

“Courage” Ministry
Article 70 August 2012
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**Educating Ourselves to Be Better Informed Using the
Grace Given To Us by Christ**

Introduction

In the Liturgy of 29th July 2012, the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Saint Paul exhorts us "... to live a life a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace... But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift." (Ephesians 4: 1-3, 7). This is a constant call of mine as well in the ministry of Courage and now Encourage.

How do we inform, instruct, edify and nurture our intellect, mind, soul, spirit?

We all have our own way of gaining knowledge. For me it is reading sacred scripture and inspirational works – to renew my mind. I find the lives of the saints a good source of spiritual reading and unexpected wisdom in how they cut through various difficulties. Sadly the reading of them is almost a forgotten pastime in our modern life. Does your spiritual director, mentor, have an acquaintance of the lives? What do we fill our minds with each day? Are we allowing ourselves to be distracted by too much reliance on iPods, magazines, newspapers, internet, television news? How do we allow the time for solitary and in-depth prayer. How do we allow the Spirit of God to inspire us to plan for witness and mission and service to our brothers and sisters? Another way I do this is by memorizing scripture, listening to significant people in the secular and spiritual world who enable me to reflect on the way the human and the divine work together in our world. How are we nurturing, informing, educating our mind, heart, soul, spirit and body?

Reading and study

In the Ministry of Courage it is important to keep up a knowledge base as much as possible with trends, views, erudition and social commentary. This is not an end in itself, but in order to be as wise as serpents and simple as doves, we need to be able to answer men and

women with credible perspectives. It is sometimes the most vehement proposer of the opposite view who helps us most. The starkness of the vehement, volatile, outrageous view can enable us to hone our own perspectives. Many men and women are won over by the persistently strong views of social commentators and the pervasive secular media. They claim to be a liberating voice as they speak for those men and women who believe, feel, are judged, denigrated and outcast from the normal Church, worshipping, fellowship circles. We need to make a credible response to such influences.

A Same sex attraction *Literary Tour de Force*

I have just finished reading the book *Sexual Authenticity: An Intimate Reflection on Homosexuality and Catholicism* by Melinda Selmys (Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division Our Sunday Visitor, Inc. Huntington, Indiana 46750, 2009), which shows to a fine degree how we can experience the exhortation Saint Paul calls us to in Ephesians. The book is divided into five parts – *Homosexuality in the World, Homosexuality in Theory, Homosexuality and the Human Person, Homosexuality and God* and finally *Homosexuality and Identity*. It is not the usual type of same sex attracted work but one in which I could so readily agree with the ideas, thoughts, approaches, and practical ways expressed. Melinda displays a vibrant living charity, patience and love to men and women on both sides of the debate about the Catholic Church's doctrines and a moving pastoral sensitivity to those who are seeking the truth about God, Church and Life. Her testimony at the end of the book is given totally verbatim, for it points the way others might employ to seek God's will and way.

Melinda writes cogently on how a person may intellectually adopt a lifestyle of SSA for various ideological reasons. Her perceptive chapters are a good balance to the at times intemperate, prejudicial and intolerantly expressed points of view from the literature on both sides of the divide of same sex attraction battlegrounds.

Melinda writes from her own history of living a former lifestyle of a same sex attracted woman. On page 213 she provides a telling insight into how a person may almost unconsciously take up the same sex attraction life style. "A particular kind of self-insular feminist will, I think, tend to drift into lesbianism on the basis that it doesn't seem to impinge on freedom and autonomy, because a relationship with someone who is *like* oneself naturally contains less threat of compromise."

Melinda's courageous testimony

"When the life of God is embraced and "is lived, it transforms the rest of reality into a foretaste of heaven. The entire project of human living comes into its own, develops its meaning. The light of God shines through life as though through a photographic negative. At last, so much that seems like meaningless and chaos resolves into order, into significance. The trials and sufferings and pains of life cease to be an engine, stopped in the sky and become the chiaroscuro etchings of a portrait so beautiful it is almost impossible to believe that this is oneself, perfected – as one appeared in the beginning, in the mind of God, before all the broken chemistry of a fallen womb or the first breath of hospital-scented air."

It is for this that I gave up homosexuality. I could feel the light creeping under the doorways of my heart, and I understood that it might reveal a future without lesbianism - I understood it with all the terrible clarity of Christ looking at the cup of suffering offered to Him at Gethsemane. There were absolutely no illusions, no possibility of turning and twisting Scripture until it said what I wanted it to say. I had told God clearly what I wanted; then I had said, "Thy will be done."

So it was that I ended up kneeling in the chapel at Queen's University, some three months after I had first started praying to an unknown deity, a formless "Thou who art." I started to pray as I usually did, offering up a general thanksgiving, an informal expression of my own joy in the world that I had been invited to inhabit. It was not long before prayers from my childhood began rising up in my mind, and I voiced them, as naturally as I had then. "Our Father, who art in Heaven...". The Hail Mary was new to me, but I had learned it in some quiet moment at the library, when I had first recognized the Lady in the Moon as the Virgin Mother of God. I prayed it as well. Finally, when I had exhausted all of the more innocent prayers, and sung the Christian hymns that I remembered, I realized that I desperately wanted to pray something more. There was something further, unexpressed. Almost without realizing what I was doing I began to whisper, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. And I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, Our Lord..."

"The creed ended in silence. And in that silence, I could feel God there, waiting. A question hovered in the air between us: *What are you doing?* It was not reproachful, and I understood immediately what it meant: why was I saying that I believed these things and yet refusing to acknowledge them in my life, outside of this little space that I set aside for prayer? Why had I spoken with my lips what I had not

professed in my heart? I could see, with absolute clarity, that I stood at a crossroads. (See Jeremias 6:16 my insert). Either I would reiterate that prayer of belief, and make it real, entirely, with the rest of my life, or else I would turn away and never pray again. I had asked to know God, and to know God's will, and now I did.

I went home, dialled the phone, and said, "Name of lover..., I'm becoming a Catholic. That means that we can't be together anymore - not as lovers." It was the end of a relationship that had lasted nearly seven years. It was the beginning of a life more beautiful than I could have asked for or imagined."

We like Paul always have hope

We can see in this testimony the qualities and determination required to live a life in Christ, and so follow St Paul's injunction from the Liturgy of the 17th Sunday of Ordinary time in the second reading from Ephesians 4:1-3 "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". Melinda's whole book is a testimony to these qualities. It does not follow the usual genre of books devoted to the issues and complexities of same sex attraction. It may be a trend setter for the pastoral approach that allows one to listen to whoever the person might be and whatever their angst, pain, bias and ideology maybe. I have learnt something more from this work and it encourages me to keep in contact and meeting men and women with their concerns about same sex attraction. Some of those have reverted to their former ways. My vocation is to respond to them as they call. Quite a lot of my current work is to meet those with same sex attraction in various places in Brisbane. Mostly at a coffee shop and frequently for a meal where substantial sharing occurs. I never give up hope.

Courage is a joint ministry of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane and the Emmanuel Community.

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