

My Secret is Mine

Catholic spirituality for modern women



Volume 1, Number 10

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Seeing with the Eyes of God

The ants of summer have arrived. I caught one in the second floor bathroom, and another by the basement television. (The subterranean ant looked better fed, nearer the cracker crumbs!) My youngest spent hours face to face with them on the patio. Then, smoosh!

If I wait long enough, Mother Nature will take care of my pest problem with frost. But I'm unwilling to share my abode for the summer, so I redirected them to the Raid ant "hotel." I'm just exercising my dominion over the plants and animals of the Kingdom. It's all biblically correct.

But contextually, I pause. Aren't I like an ant compared to my Lord? Doesn't he watch my every move, full of suspense? The analogy dies as fast as the ants in the "hotel."

Human beings are not animals, but creatures created in the image and likeness of God. And God isn't capricious, immobile with wonder one moment and smashing the wanderers the next. But my vision is rather limited, just like the ant. Do the shadows I fear resemble tolerant toddlers or efficient housewives, spiritual succor or soul-smashing evil?

In between the freshness of youth and the wisdom of old age, we often misjudge the magnitude of both mountains and molehills.
(continued on page two)

HUMILITY

Feature Essay: Page 1

Seeing Yourself with God's Eyes

Interview: Page 2

Anne Rice: Surprising and Scholarly

Scripture Study: Page 5

Isaiah 55: My Word Shall Not Return to Me Empty

Prayer Intentions: Page 6

For the Cross of Infertility

Historical Sketch: Page 7

Empress Irene and the Iconoclasts

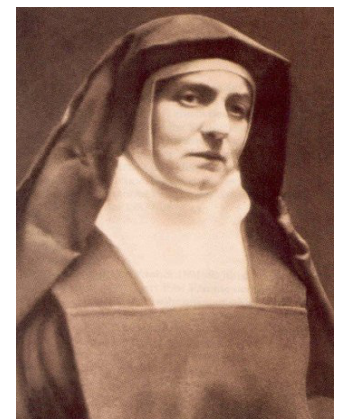
Book Review: Page 8

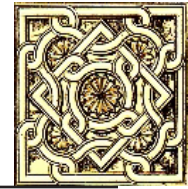
Pride and Prejudice, by Jane Austen

www.MySecretisMine.com

Secretum Meum Mihi means "My secret is mine"

Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta) was a Jew who became Catholic in 1922 after reading the autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila. When asked why she converted, she wrote, "secretum meum mihi." She became a Carmelite in 1934, but perished in Auschwitz. Her feast is August 9.





In April 1933, after losing her professorship at Munster, Edith Stein wrote a letter to Pope Pius XI, politely requesting he denounce the anti-Semitism of the ascendant Nazi regime. She never received a response.

The Vatican signed a concordat with the Third Reich in July 1933, the first vain attempt at negotiation with Hitler. Unintentionally, the Church only strengthened the Reich. Although many still criticize the popes of that era, historians have agreed that both Pius XI and his successor Pius XII saved many lives, both Jewish and Catholic.

We are a human, fallible Church, individually and corporately. United in the mystery of Christ, our actions and inactions affect the entire body. It is possible to misjudge a situation in myriad ways. Humility is born of a deep appreciation for human weakness.

However, true humility is a vigorous virtue. Based on the Latin word *humilis*, it connotes a low position in a hierarchy. Thus, healthy humility acknowledges the Creator, in addition to intimacy with His creatures.

God has infinite mercy on us, especially when none of our options appear right. From the crucible of the Nazi occupation of Europe, many great leaders emerged, including Pope John Paul II. He lived long enough to see Nazism and Communism crushed, and a renewal of the Catholic Church itself in the Second Vatican Council.

Edith Stein could not avoid death. She told her mother superior that her death would be united to Jesus' redemptive death. She wasn't exalting herself, but humbly giving testimony to God's vision for her life.

Peace be with you,

Kristen West McGuire interviews Anne Rice: A Surprising, Scholarly Look at the Historical Jesus

*(Novelist Anne Rice is famous for her carefully researched tales of vampires and witches. In 2005, her book **Christ the Lord, Out of Egypt**, was widely acclaimed but greeted with suspicion. Originally christened "Howard Allen" in her native New Orleans, she is a unique and gifted Catholic. Mrs. Rice now lives and works in California.)*

Kristen: What prompted you in 1998 to return to the Catholic Church?

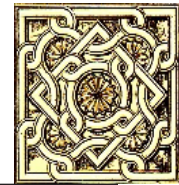
Anne: I returned to Holy Communion because I believed in it. The drive was so overwhelming that I didn't ask anyone, not even my husband. I had to wrestle with a lot of questions, on original sin, on homosexuality, on many topics. Finally, I realized it didn't matter what I personally thought. God would work all that out. I believed in God in the Eucharist and I would try to work my very best to be true to that impulse.

So, I went to confession to a particularly brilliant priest and then I went home and told my husband.

Kristen: Was he upset?

Anne: Art was religion for Stan. He felt we had to redeem ourselves by making life meaningful; you know, he was a very monastic personality. I can't count the times I found him reading the Bible— he was drawn to it. He painted religious paintings; they were explorations of the miraculous. It's amazing how often he went to religious themes. So, I did not fear to approach him about my decision. I felt secure.

Still, Stan was a "devout" atheist; his faith that there was no God was something one could compare to a believer. He wasn't neutral. Our marriage was stable because he brought high principles for life and living to our union. There was never a question of throwing in the towel. His commitment was stronger than mine.



When I converted, we had to marry in the Church. I fully expected him to object, but he immediately recognized the wisdom of the idea. He had a deep respect for standing before the tribe and proclaiming the vows. He was very moved during the ceremony in the New Orleans parish I'd gone to Mass in as a schoolchild, St. Mary's.

Kristen: I understand you were very ill in this period of time as well.

Anne: I went into a diabetic coma two days after getting married in the Church! The night before I was feeling very sick, and I thought it was just gastrointestinal. I have severe allergies, but I didn't know I was diabetic.

The healing after the coma was anxious and confusing. In a diabetic coma, your brain shrinks. I had no memory of that day, and my recovery was very difficult. I had a long, dry period. And at the same time, my faith was never shaken. God had in His wisdom had brought me back!

Death had always been a part of my life. I lost my mother in my teens, and my daughter to leukemia when she was not yet six. I was aware death could come and take someone. I always thought, "No one gets out alive."



Anne Rice: "I am amazed."

Kristen: I read that you decided to write only for the Lord so you could "approach the altar without convolution." Tell me about that.

Anne: Everything was smooth sailing when I did this in early 2002. I didn't know Stan would die. [Stan Rice died in 2002 of a brain tumor.] I was going back to the spiritual commitment of my childhood, when I wanted to be a nun, to give my life to Christ.

I told God, "I have all these people to take care of and salaries to pay, but if this is what you want me to do, from now on it's going to be completely for you." I didn't put this plan fully into place right away; I had already signed to write *Blood Canticle*.

That last book is the most densely theological of the vampire books. The hero resigns as a hero. He opts on the side of life. And it's an uneasy book; there is a sense of the condemnation of the hero for himself.

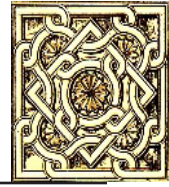
Kristen: Has writing only for God been what you expected it to be for you as an author?

Anne: All of my early conceptions were shattered as I made my way through all of the scholarship. I've always carefully researched my novels. I go with the earliest, oldest, most consistent position, which in most cases corresponds to the doctrines of the Church.

And I was amazed by the power of scripture to come at you. It's inexhaustible...and explosive! I'm knocked on my back on the road to Damascus every day.

Kristen: Were you surprised at the divisions in the Catholic Church that you discovered after your conversion?

Anne: I was not aware of the fights between liberals and conservatives, the arguments and the litmus tests they apply and their reactions to my public statements— I am amazed. This requires a recommitment every day to the gospels. History shows that Christianity in organized form is filled with quarreling.



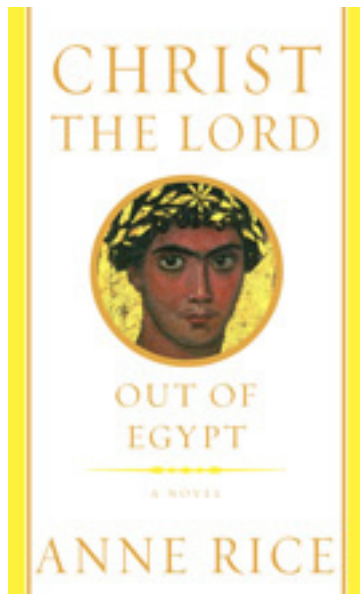
Kristen: I am uncomfortable with some of your older books. Do you have any regrets?

Anne: I really don't. My mind is not focused on regret; it's focused more on awe as to how things work out. Every book, even the most extreme, reflected my own search, things I needed to work through. For example, the explicit erotic scenes in *Blood and Gold* attempt to redeem our sexuality. Would I write that now? No, of course not.

People say, "If it is true you have renounced it, I want everything about vampires removed from your website." But I would not want to affect those vampire book lovers. I hope and pray that all my books have integrity, that they mirror something that is important.

Kristen: How do you see your work today?

Anne: My vocation is really to serve the humanity of Jesus Christ. Sometimes objections to the book [*Christ the Lord, Out of History*] are made on the grounds that Jesus is portrayed as too human. The book is my attempt to wrestle this belief to the ground, that Almighty God himself was born as a baby in a stable, a social inversion of such power that Christianity springs out of the east and changes the west. It's immensely powerful!



Anne's Favorite Poem:

Holy Sonnet XIV

by John Donne

*Batter my heart, three-person'd God;
for you*

*As yet but knock; breathe, shine,
and seek to mend;*

*That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me,
and bend*

*Your force, to break, blow, burn,
and make me new.*

*I, like an usurp'd town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but O, to no end.*

*Reason, your viceroy in me,
me should defend,*

*But is captived,
and proves weak or untrue.*

*Yet dearly I love you,
and would be loved fain,*

*But am betroth'd unto your enemy;
Divorce me, untie,*

*or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,*

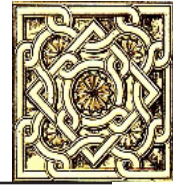
*Except you enthrall me,
never shall be free,*

Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

**John Donne, Volume I E.K. Chambers, ed.
London, Lawrence & Bullen, 1896, 165.**

ANNE RICE'S NEXT BOOK,
CHRIST THE LORD:
THE ROAD TO CANA
WAS RELEASED SPRING 2008

SHE DIED IN 2021 - for more info:
WWW.ANNERICE.COM



Bible Study:

Isaiah 55: 6-13

My Word Shall Not Return to Me Empty

*“Seek the LORD while he may be found,
call upon him while he is near;
7 let the wicked forsake his way, and the
unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may
have mercy on him, and to our God,
for he will abundantly pardon.
8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,
says the LORD.
9 For as the heavens are higher than the
earth, so are my ways higher than your
ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
10 “For as the rain and the snow
come down from heaven, and return not
thither but water the earth, making it
bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the
sower and bread to the eater,
11 so shall my word be that goes forth
from my mouth; it shall not return to me
empty, but it shall accomplish that which
I purpose, and prosper in the thing for
which I sent it.
12 “For you shall go out in joy,
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall break forth into singing,
and all the trees of the field
shall clap their hands.
13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the
cypress; instead of the brier shall come
up the myrtle; and it shall be to the
LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting
sign which shall not be cut off.”*

(Revised Standard Version)

Context: The book of Isaiah is divided by scholars into three sections. This section is supposed to have been composed by “deutero-Isaiah”, a prophet writing in Isaiah’s stead after the Babylonian exile.

You are probably more familiar with the first chapters of Deutero-Isaiah, memorialized by Handel’s Messiah: “Comfort ye...comfort ye, my people...Behold your God.”

Deutero-Isaiah was relentlessly encouraging. He’s writing to a dispirited people, devastated by the destruction of Jerusalem, and exiled by the Babylonians. The temple, the center of their religious beliefs, is gone. The need to repent is past; God’s mercy awaits!

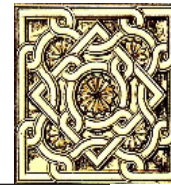
Translation: This biblical passage originally appeared in Hebrew. It was translated into Greek for Jews in the diaspora, called the Septuagint. Much later, St. Jerome translated the Septuagint into the Latin Vulgate, upon which many modern Bibles are based.

Vocabulary:

“Seek the LORD”: This phrase was commonly used to call the faithful to the temple. With the temple destroyed, it was understood as an exhortation to find Him outside the temple.

my word: Deutero-Isaiah speaks of the word not like a message, but an event. Later Christian commentators would find here a prophecy of the messiah, but for Israel, it acknowledges the nearness of God’s saving hand.

empty: Many other translations render this word as “void,” as it has the connotation of annihilation or purposelessness. God has a purpose for each of us.



My husband and children shudder when Christmas approaches, because all through Advent, I belt out impoverished attempts at the alto parts for Handel's Messiah. "The voice that crieth in the wilderness" isn't so much preparing the way of the Lord as caterwauling.

But I remind them that "my word shall not return to me void," says the Lord. It ranks on my list of top ten bible verses. Nothing God creates lacks a purpose. We are each uniquely formed according to his purpose. Omnipotence means his purpose is already taking into account our weaknesses and failings. Each moment, He is creating new possibilities for us to participate in His saving plan for His glory. Even bad cantatas sung in bathrooms can be redeemed. Saith your God.

Discussion Questions:

1. God's ways are not always obvious to us. Talk about a time when God's purpose was revealed in a place and time that surprised you. Did this incident affect your faith?
2. There are often monotonous and depressing tasks and chores involved in both the workplace and the home. Does God have a purpose for this? Or is a cigar sometimes just a cigar?
3. "Let the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts," reminds Isaiah. Oh, those pesky thoughts. A multitude of sins begin in the unfettered thoughts that pepper my cognition. Is there a healthy way to tap into the thoughts of God? If you were to let God be your thought police, what thoughts would he censor? Why?

Prayer Intentions:

Pray for Couples Suffering Infertility

Long ago, in ancient Israel, infertility was considered a punishment from the Lord. Although we've ditched the divine hubris, infertility is still a source of serious emotional pain for an estimated one out of every eight women in the U.S. alone.

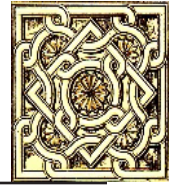
While medical advances have certainly provided hope, there is a darker side to medical intervention. Some of the treatments are not only invasive and painful, but against the teaching of the Catholic Church. When our deepest desires seem to be opposed by God himself, "painful" doesn't begin to describe the experience. The following websites are excellent resources for hope and healing.

An infertility website devoted to Catholic couples, including a chatroom and links.
www.catholicinfertility.org

The Pope Paul VI Institute develops morally and professionally acceptable reproductive health services for Catholic couples.
<http://www.popepaulvi.com/>

Hannah's Prayer Ministries provides Christian-based support and encouragement to couples around the world who are struggling with the pain of fertility challenges
www.hannah.org

A Little Pregnant is not a Catholic site, but the owner has a soul-searing story, and provides resources, regular news updates, and a non-judgmental atmosphere.
Link broken



LORD, we pray:

- * for all couples whose desire to have a family has not yet been fulfilled;
- * that women suffering from infertility would meet compassionate and joyful friends who can accompany them on their journey;
- * for the doctors who work with the women who are struggling to conceive, that they would be sensitive to their emotional needs, and skillful in their medical care;
- * for the families and friends who stand by the couples trying to conceive, that they would be led to show a loving attitude, and help the couple in any way possible, including financially;
- * for those couples who lose a baby to miscarriage, or who are unable to conceive despite medical help, that they would be comforted in their grief;
- * that women who choose to undergo treatment that is not in keeping with the Catholic Church's teachings might find peace and acceptance within the Church;
- * for those couples who seek to adopt a child, that they would receive financial, spiritual and emotional support as their families grow; and
- * for the complete repentance of those who, knowingly or unknowingly, say unkind or insensitive comments to infertile couples.

Amen.

Historical Sketch:

Empress Irene and the Iconoclasts

Empress Irene, the first woman to rule the Roman empire alone, restored devotion to icons. Was it a pious gesture, or just politics?

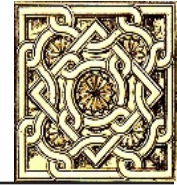
She inherited a complex situation. The Byzantine emperor Leo III declared icons illegal in 730, in part as an emotional reaction to a volcanic eruption and tsunami in the Aegean Sea in 726. After all, marauding Muslims were routinely more successful on the battlefield. Could God be punishing the Christians for their "worship" of graven images? The Muslims thought so. Leo agreed. When his bishop demurred, Leo appointed his own church leadership, shocking Pope Gregory II into a declaration of schism.

Icons were zealously worshipped by the poor and illiterate, often near monastic centers of charity and piety. Furthermore, popular devotion turned ugly when an icon did not produce the desired effect. So, icon adoration cut both ways, and needed certain safeguards. Senior clergy probably welcomed the reforms.

When Constantine V took over in 754, he intensified his persecution of "iconophiles" (lovers of icons) in such a way that he alienated the monasteries, but won the respect of the military, who suddenly found themselves more successful on the battlefield. Obviously, God was with them. (He also restored fresh running water to Constantinople and constructed roads.)

Monks who were caught venerating icons were tortured, blinded and exiled, or, less often, forced to marry nuns. Popular dissent against the iconoclastic prohibitions was high. When Leo IV took the reins, his indifference to theological matters apparently encouraged some dissenters to return. Irene noticed this trend.

She became regent for her son Constantine VI, crowned at the age of nine when her husband Leo IV died in 780. At the time of her marriage,



it's unlikely she was an iconophile. Because she only had one son, and later claimed a miraculous healing from a hemorrhage, it seems likely that she suffered from some gynecological malady which prevented future heirs.

Leo's half brothers (called caesars) caused several power plays, for which Irene had the caesars whipped, tonsured and sent to monasteries. Public spectacles were her specialty: she toured the empire tossing imperial coins depicting herself and her son from the royal carriage.

She was close to her eunuch guards, promoting them in both military and church positions after her son's accession. To head off the growing superiority of the Franks, she betrothed her son to Rotrud, daughter of Charlemagne. (The marriage never took place.)

Against this backdrop, her success in orchestrating the Second Council of Nicaea looks as political as it does pious. The bishops denounced iconoclasm and declared that icons should be venerated but not worshiped. Relations with Rome improved immediately, leaving Irene free to attend to military struggles in Bulgaria and internal rebuilding on the Turkish continent.

Meanwhile, her son Constantine VI had chosen a second (illicit) wife and banished the first with two daughters to the monastery of the Virgin of the Spring, where he also banished his mother in 790 at the behest of the military.

She managed to seize control again in 797. The thugs she sent to blind her son (to avoid another takeover) accidentally killed him. Viewing the Byzantine throne as vacant, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne the Roman emperor in the West in 800 to "fill the seat." Thereafter, the Holy Roman Empire was centered in Europe.

Although venerated by the Greek Orthodox Church as a saint for supporting the iconophiles, Irene's powerplay marked the end of Byzantine control of the Roman empire. Her gains were overshadowed by her personal and political losses. Pride goeth before a fall.

Book Review:

Pride and Prejudice

by Jane Austen

(Modern Library Classics, 1995. 302 pp., \$14.95)

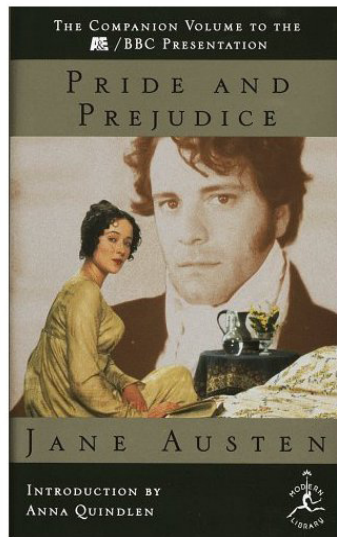
Reviewed by Beverly Mantyh

Summer -- time to kick back, pour a tall glass of ice tea and grab a good book. A hard working woman deserves a novel that will make her laugh! Forget that *Pride and Prejudice* is on so many required reading lists; it's the perfect summer novel. Austen entertains with witty insights while exploring themes for summer reflection.

"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." When two eligible bachelors are introduced to their sleepy rural neighborhood, the Bennet family anticipates romance. The five Bennet daughters are seeking true love, Mrs. Bennet is searching for men with fortunes, and Mr. Bennet is looking for amusement.

One introduction leads to another and Jane, the eldest Bennet, has captured the eye of bachelor number one, Mr. Bingley. The second eldest Bennet, Elizabeth, has a run in with Bingley's more eligible (richer) friend, Mr. Darcy. He offends Elizabeth by remarking, "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men."

Elizabeth is not your fainting, hothouse variety of heroine. She "remained with no very cordial feeling toward him. She told the story, however with great spirit among her friends." Boy offends girl; girl ridicules boy; the exposé of romantic pride begins.



Austen saves Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, and Jane and Mr. Bingley from the fate of garage sale paperbacks. She uses the Bennet sisters' romances to examine the age old theme of pride vs. humility. Elizabeth relies too heavily upon first impressions, confusing social intelligence with true virtue. Darcy rests upon his social position and considers himself above proper politeness. Jane and Mr. Bingley are also almost thwarted in romance when fear of rejection and social embarrassment keep them stuck in passive pride. Both couples must act in humility and vulnerability before their relationships can deepen.

The minor characters also contribute to Austen's tale of the pitfalls of pride. Mr. Collins' shameless groveling for position and security exaggerates the hilarity of his marriage proposal to Elizabeth. The overbearing Lady Catherine, puffed up with connections and wealth, counterbalances the zealous maternal ambitions of Mrs. Bennet. But all Austen's characters are allowed to grow in humility and understanding. Even Elizabeth's wayward younger sister, "became, by proper attention and management, less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid."

Austen's characters stand the test of time. We can still meet Mr. Darcy at a barbeque or get mired in a monologue with Lady Catherine. Austen captures the humor of the human predicament of having to live with ourselves and others in all our fallibility.

Discussion Questions:

1. Austen portrays false pride in a couple of different guises. Elizabeth judges rashly and acts without thinking. Jane, on the other hand, draws into herself. She withholds herself from others and expects to be cajoled and drawn out. In both cases, pride is the cause of injury to relationships. Does your own false pride manifest itself in action or passivity?
2. Elizabeth and Jane are supportive, encouraging and very considerate of one another. Who is the Jane in my life? Do I work to create and maintain supportive friendships with a God given sister or a chosen sister? What can I do this summer to enrich my friendships?
3. Elizabeth had to give up her preconceptions and swallow her pride before she could see the real Mr. Darcy. During their long walk at Longbourn, Darcy began to linger upon regret for past actions. Elizabeth replied, "Think only of the past as its remembrance gives you pleasure." Straight from the Gospels, the forgiveness and grace of this attitude is one we could all embrace. To forgive and forget is to set someone free, like God sets us free in the confessional. Is there someone in your life to whom you could pass along the grace of a fresh start?



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www.MySecretisMine.com

“...No one other than God is capable of receiving [one] completely for Himself, and it is sinful theft toward God to give oneself completely to one other than Him.”

– Edith Stein,
in Principles of Women’s Education,
Essays on Woman

Coming Next Month:
Mistress of Her Own Castle

Interview: Suzanne Fowler
Found a Lighter Weigh

Bible Study: A Dozen Virgins
with Lamps

Book Review: *Lying Awake*
by Mark Salzman

Historical Sketch: Sr. Mary
Luke Tobin Goes to Rome

