

# CONSECRATION

## Tapping Into Heaven

A Series of Booklets for Souls That Want to Fall in  
Love With the Mystery of Consecration



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# Access To the Unseen World

## SEEING HEAVENLY REALITY

“...it was our Lord’s will that I should see the angel in the following way. He was not tall but short, and very beautiful; and his face was so aflame that he appeared to be one of the highest rank of angels, who seem to be all on fire. ...if anyone thinks I am lying, I pray God, in His goodness, to grant him some experience of it.” –Saint Teresa of Avila

For those unfamiliar with this opening quotation, this brilliant and celebrated saint is describing one of her admittedly rare experiences in which God permitted her to see an angel. She explains that, although she would frequently sense angels, the encounters were usually not visible ones. Most of the time, such experiences would occur only within her mind’s eye. But then there were those *other* occasions that only happened *very rarely*, as she words it, in which God allowed angelic visions that engaged her physical senses. In other words, she had some rare occurrences in which she literally saw angels, not just in her mind, but with her eyesight.

She proceeds in the quote above to recount one of those very rare instances in which she actually witnessed an angel with her waking eyes. Then following her captivating description she offers her prayer: *if anyone thinks I am lying, I pray God, in His goodness, to grant him some experience of it.* Her prayer in this autobiographical passage is clearly motivated by love. Saint Teresa described how this particular

visionary experience was an instrument through which she experienced God's gentle wooing of her soul that left her *utterly consumed with the great love of God*. She writes that after such an encounter, one's soul will not be content with anything except God. She wants, from the bottom of her heart, for people to know firsthand God's gentle wooing of their own souls; hence, she prays for anyone who thinks that she's lying.



## PRAYING FOR OTHERS TO WITNESS THE MIRACULOUS

I've seen them. Saint Teresa's description is spot-on. To experience tangible encounters with God's angelic creatures is indeed a life-changing and fascinating occurrence. But it can also be isolating. In fact, any miraculous experience can lead to feelings of isolation whenever people don't believe you. Like Teresa of Avila, I have had miraculous experiences of the supernatural. And like Teresa of Avila, I have prayed that God would allow such experiences for those who would think me a liar.

But unlike Teresa, whose prayer was so clearly motivated by love, mine was driven by a growing sense of loneliness. I was tired of being doubted by my closest and dearest when I would talk about spiritual experiences. I thought that, if God allowed them to experience the transcendent, then the suspicious looks would stop, the accusations would stop, and I could feel the bonds of community again. My lack of the purest of intentions did not stop God from hearing and answering my prayer. In fact, it was an angel who came to my aid.

## THE FASCINATING SUBJECT MATTER OF THE MIRACULOUS

Before I continue with the true story of how an angel helped me, we need to take some time to talk about the fascinating yet tricky subject matter of the miraculous. It's fascinating for the obvious reason

that this topic is very, very cool. Let's face it, when somebody says that she ate granola for breakfast, the information is not that big of a deal. Besides feeling happy for the person, and a sudden craving for granola, the details of the event are pretty mundane. But when somebody tells you that she saw an angel, the account rightfully excites one's interest and curiosity. Fascination with the supernatural can be dangerous if it draws a person's gaze away from Christ, but that danger is the case for anything. *Anything* can become an idol.

Initially, our inherent attraction to accounts of supernatural experience is a healthy and inevitable expression of our spirituality as human beings. Because all people are created in the image and likeness of God, we are all aware, at some level, of transcendent reality. Denying it doesn't lessen its reality, just like denying gravity doesn't make us float. The most vehement atheist, in his insistent denial of God's existence, is still expressing *vehemence* and *insistence*, expressions of his spirituality. Mistaken as the atheist is, he still has an outcry, and outcries themselves are indicative of spiritual reality. Beneath any individual's outcry is a place deep within, a *sense of ought*, a sense of what *should be*, that spurs one on to *cry out* in the first place.

## DEEP DOWN WE ALREADY KNOW IT: WE ARE SPIRITUAL BEINGS

A sense of purpose for humanity, the desire for justice in the world, anger against injustice, a desire to be heard relationally and dignified in the hearing, a sense of truth and the attempt to communicate to others what one believes to be true, the sense that such sharing is a worthwhile endeavor in the first place—all such matters are signals of transcendent reality, for if the universe is all just accidental randomness, what accounts for our *sense of ought*?

The human desires for goodness, truth, and beauty, convictions about morality and purpose, love and relationships, *all* indicate the reality of something *more* than meets the eye. No denial of God will change the fact that God created, loves, and died for people. All human beings reflect the image in which they were designed, whether they ac-

knowledge that fact or not. Whenever somebody reports some physical encounter with transcendent, spiritual reality, the report rouses people deep within, with the reminder that they are in fact spiritual beings with an eternal purpose.

When we hear, “I saw an angel,” our souls cry out in response, “Could it be? Could it be true, that there really *is* more than meets the eye? I want it to be true; somewhere deep within I already knew... yes, yes! Tell me *more*...” It’s as though supernatural reality saturates everything else, but typically remains hidden from natural view. But every once in a while, something which is normally invisible will reach past the veil of the natural, revealing itself to the world of our sensory experience. When that happens, the astonishment does more than just amaze us. It interrupts the hypnosis of this world’s day-to-day rhythm to remind us that we are in fact spiritual beings created in God’s image, caught in a spiritual war over our souls.

## THE TRICKY SUBJECT MATTER OF THE MIRACULOUS

Indeed, testimonies of the miraculous are fascinating, because they call to our spiritual nature. From answered prayers to spiritual gifts, from angelic sightings to divine orchestration in our lives, supernatural experiences remind us that there is so much more than meets the eye. Encounters with miracles tell us again that our current five senses give only a glimpse of the big picture—we have barely scratched the surface. But as I said before, this subject matter is fascinating yet tricky. We have covered the fascination piece; now let’s take a moment to discuss issues that can make this topic potentially problematic. First of all, the entire differentiation between the *natural* and the *supernatural* can be challenging because, even though they’re distinguishable notions, they are experienced together—for all of nature is *graced nature*, everything in the natural realm constitutes the Creator’s handiwork. In this sense, all life is already a *miracle*.

Second, there are generally two different types of miracles. God’s activity in human affairs, in other words the *miraculous*, can either work within normal natural mechanisms or it can defy the rules of

nature. On the one hand, God's intervention in human affairs can work within the natural parameters of the created order, bringing about divine orchestration in a person's life that is no coincidence. A divinely-orchestrated meeting or situation may be rightly deemed *miraculous*, because God set it up, but no natural laws were suspended in the process. Have you ever looked at a circumstance in your life and said, "What an impossible coincidence!" It probably wasn't a coincidence at all. It was probably God. On the other hand, our Creator can (and *has*) transcend the natural laws of His creation in interventions such as the Incarnation and the Resurrection. It's God's creation after all, God can do that. Whether working within His created order, or contravening it, God can work with us and in us and answer prayers however He wants.

### A SENSITIVE SUBJECT

Third, this topic raises the extremely sensitive question for people of why the miraculous doesn't seem to happen to them, at least not as often as it does to other people. I was talking with a man once who suffered from the chronic illness known as multiple sclerosis. He told me that the disease was not causing him to doubt God's existence. "Doubt the existence of God?" he asked, "I could never do that after what happened to me." The man proceeded to explain how earlier in his life, he could have died from tripping badly and falling down. "After slipping on the ice, I was falling, and my head was about to hit concrete," he explained. "The way I was falling, the impact could have killed me." He paused for a moment, looking down at the floor. I could tell that his heart was heavy.

Eventually he looked back up at me and continued, "As I was falling, a strong man suddenly caught me right before my head hit the concrete, and the man slowly picked me back up to standing position; I could feel his hands under my shoulder blades as he caught me and lifted me back up. I immediately turned around to thank the man who had saved me only to find that I was alone. I was standing there by myself; nobody was there. An angel saved my life."

The man continued his story, “After having my guardian angel catch me to save my life, I will never doubt the existence of God. My struggle is in trusting Him. Why would He save me then, but not save me now from my disease?” I can vouch for the authenticity of this testimonial; that man was my father. More than any other factor, the questions of *why* and *why not* render this subject matter tricky to navigate. The bottom line is that when it comes to discussing dramatic supernatural experiences, the conversation can get complex quickly, because these considerations mentioned thus far, as well as numerous others, all enter into the picture.

## THE NECESSARY SUBJECT MATTER OF THE MIRACULOUS

The mystery of the miraculous is not one that we will solve here—not on this earth, and certainly not in this booklet. But we need to engage with the topic because consecration is itself an enhanced participation in supernatural reality. Consecration is increased communion with the Almighty Creator of all reality. Consecration means deeper intimacy in your personal and family relationship with the Most High God. Consecration is itself a closer walk with the firstborn from the dead, the risen Lord. How could consecration *not* open you up more to the miraculous?

Because of what consecration is, it would be impossible for it not to open you more to supernatural power. Consecration is a closer friendship with Jesus Christ, so we *have* to talk about the supernatural. Supernatural power is precisely what consecration plugs you more thoroughly into. So even though it can be a complicated topic with a number of important considerations entering into the picture, we need to discuss it. Here’s some happy news: the complex, mysterious nature of supernatural reality in no way holds us back from what we need to cover in this booklet.

In order to bring some needed clarity to this conversation, I would like to focus upon the most common misunderstanding that is interfering with consecration. All the fascinating considerations we’ve

been addressing can remain complex, mysterious, and absorbing to our spirits, as long as we illuminate and allow God's grace to cure this one particularly dangerous misunderstanding. Once this misunderstanding is addressed, the various complexities surrounding spiritual experiences are free to captivate us and get us even more excited about consecration. This common misconception that we must address deals with our understanding of the term "dramatic" when it comes to miraculous experiences of God's work in our lives. This term "dramatic" is so often distorted by the backwards standards of a fallen world, and the distortion is hurting people. Clearing up this distortion, in turn, can be incredibly healing.

## RETHINKING THE NOTION OF THE *DRAMATIC*

I often hear testimonies begin with some statement like, "Now I don't have *one of those dramatic lives* or anything impressive like that, but in *small* ways God found and rescued me..." or some similar notion about the Holy Spirit's agency in the still and in the calm. Personally, I find such stories equally as moving and inspiring as I do the "dramatic" sorts, awed by the mystery of how the Almighty's voice resonates in the quiet. However, whenever I hear people emphasize the relative lack of the spectacular in their pilgrimages, I experience a twinge of concern in my spirit. A note of distress sounds within me that these children of the Most High God might be entertaining the dangerous lie that a comparative lack of the so-called "impressive" in their stories somehow corresponds with a lack of worth in the eyes of God.

First, one's sense of what counts as dramatic, spectacular, or impressive may be distorted by the kingdom of this world and its counterfeit measures. More importantly, God uses both the quiet and the loud to communicate intimate love for each individual. The Lord can whisper, and the Lord can swallow His servant with a big fish to maneuver him back on course. God



will do what God will do—to God is the glory. And whether the human soul finds the Lord’s instrumentation tranquil or deafening, there is no such thing as an insignificant encounter with the living God, Who is no respecter of persons. From the fiery face of Moses to the little way of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, God is no respecter of persons.

## WHY DO THE FREQUENCY AND INTENSITY OF MIRACLES VARY FROM PERSON TO PERSON?

For a variety of reasons, not everybody has what this world deems *dramatic* experiences of the supernatural. First, the lack of miraculous experience can sometimes connect with a lack of faith. After telling true stories about supernatural experiences, I will occasionally hear people say, “Hey, how come nothing like that has ever happened to me? I don’t believe it!” I respond, “You just asked, then *answered*, your own question.” If you don’t believe, then your willful choice to reject belief may have the consequence of your *not* experiencing that which belief gives you access to.

Recall the woman from the Bible who reached out and touched Jesus’ garment and was physically healed. Jesus said that He had felt power leave him, and asked who touched him, and He told the woman that her faith had healed her. So it was the power of



Jesus that healed the woman; at the same time, Jesus attributed the miracle to her faith which drew His power. We were created with the graced abilities to belief and trust in God. When we choose to believe and trust Him, that faith draws His power. Of course we don’t always get what we ask for from God, but it is the truth that the more faith you have, the more heavenly power you will experience. As the Lord said, with enough faith mountains could be moved. We live by faith, not by sight; therefore, believing is seeing—*not* the other way around. God’s reality does not depend upon us.

## OTHER REASONS THAT MIRACULOUS ENCOUNTERS VARY

But a lack of faith is not always the answer, because sometimes God allows the miraculous for a person who lacks faith, and sometimes God withholds the miraculous from those with great faith. A second reason that not all people experience what they would call dramatic encounters with supernatural reality has to do with the ability to recognize when a miracle is occurring. Many people will experience supernatural happenings, but not recognize them for what they are. Because of an overreliance upon the familiarity of the five senses, they will remain unaware, even with a miracle right in front of their faces—like Pontius Pilate asking Jesus, “What is truth?” as *the* Truth was standing right in front of him. These types of people will see an accidental sequence or coincidence, even when heavenly reality is staring them in the face.

Third, others will seek supernatural experiences for the wrong reasons, and God will withhold such experiences for the person’s protection. And still other people will indeed have a spectacular miracle at work in their lives—but it simply hasn’t become apparent yet, and God’s timing is perfect. Only in hindsight will the individual recognize the blatant supernatural activity that had previously been hidden from view. To complicate the matter further, there are false prophets in the world. For example, through satanic witchcraft, people exercise spiritual power. The power is real, but it’s not good. And then there are the charlatans who deceive people with tricks for money. Nothing truly supernatural occurred; they faked it, in order to prey on the desperate and make themselves a *false profit*, so to speak.

## THE PRIMARY REASON THAT SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES VARY

All these considerations aside, the main reason that miraculous encounters vary from person to person relates to our being different parts of one body. Different organs in the body experience the life of the body differently; a healthy body needs all the parts. And the partic-

ular gifts of each specific part are not for the *privilege* of that part, but for love. The giftedness of the lungs isn't just a gift for the lungs—it's a gift for every other part that needs the lungs' service to the whole body.

Imagine if a hand part got jealous of a heart part because of the heart's unique gifts. Would the hand feel better if the heart lost its gift of pumping blood? No, the hand would die. Imagine if an eye part got jealous of the brain for the brain's cognitive gifts. Would the eye feel better if the brain lost those gifts? Actually, the eye parts would go blind, because it's the brain that interprets sight. We are many parts; one body. And different parts experience the life of the body differently.

## GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS

Not enough can be said about this important conversation, but please allow me to at least clarify the most important thing: God loves you. And God loves you with an immeasurable, infinite, unfathomable love. God is no respecter of persons. God has the hairs on your head counted. God does not love Moses more than Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. God does not love the Pope more than the little baby born in a hovel. God's love for *you* is scandalously particular. God is jealous for *you*. God is after *you*, pursuing you, longing to hear you invite Him in, to search and know you in your innermost depths. That kind of special, close friendship that the Lord had with Mary of Bethany sitting at His feet—He wants that level of intimacy with *you*.

God wants the most intimate communion with you. God calls you friend, brother/sister, child, bride, and temple. And God has exciting purposes for you that He designed when He knit you together in your mother's womb. The whole notion of what counts as "dramatic" and what doesn't is a matter of perspective. Whatever part of the body you are, and however that part experiences the life of the body, the fact that God created you with a purpose, and desires best friendship with you, died for you, and after He rose went to prepare a place specifically for you in the world-to-come, well, that's already DRAMATIC, wouldn't you agree? Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist at Mass is already pretty *dramatic*.

The dispersion of spiritual gifts is a mysterious topic, and granted, we are not disinterested parties in who gets the goods. But I'll have no silly talk about your encounter with the Almighty being *insignificant*. And rest assured that, however spiritual matters manifest themselves in your own life, spiritual gifts and spiritual warfare and saintly intercessions and angelic guardians are *universal realities* for *all* of God's children. The spiritual realm is objectively real. Different subjects will experience that reality in different ways, but the reality itself is not diminished by the particular manner of your access to it. Or to put it simply, you *have* a guardian angel—whether you've seen him, or not. Consecration will enhance your participation in spiritual realities. I don't know what exact form that will take for you. I just know that your participation in the things of God *will be enhanced* when you make an act of consecration.



# Consecration: A Mission Of Love

## CONSECRATION CHANGES EVERYTHING

Overall, I guess mine is *one of those dramatic lives*, according to the meaning that people commonly have in mind when they use that problematic term “dramatic.” Granted, I’ve never been in the belly of a fish, nor do I have any particular desire to see what that’s like. Nonetheless, experiences of bona fide spiritual warfare, a media blitz launching me into nationwide celebrity, being chased by a news helicopter, a federal law inspired by my life, sacramental miracles, and yes, angelic visions, were all instruments that the Lord used for guiding me out of myself and into His Church—to God be the glory, always. The miraculous encounter aspect of my life had always been there in some sense, but after my consecration, the heat turned up considerably. Everything was different since my consecration.

Following my consecration, I could hardly purchase the week’s coffee beans without the Holy Spirit using the shopping trip as an occasion for ministry. More and more I was detached from empty cares that used to have me so preoccupied. More and more I was being called to works of mercy in the lives of those around me. God was developing within me what Saint de Montfort calls a “great contempt” for the spirit of this world, and my eyes were increasingly opened to God’s care for each individual. The lie of self-sovereignty that I was born into was increasingly exposed within me, lighted by the Great Physician at greater depths than before.

The Lord would show me the damage of pride within myself, assure me of His love, and administer more healing grace as His divine mercy extracted more poison from the wound. The Lord would increasingly search the depths of my divided heart. He would take the fragments blown apart by my having played God in my own life, and unite them back together into a stained glass window for Him to illumine. Jesus takes the shattered pieces, forgives me, continually heals me, and redeems me. He keeps removing more of ego's cancerous tumor, and brings the life of radical dependency upon Him—the source of life—as well as the hopeful assurance that He will complete the good work He began.

## WHERE TO FIND MIRACLES

Through consecration, my own agenda gave way to God's and continues to do so, in a never-ending growth process. And the more that happens, the more I have to unlearn what I grew up deeming important, and learn instead what's on God's radar. Whereas I was born into a world that is bedazzled by its high places, the Lord is constantly about the task of finding His strayed sheep. I kept witnessing miracles, but never where I would have expected them. The grandiose high places of this world and all of the self-aggrandizing bravado of their arrogance would leave no room for the miraculous. People who embrace self-sovereignty are often closed to reminders that they are not gods.

But while God opposes the proud, He gives grace to the humble; and I was (and am still) continually amazed by the miraculous lengths that God will go to for a single lost sheep who the kingdom of this world doesn't even notice. The deeper my communion with Christ, the more I witness heavenly power. The more consecrated my life, the more I experience God's involvement in the daily lives of people. He is more intimately involved in our lives than we can possibly imagine. We've been looking for miracles in the wrong places. If you want to witness the miraculous, consecrate yourself and go love the least of these, because that is where you will find Him.

## FROM HEAVEN'S VANTAGE POINT IT ALL LOOKS VERY DIFFERENT

We trouble ourselves with trying to shape the course of human history from society's high places. Yes, we are called to greatness, and yes, we are indeed supposed to have a tremendous impact upon the world in which we live, make no mistake about that. But our eyes are on the wrong methods. We are so addicted to our own current understanding. Sinful pride that separates us from our loving Creator is basically a misplaced sense of self-reliance. Our current five senses and minds that interpret reality for us are magnificent creations gifted to us by God, no doubt. The problem is not with these gifts that give us access to the world in which we live; the problem is with our egoistical reliance upon those gifts, as though sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch give us the full picture of reality. Physically and mentally, we trust in our own understanding, way too much. From the vantage point of heaven, it all looks very different.

For example, according to what we can presently see and how we tend to think about it, we typically understand kingdom advancement as a capture of civic territory. From our current perspective, a kingdom has advanced when it has taken control of a larger area of land and people, with an established authority seated in a capital city. Even the Apostles wanted to see Jesus take over Jerusalem. But our Lord made clear that the advancement of the Kingdom of Heaven occurs in human hearts, as people increasingly surrender more and more of their interior life over to Christ's reign. It's the heart territory where the real war is fought, and where the true Lord advances His kingdom. A heart that is totally devoted to Jesus Christ will produce visible fruit for the world to see, absolutely, but the advancement of God's kingdom is initially *invisible*. Kingdom advancement comes from surrendering more of your heart territory over to your Maker Who searches your innermost depths, and unites your divided heart.

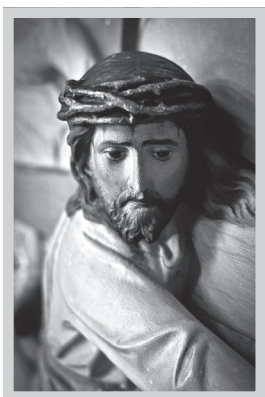
The Lord's providential care has all of human history covered. When powerful people in the kingdom of this world don't surrender to Christ's lordship, God's sovereignty remains unthreatened, abso-

lute, and perfectly intact. The stubborn Pharaohs and skeptical Pontius Pilates of human history don't thwart God's plans. It's an unspeakable tragedy that they don't flock beneath His wings in friendship, but they do not threaten the Creator's providential care over the creation. Even when we use the phrase "breaking God's laws" we reveal the echo of our ego because God's laws are unbreakable. A person who falls from a height does not break the law of gravity—he breaks his leg. We do not break God's laws; we break *against* them. God's laws remain perfectly intact.

## WE HAVE A LOT TO UNLEARN

It's been 2,000 years and we are still crying out for Jesus to take civic control over capital cities. "Why won't God put more Catholic presidents into the White House?!" we grumble. Perhaps the answer is for the same reason He didn't capture Jerusalem: that's not the throne He's after. He's after the throne of your heart, to bless you with the life, love, and happiness He created you for. Yes, we are called to transform the world as a visible Bride of Christ. But the way to do that is not through louder protests that out-shout the enemy camp. The way you transform the world is through deepening your own friendship with Jesus.

Through consecration, God began to train my own gaze off of this world's high places and onto the least of these, and the more I witnessed His handiwork. As my own agenda gives way more and more to God's, the more I turn to Him and away from my own take on every-



thing, the more I decrease and He increases, and the more spiritual power I experience. God is after souls. The Lord is so in love that He went through His passion and death to save whosoever wants the relationship. When you go love the least of these, you will witness the lengths heaven will go to for the salvation of one individual. There aren't any "nobodies" from heaven's perspective. God is after His kidnapped babies.

## WITNESSING GOD'S HANDIWORK

When I went to the least of these to love them for Jesus, heaven's power was readily evident. My heart broke for a particular student in my Ethics course at Duquesne University. She was particularly bright, but struggled with alcoholism. She wanted to believe God loved her and could help her, but skepticism kept her an agnostic, wondering whether or not God existed. The "old me" might have judged her, accused her, condemned her, or used her state as an affirmation that I was doing pretty alright by comparison. That's if the old me would have even noticed her in the first place. But consecration takes you too close to the Heavenly Father to ignore his babies. By God's grace, I noticed. And rather than resorting to hammering her with doctrines or plastering my ideologies all over Facebook, I did something radical—I cared. I actually gave a care, a genuine one. And so I prayed one Saturday with a broken heart for God to show her that He is real and loves her, and has the power to heal her and set her free. I prayed as though she was family, kneeling before the mystery of how much God loves her. It's very different than being judgmental. Real love bears no resemblance to *agenda*.

After praying for her that Saturday, I wrote Tuesday's upcoming class lecture and created the PowerPoint slides. During that next class, this particular girl was riveted the entire time. After the lecture, she ran up to me, speaking so quickly that she was stumbling over her words. "It can't be a coincidence, it just can't be, it's impossible!" she exclaimed. "What is it?" I asked. She replied, "Just this past Saturday, I was asking that if God was real He would show me, and I swear He answered me in my spirit. He said that you, my Ethics teacher, knew Him, and that I should listen to you, and believe what you tell me about Him. I asked God for a sign that it was really Him telling me this, then I pulled out my journal and started writing. Your PowerPoint slides today quoted what I wrote in my journal Saturday, word-for-word! I have never shown this journal to anybody." She excitedly opened up her private journal, and showed me Saturday's entry, which matched my lecture notes verbatim. "He's real! And He gave me my

sign! Thank you for showing Him to me, sir!!” The transformation in this young lady that followed was inspiring, to say the least. She wrote her class essay about her conversion.

## MORE REAL ENCOUNTERS

The instances didn’t stop, each one mind-boggling in its own right. One day I was praying when a mental vision popped into my imagination of my friend Robin, stuck walking two miles home from work in a rainstorm, because her car was in the shop. I left immediately, drove past where she worked, and saw her walking drenched in the rain. I pulled up and offered her a lift home which she delightedly accepted. “What a crazy coincidence, Ian, for you to drive by and see me; you didn’t know my car was at the mechanic’s.” When I told her why I was there, she started crying and said, “I asked God for help when I saw the storm outside; wow, he really sees me, and He cares if I’m caught outside in the rain; He really sees me!”

Another day I was moved to drive forty miles to a Chinese restaurant that I hadn’t been to in nearly a year. I had befriended one of the employees there, but hadn’t seen this person in almost a year. When I walked into the restaurant, this employee ran up to me and embraced me saying, “I tried Jesus today, I tried prayer like you had told me about, and I asked Jesus, ‘If You are real, then could You please draw my old friend Ian here today to visit me?’ He heard me, He’s real! He’s really real!”

Another time I was moved by the Holy Spirit to buy a giant bag of M & M’s, write an encouraging message about God’s love onto a card, attach the card to the bag of chocolate, and give it to a troubled stranger. Five minutes later I saw a student sitting cross-legged in the grass, sobbing on the front bumper of my car. We had never met before. “This is for you,” I said, handing the gift to the student. The crying changed to tears of joy as the student looked up at me and said, “He knows that M & M’s are my favorite!” Witnessing the loving handiwork of the Most High God is a life-transforming marvel that will change you forever. Please consecrate yourself, come out of your own understanding, and

take Jesus' yoke upon you and learn from Him Who loves you. Eye has not seen nor ear heard what He has in store for you. When you're out in the garden with the Master Gardener, His handiwork is *apparent*.

## HOW AN ANGEL HELPED

No, it doesn't happen all the time. But you remember every time that it does... which brings me back to my opening story. I was talking about these types of miraculous stories with one of my dearest loved ones. She didn't believe me. In anger, this person said, "I don't believe you, you're *lying*." It was among the most isolating moments of my life. This individual believed in spiritual realities at church, when ministers read from the Bible about countless occasions of God's miraculous wonders across Scripture's sacred record of salvation history—but she didn't believe me. I knew these things had happened, and the people involved knew, yet I found myself guilty until proven innocent in the eyes of a dear friend. I thought about the time when Peter and Susan didn't believe Lucy about the world inside of the wardrobe, despite the fact that Lucy was a trustworthy person. C.S. Lewis' allegorical fantasy gave me some comfort. And I understood, from my loved one's point of view, why she would feel the way she felt. In the end, I wasn't angry, I just felt alone.

"Lord," I prayed, "your humble servant has been falsely accused of lying. If you wish to allow this thorn for my humility, I trust you. But I request, if it be your will, for you to be my advocate in this matter. Please heal my feelings of isolation and reconcile this friendship with my loved one, by allowing her a miraculous experience, so that she knows I am not a liar. Your will be done, thank you in all things. In Jesus Name I pray, amen. Teresa of Avila, pray for me." Later that same week, my loved one called me on the phone with an unforgettable experience of her own. "Ian," she shouted, "I saw an angel! In broad daylight, with my waking eyes, I saw one of God's heavenly host, standing guard over me!"

As she explained the event, she had been sitting outside in her yard praying during the afternoon when she felt an evil presence ema-

nating from a neighbor's house. She had the distinct sense in her spirit that something demonic was trying to press in closer to her home, and was present in this neighbor's dwelling place. Then, upon praying for Christ's protection, her human eyesight was opened to the sight of her guardian angel. God's grace permitted her to see her heavenly protector *visually*, standing guard, like a tall pillar of light, defending her home from the evil spirits nearby. She became filled with the confident peace that she and her household were in God's care. She was allowed to behold the angel for roughly thirty seconds, before his presence became veiled again. "It was incredible, I needed to tell somebody about it, but I knew most people would just call me a liar. I knew you would believe me, Ian, and that you would know I was telling the truth. By the way Ian, I'm so sorry, I definitely believe you now." This precious loved one was never told (before now) what I had prayed only days earlier.



# Consecration: Why Bother?

## CONNECTING WITH GOD

The point of celebrating these true stories with you is to emphasize that heaven's power is very literally real. It's more real than that which we access physically, as though the world perceived by our natural senses is but a shadow cast by the greater spiritual reality. From heaven's perspective, nature is a conduit that makes grace present to us. If you don't plug in, what you have is a dead wire. To deny God and deny spiritual reality is nonsensical. Imagine an infant, who is still inside of its mother, denying the existence of Mom and the world outside the womb. That would be very silly. In reality, as the infant is dependent on its connection to the mother, we are dependent upon staying connected to God. We are designed for God, which is why our hearts are restless until they rest in Him (Saint Augustine). To avoid being a lifeless conduit, we must plug into the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who creates and animates all being. We must be born from above. Sleepers awake, we *must* be born again.

Have you ever asked yourself any of the following questions:  
Why do I feel like, no matter what I do, I simply can't get it together?

How come I often find myself saying "I'll be happy *once* this thing happens," or "everything will be OK *after* such-and-such gets dealt with," or "if only that thing could get taken

care of, *then* I'd be alright," or "if this problem could be solved, *then* I'd finally be able to live my life"?

Sometimes I feel so restless... how come I'm *still* not settled?

There is so much tension and arguing in the world... why are people so angry?

Religion, politics, the media, and everyone around me has all of these alleged answers and points to make, and they're all *different*, is there anybody who I can trust?

Can that strained relationship in my life heal? Can I find joy and happiness that lasts? Is it possible to have peace when a situation seems hopeless?

Do those questions and comments sound familiar? Do any of those statements resonate with you personally? Have you ever felt any, or even *all*, of those sentiments at some point or another? These ways of feeling are not as uncommon as people think. In fact, they are universal. You are not alone after all. Better yet, there is an answer; not an agenda—an answer... *the* answer. As you know by now, this booklet series that you are reading right now is about the mystery of *consecration*. But the term is not exactly a common vocabulary word for most people, is it? We probably don't hear kitchen conversations like this:

"Hey Mom, what's for dinner tonight? I was thinking of going out with my friends after practice—to discuss how our consecrations are going."

"Oh, your practice is tonight, I forgot. I was just going to re-heat some leftover chicken, so that'll be fine. You know what? Chicken reminds me of consecration, but then again, chicken reminds me of everything."

"Haha, you're so funny, Mom. Oh hey Dad, *nice consecration!*"

"Thanks kiddo. I go to this place in Ohio, they do great work."

No, it's not exactly a word that most people hear on a regular basis. Nevertheless, consecration is a mystery that is worth exploration because those people who decide to consecrate themselves are changed forever.

## THE BASICS: GOD INVITES US TO LIGHTEN OUR LOAD

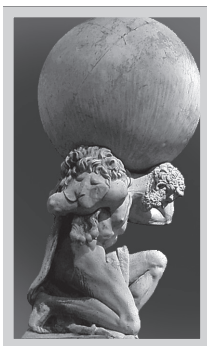
In a nutshell, consecration means totally dedicating your life to God. When a person makes what's called "an act of consecration," that person is making a commitment. Consecration is a promise to completely devote everything to God. One way that a person might think of consecration is with the idea of *total entrustment*. The act of consecration is, simply put, the act of totally trusting someone to take care of you—in this case, that someone is God. The act of consecration is, in other words, your official choice to totally hand over everything to God, trusting that He will take care of you. Consecrated people are people who place all of their physical possessions and all of their spiritual possessions into their Creator's loving care. Those physical and spiritual possessions remain in the consecrated individual's life, but the person hands over *control* of those belongings.

Living as though everything depends upon oneself is a heavy yoke to bear. It's *too* heavy. Our loving God revealed Himself to the world most clearly in Jesus Christ. And Jesus presented God's loving invitation to the world: "Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28–30) Consecration says "yes" to that invitation by trusting God with everything. Consecration means letting go of control and totally trusting God to take care of you. Instead of carrying the burden of trying to master your own life, you take Christ's yoke upon yourself and learn from Him. Consecration is our ongoing, trust-filled, faith-filled, hope-filled living out of our loving response to God's loving invitation. Consecration means letting go of the burden of playing God and instead com-

mitting to your Creator. Consecration means trusting God to love you, take care of you, continually mold you, and bring to fruition all of the exciting purposes and beautiful plans that God created you for.

## SOME BENEFITS OF ACCEPTING GOD'S HELP

The consecrated life doesn't drag around the weight of the world; instead, the consecrated life is yoked to Almighty God and receives



the divine help of God's mercy, power, and answers to prayers. For the consecrated person, life's joy is shared with God and others. And for the consecrated person, life's sufferings are not meaningless. They are united to Christ's own sufferings, they are temporary, and they are used for redemptive purposes. Most people experience peace as an *absence* of trouble; most experience joy as an *absence* of sadness. But the consecrated life can increasingly

experience peace and joy as a presence rather than an absence—peace amidst trouble, joy even in the midst of sorrows. By letting go of control and totally trusting God to take care of you, consecration means good news. Consecration means being unified in loving relationships, it means joy, and it means the transcendent sense of peacefulness that results from a hope-filled life.

As we explore consecration together, we are learning about fascinating, miraculous, life-transforming mysteries. But no matter how deeply you explore these mysteries, you can always come back to the basics. Consecration means totally entrusting everything to God. This way of life brings unity and healing to loving relationships, lasting happiness, and a hope-filled life lived in peace, even through our most trying times. These overlapping benefits are like central themes. No matter what aspects of consecration we get to discuss, we're always exploring those same basic realities, appreciating them at deeper and deeper levels. Let's take a closer look at these three central themes.

## (1) CONSECRATION MEANS LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

Think for a moment about the happiest time in your entire life. What is your single favorite memory? What was the most joy you have ever experienced? When in your life did you feel the most happy? What moment from your past felt like *heaven*? Do you have a memory in mind? Perhaps your wedding day? Or graduation? The championship game? A vacation? A family reunion? That Christmas which got everything right? A perfect date? The birth of your child? Whatever picture is in your mind right now, relationships are a part of it. In fact, it's the unity that made it so happy. Being unified together with close friends and family is the stuff of life's most joyous moments. It's all about family. It's all about love.

Now think about your worst memory. It may be painful, but envision for a moment the most horrific time of your entire life. Maybe a funeral? Or a divorce? A death, or a sickness, or a goodbye, or a break-up? Some loss, or injustice? What moment from your past felt like *hell*? Whatever memory is in your mind right now, relationships are a part of it. In fact, it's the rupturing of a relationship that made this memory so painful. The fracturing of relational bonds is the stuff of heartache. Our worst times in life are when we experience a broken heart. Healthy states of united relational bonds define paradise, and the breaking of relational bonds feels like hell; both of these realities testify to the fact that it's *all about love*.

In other words, it is clear that we were created for love. The Biblical story of human beginnings is all about this simple reality. Adam and Eve lived in a paradise of loving God, and loving one another. They were united with God in a healthy relational bond. They spent intimate time with God, and could take walks together with God in the cool of the evening. They were united to each other as well. These love-bonds are called *covenants* in the Bible. There is a lot to the term *covenant*, but at its very basic level, the word *covenant* describes a relational pledge that binds two parties together in the profound union of love. People were created for covenant with God, and covenant with one another.

As John Paul II states:

Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.<sup>1</sup>

These covenants, or relational love-bonds that unite people with God and with each other, form the central message of Christianity. Healthy relationships with God and with one another defined the Garden-of-Eden paradise. The first three commandments of the Ten Commandments explain how to love God; the rest describe loving each other. Jesus says that the greatest two commandments are to love God and to love your neighbor. The Lord adds that all of the law and the prophets hang on these. (Matthew 22:40) People should know we are Christians by our love. (John 13:35) We could speak from angelic knowledge but if we don't have love, then we're only a bunch of noise. (1 Corinthians 13:1) It's all about the love.

The first human beings had healthy, loving relationships with God and with each other. And these love-bonds, or *covenants*, defined paradise. Then paradise was lost when these love-bonds were ruptured. But those relational ties don't have to stay broken. Consecration reconciles fractured relationships. By totally trusting God, a person's relationship with God enters into the healing process. Total entrustment accepts Christ's invitation to take His yoke and learn from Him, allowing God to put the broken pieces back together. As an individual's friendship with God heals, God's love brings healing to that person's relationships with other people as well. God is love; so when people accept the Lord's yoke and learn from Him, they are learning from Love Himself. Learning how to love brings reconciliation. God's love restores our friendship with Him, and friendships with other people. Consecration means loving relationships.

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1 John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis (The Redeemer of Man)*, (Vatican City: March 4, 1979): no. 10.

## (2) CONSECRATION MEANS TRUE HAPPINESS

By extension, total entrustment also means true happiness, because love is precisely what makes us happy. Our paradises come from unified, loving relationships, whereas our worst moments are heart-break. By healing the bonds of love, we don't just restore the relationships themselves—we also restore the happiness that loving relationships give us. Let's again go back to the first human beings for a moment. Rather than trusting God, Adam and Eve listened to the serpent who deceived them, and ate fruit that was forbidden to eat. Even though listening to snakes is generally a bad idea, the first people listened to the deceiver and disobeyed God.

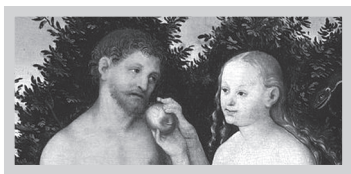
Much can be said about that familiar story, but for the sake of simplicity, let's focus on a specific point. In particular, let's focus on how the serpent introduced the temptation to disobey God. "The serpent said to the woman, 'You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" (Genesis 3:4) Notice that the first thing the serpent said to deceive Eve was designed to have her question her *trust* in God. The lie of the serpent claimed that *God knows that in the day you eat ... you will be like Him*. In other words, the deceiver falsely alleged that God was threatened, and so God lied to the people about death, in order to scare them away from eating the forbidden fruit. The first thing to do to break a relationship is to break the trust.

Human beings were created in the image and likeness of God. And since God is Love, people were made in the image and likeness of Love. We were made by Love, for love. That is why love defines our happiest, most joyous times in life; and that is why a broken heart feels like pure misery. That is why loving relationships feel like paradise. We were made for love, the source of human happiness. When the deceiver worked to break the loving relationship between people and their Creator, it was not only an attack on trust—it was simultaneously an attack on self-image. As soon as Adam and Eve accepted the serpent's message that God was a threatened liar, seeking selfishly to preserve His own unique status, they doubted God's love. They doubted God's

very nature. And in doubting God's loving nature, they were doubting the very image in which they were made.

If you doubt that God is Love, then you throw into doubt the defining attribute of yourself as a human being. Adam and Eve doubted the very same image and likeness in which they themselves were created. To doubt God's love is to misunderstand oneself. Adam and Eve originally understood God as Love, and themselves as God's beloved—and there was joy. But after their trust in God was shaken, they came to mistakenly understand God as a selfish Being trying to stay in power. This misconception of their loving Creator immediately resulted in their distorted self-image, as Adam and Eve arrogantly attempted to play God for themselves, selfishly seeking to have knowledge *as God has it*—and there was misery. If we want our joy back, then we must rebuild total entrustment in God, and allow Him to show us our true self-image of who we really are.

When Adam and Eve ruptured the happy covenantal unions for which they were created, the results were disastrous. They ran away from God. They were scared of being near God. They doubted that God loved them. And since they were created as a reflection of God's



love, by doubting that love, they correspondingly misunderstood themselves. They tried to hide from God. They felt shame. Then the blame game began. When God asked Adam what

happened, Adam replied, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” (Genesis 3:12) “The *woman...*” (so apparently it's all *Eve's fault*) “whom *you* gave to be with me...” (and now it's evidently *God's fault*, too) ...in Adam's mind it was everyone else's fault except his own, as he attempted in his blame game to dodge accountability for his own free-will decision. Running, hiding, accusing, damaged self-image, paradise lost, focusing on the faults in others, shame, sweat, toil, labor pains, death—the fractured covenants wounded the whole created order. It wasn't long before even the sin of murder entered into human society.

Think about it, when another person is bigger, stronger, and notably more powerful than you are, how do you feel toward that person if you know that person is madly in love with you, and would go through anything for you? Well, you feel protected. You want to be near that person. You feel safe. Now suppose another person is bigger, stronger, and notably more powerful than you are, but instead of loving you, that individual feels threatened by you and tells you lies. How do you feel toward that person? Well, you want to run and hide. When Adam and Eve knew God loved them, they wanted intimacy with God. When they doubted God's love for them, they wanted to run and hide. By believing that God felt threatened by them, they in turn felt threatened by God. By doubting God's love, they no longer understood that they were God's beloved. By doubting God's love, they no longer understood who they were. Playing God for themselves messed everything up. Indeed, the results of *self-sovereignty* were disastrous. It was an utter catastrophe.

But God did not abandon the people. Quite the opposite, God affirmed His love and commitment to people, even across the painful consequences of ruptured covenant. God promised that one day, one of Eve's offspring—in other words, a human—would crush the head of the serpent. (Genesis 3:15) God did not abandon people to their own understanding, but sent His Son to save us. As said earlier, consecration is totally trusting that God will take care of you, or *total entrustment*. By accepting Christ's loving invitation to accept His yoke upon you and learn from Him—by making that act of trust—you reject the serpent's lie. The deceiver tried to break the bonds of love between people and God by having people question their trust in God. Consecration is your affirmation that you *do* trust in God. You reject the enemy, you reject his lies, and you reject all of his empty promises. Instead, you reaffirm that very trust in your Creator which the serpent tried to break in the first place.

In consecration, or total entrustment to God, you completely trust that God is Love and will always hold you in His providing care. You allow God's love to heal your broken heart. You allow God to take

care of you and mend the fractured friendship. You allow the healing process, and discover again who you truly are, by getting to know the image of Love in which you were made. The burden of playing God for yourself is increasingly replaced by the happiness of living as God's beloved, aware that God indeed loved you so much that He stopped at nothing to get you back. Consecration rebuilds the trust as God reconciles the covenantal friendships. The healing of loving relationships means the restoration of the paradise for which people were created. Consecration means joy.

### (3) CONSECRATION MEANS PEACEFUL HOPE

Consecration means being unified in loving relationships. Consecration means true happiness. And consecration means the transcendent sense of peacefulness that results from a hope-filled life. Growing up in my family, we had an annual tradition. Each year, the seven of us would drive from western Pennsylvania to northern New Jersey every Christmas to visit our grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and family friends. It was hands down the happiest time of the entire year. Christmas was uniquely special; the rest of the year had its moments, too, but nothing to compare with the joy of God and family experienced at Christmas. For the most part, the remainder of the year was filled with the typical ups and downs of everyday life. And throughout the mundane, daily grind of work and school across most of the year, our car would pass by a common sight: the local gas station, called the *Honeybear Minimart*, close to the Donegal exit off the PA Turnpike. On a typical day of the year, whenever we would look out the car window and see this local gas station, we would see nothing special. It was just your every-day, run-of-the-mill fueling station for vehicles, quite boring actually, and stressful for kids who are anxious to get home in time to watch the cartoon program *Thundercats*.

Now on that drive out once per year to New Jersey for Christmastime, we would pass by the *Honeybear Minimart* gas station, but it looked different than it looked throughout the rest of the year. We did not see just an every-day, boring, run-of-the-mill gas station any-

more. Passing by on our annual Christmas road trip, we saw what would otherwise have been something ordinary and drab in a whole new light. Looking at everything through the clarifying lens of grateful anticipation, the world outside the car window had a sense of mystical enchantment to it all. The sights out the car window were imbued with new purpose, for even the dullest parts were only momentary, and could be used to help get us where we were headed. It wasn't just the gas station anymore. It was the gas station *on the way to Christmas!* It was as though somehow, by virtue of where we were headed, everything was recolored in a different light. That image describes hope.

Biblical hope does not refer to something wished for that probably will not actually happen. Instead, when the term *hope* appears in the Bible, it refers to an excited sense of anticipation, looking forward to a guaranteed reality that has not yet arrived. In this sense, hope is mostly about the present moment. The past feeds it, as we look back to see God's covenant faithfulness in the past and are reassured that His faithfulness shall continue. The future informs it, as we look forward to God's promises. But primarily hope regards the present moment, and that sense of mystical enchantment that recasts our entire outlook on people and the world. That's not just the world outside your window; it's the world *on the way to heaven!* Nothing is what it seems, hardships are redemptive and momentary, and the reunions and indescribable joys that await us in the world-to-come are unimaginable.

For Catholics, it's not just the gas station anymore. In consecrated living, it's the gas station *on the way to Christmas*. That kind of hope-filled living brings a transcendent sense of peace. Even amidst daily troubles, we still look forward to where we're headed. On the way to Christmas, "the sights out the car window were imbued with new purpose, for even the dullest parts were only momentary, and could be used to help get us where we were headed." A person whose life is consecrated to Jesus remembers that troubles are temporary, and that God uses them to help get us where we're going. Hope brings inner peace, trusting God to take care of you. Hope brings the peacefulness of knowing that our hardships do not stop at being hard. They are not

meaningless, just as Christ's hardships were not meaningless. Total entrustment is confidence in our trustworthy Creator, that God uses our hardships as instruments for our growth. Hope brings peace, *not* as an absence of trouble; life *on the way to Christmas* brings peacefulness even amidst our troubles. That is what we get to enjoy, and that is what we show to the world.

People in our world today need hope... yet how can we bear witness to hope if we don't have it ourselves? If we exhibit the same frustration, fear, and anger that saturates this dark and broken world, then we have forgotten who we are. But when we grow closer and closer to God through total entrustment, we encounter God's love—the image and likeness that truly defines our created humanity. When we take Christ's yoke upon ourselves and learn from Him, we learn about who we really are. We learn that we are not God, we don't have to carry that burden. We learn that we are God's beloved people, a people who He calls friend, brother, sister, child, temple—and even *bride!* We learn that it's not all about power and money; no, we were made by Love, for love. Love is what really makes us happy. Made in the image of self-sacrificial love, the more we die to our own selfishness, the more we realize who we are. In consecration, we heal and clarify our true self-image as fundamentally relational creatures, made for the joy of loving God and loving one another, headed toward a heavenly destiny which we can't yet fathom. In consecration, we increase in the healing of loving relationships. We increase in the happiness that we derive from love. And we increase in the peaceful hope of our confidence in God. God bless you.

# Apostolate for Family Consecration®

The Apostolate for Family Consecration (AFC), an international lay association of Christ's faithful, was founded in 1975, by Jerry and Gwen Coniker, parents of 13 children and grandparents of 74. It is headquartered in Bloomingdale, OH (1 hour west of Pittsburgh) with over 800 acres set apart for family ministry.

The AFC was founded as a direct response to the increasing attack on family life in society. Motivated by St. John Paul II's prophetic words: "As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live." The AFC seeks to help protect and strengthen the sanctity and dignity of the family. This is realized by looking to the Holy Family as the model of family life and leading families through a spirituality of Family Consecration, inspired by the Eucharistic, Marian and family-centered spirituality of St. John Paul II.

The Apostolate for Family Consecration assists in transforming families into strong domestic churches and works to awaken the sleeping giant of the Catholic laity by uniting family members with God, with one another and with their neighbors (friends, parish communities, etc..) thus bringing about the Civilization of Love, which St. John Paul II often spoke about.

The AFC serves families by providing them with resources to learn the truths of our Faith, sustaining them in these truths through on-going study/formation, sharing a spirituality of family consecration and uniting them with other Catholic families from around the world. This is accomplished through various outreaches of the ministry which include: resources, events, small study groups, and more. Visit us online at [www.afc.org](http://www.afc.org) to learn more about this family ministry.



*All for the Sacred and Eucharistic Heart of Jesus,  
all through the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart  
of Mary, all in union with St. Joseph.*

*The AFC's motto*

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