requires a two-thirds majority from the C of E's three constituent parts. And if it fails, the women have to start the campaign all over again.

Even if it doesn't, 2014 is the earliest date for the big pointy hat to ruin its first female blow dry. Make these hurdles a marathon. But we should not be sniggering too loudly from behind the tartan arras. Let us remind ourselves that the Church of Scotland took the best part of 500 years to let women enter the ministry. And that it held fast to an all-male cast list for the Moderator's role well into the 21st century.

The redoubtable Margaret Forrester was unsuccessful in no fewer than three bids. Mary Levison and Ruth Page also found their names strangely stuck to the bottom of the hat. And when the breakthrough finally came, thanks in no small measure to an all-female shortlist, the Kirk voted in the elder rather than the meenister just five short years ago.

That it has managed one more of the female persuasion since doesn't make up for years of scarcely veiled prejudice. Or the fact that women ministers, in a country where 52% of the populace is female, still make up less than 20% of the ministerial troops. And don't let us forget that the General Assembly, too, had its moment of non-glory in 2009 when it expended a ludicrous amount of energy on the appointment of a gay minister.

It's one thing to be otherworldly; flocks quite like the chap or chapess in the pulpit not to be obsessed with the more trivial earthly pursuits which fascinate the rest of us. But you do want the churches, of whatever stripe, to try to stay in the same century as those they seek to lead into better ways of living.

If I were that all-purpose Martian, landing in the vicinity of the York Synod these past few days, I'd be pretty staggered they thought nothing on this troubled planet mattered more than bishops wearing bras.

And, finally, an interview with Father Thomas Keating, which is available in full at [\[http://www.enlightennext.org/magazine/j13/keating.asp?page=1\]](http://www.enlightennext.org/magazine/j13/keating.asp?page=1)

The Heart of the Matter

- A Dialogue between Father Thomas Keating and Andrew Cohen

INTRODUCTION

In every issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* we aspire to introduce our readers to sincere and passionate individuals who care profoundly about their fellow human beings and who dare to accept, as their own burden, the deepest spiritual aspirations of the race. Such encounters are always a privilege, but it sometimes happens, as it did with Father Thomas Keating, that the warmth, love, decency and sheer humanity that we experience in their presence exceed our expectations, and we can only wonder at the good fortune of being able to include their insights, ideas—and their spirit—in our ongoing inquiry into the nature and significance of enlightenment.

Father Keating, who spent twenty years as the abbot of St. Joseph's Abbey, a Trappist monastery in Spencer, Massachusetts, is now, at seventy-four, the leading figure in an interdenominational movement to revitalize the Christian contemplative practice known as "centering prayer." He is the cofounder of Contemplative Outreach, an organization devoted to introducing Christian contemplative practices to laypeople of all faiths, and the author of several books, including *Open Mind*, *Open Heart* and *Intimacy with God*, both of which describe the process of spiritual development that such practices are intended to catalyze.

Since the beginning of his Outreach activities, Father Keating has shared responsibility for the development of contemplative workshops and retreats with several of his colleagues. Yet for many of the growing number of people who have benefited from their work, it is Keating himself, because of his extraordinary warmth and humility, who exemplifies and embodies the transformative potential of centering prayer. As a result, he is in constant demand as a lecturer and workshop leader and maintains, despite frail health, a taxing schedule that takes him to several cities each year. Keating is also known for his avid and unusually open-minded interest in the contemplative and meditative practices of other religious traditions. He has met and studied with spiritual teachers from a variety of Hindu and Buddhist lineages and helped to create, fifteen years ago, the Snowmass Interreligious Conference, at which teachers from different traditions meet regularly to compare views and ideas, and to evaluate objectively the benefits and drawbacks of their respective practices.

In the midst of all this activity, one might well suppose that Father Keating's celibacy is, as he says it was in his years as a novice, a given, something to be considered only in the context of so many other pressing concerns. But in the course of his fifty-three years as a celibate monk—several of them spent guiding others in the practice—Father Keating has clearly given much thought to the significant role celibacy can play in the lives of sincere spiritual aspirants, and it is a testament to his open-mindedness that, among the highly respected advocates of celibacy we interviewed for this issue, he is uniquely outspoken in his insistence that the celibate state must never be regarded as inherently superior, nor as essential to the attainment of any ultimate spiritual goal. The goal of celibacy, Father Keating asserts passionately, is "ever greater humility and purity of heart . . . a letting go of pride and the false self so that God can be God in us." Fundamental to his approach is the recognition that it is only through the cultivation of these attributes—humility and purity—and only through a process of "inner purification" rather than "external observance," that the potential of any spiritual practice to bring about authentic and lasting transformation can be realized.

Father Keating shared his views with spiritual teacher Andrew Cohen, the founder of *What Is Enlightenment?*, by telephone from his mountain hermitage at St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado, last October.
—Craig Hamilton

INTERVIEW

Andrew Cohen: I thought that a good way to get started would be to give you a little background about why we're interested in discussing the subject of celibacy with you for this issue of our magazine. I'm a spiritual teacher with a community of students, and I put a lot of emphasis on renunciation and the role that it plays in helping human beings come closer to truth. There was a period in my own life when I practiced celibacy consciously for about three years, and it helped me enormously to realize a degree of objectivity in relationship to sexuality, which is a most challenging area of human life. So at this point, I encourage some of my own

students to devote a period of time—usually it's between three and five years—to a very formal practice of celibacy, in order to help them also to become clearer about this aspect of their own human experience.

So to begin with, could I ask when you first took your vow of chastity?

Thomas Keating: Let's see, that must have been in 1946, after my novitiate. I had already taken vows, though, for the two years of the novitiate, when I first entered the Trappist monastery.

AC: What kind of vows were those?

TK: Those were temporary vows like the ones your students take, a temporary commitment intended to give the candidates a chance to experience the challenges and benefits of the practice of perfect chastity. I might add that I had already been practicing outside the monastery for two or three years while I was going to school; but it's quite different to practice celibacy—or chastity, if you want to use that word—without the support of a spiritual community. So I'm glad to hear that the men and women who come to you for teaching are able to support each other in this endeavor; that's a great idea. And as I'm sure you know, the commitment to celibacy as a state of life isn't the only feature of monastic life, but it's one of several commitments, all of which are considered to be equally supportive and essential to the transformative process. For example, there's a commitment to poverty, and its tendency to induce a non-possessive attitude toward material things—just as chastity tends to induce a non-possessive attitude toward the body and sex—and obedience, which is meant to instill a non-possessive attitude toward our own will and judgment through submission to a teacher or to the community as a whole if the community has a Rule of Life.

AC: Did you have any expectations about what the practice of celibacy would be like? Would you say, for example, that it represented, in your own mind and heart, a kind of sweetness—sweetness as in simplicity?

TK: Well, to tell you the truth, monastic life is extremely austere and hard—at least it was in the monastery that I entered. And so one kind of took celibacy more or less for granted, and one's concrete attention was often devoted to the various other practices—like getting up at one or two in the morning and praying in the early hours of the dawn, fasting and abstinence, and along with all that, working very, very hard. So you really felt less involved with the concerns associated with the practice of celibacy than with, you know, having sufficient health and determination just to get through the daily schedule. That's my best recollection. You know, you're asking me about my life over fifty years ago, and my best recollection is how hard the physical life was and how searching was the exterior silence. We spoke only to the Superior and the Novice Master most of the time, and it was silence, the experience of silence, that was most pervasive. So it would be hard for me to say that I experienced celibacy in any other way than as part of the context in which these other very concrete issues were turning up every single day. When you get up at one in the morning, for example, all you're really thinking about is getting down to the church on time.

AC: How has your experience of celibacy changed or deepened over the years?

TK: It has only become clearer that it's a gift of God and that the practice of it is entirely dependent on God's power and mercy. In other words, you learn about your weaknesses in a way that only strong temptation and perhaps a few other things can teach you. So all I can say

is, "So far, so good"—but I never claim that I'll make it to the end. In fact, I remember a dear old brother who, at eighty-five, used to come to speak to the Superior, and when he left he'd always say, "Pray for my perseverance!" Because he was worried, you know, that he might hit the road to town before he managed to get himself back to his room!

But another thing that comes to mind is that as one matures in a lifelong commitment to celibacy, there's a whole set of attitudes toward God that begin to emerge as a result of this movement from formal commitment to direct experience, from friendship with God to union with God—attitudes that open one to ever deeper possibilities of union with ultimate reality, ever greater humility and purity of heart, which are what were identified by the Desert Fathers and Mothers as the goal of celibacy. And I think that that would be what characterizes my own experience more than anything else—the ever increasing desire for humility and purity of heart. Of course, physical success in observing celibacy can also lead, in some cases, to a certain sense of achievement or pride, and in fact there's a recorded instance of that; it's the famous case of some Jansenist nuns in sixteenth or seventeenth century France who were described as "pure as angels but proud as devils"—so evidently something was not working in their celibate commitment! And that's why I feel so strongly that celibacy needs to be presented not in isolation but as part of a larger package, and especially with the interior purpose or intention of getting closer to God. Because the renunciation is sometimes very, very intense, and one needs the motivation of knowing that this really is moving somewhere that's more important than physical attraction, or comfort, or sexual relief or whatever—of knowing that this is the love of God coming to fulfillment in oneself, all at once in a number of different ways, all leading to a letting go of pride and the false self so that God can be God in us.

AC: Especially in light of what you've just spoken about so beautifully, I'd like to ask you about the common view that the celibate state represents an inherently higher or purer condition than the noncelibate. I'm sure you're aware that there's a lot of debate going on around questions like this these days. ...

Please send your comments and articles to tony@tonvercolano.com