

Designed Tension  
John R. Gavazzoni

There is a strange tension involved as we walk along the Jesus-Way. Though the tension has been designed by God to bring out His best in us, a feeling that this ought not to be persistently dogs us. One of the marks of spiritual maturity is the recognition and acceptance of this tension as a dynamic necessary for the believer to come to an intimate knowledge of "the glory of His grace."

If we are to know God, we must come to know Him in His glorious givingness. Grace is just that---God's givingness. God is glorious in His givingness. It is by His givingness that we know His glory. "The glory of His grace," literally means "His grace's glory." That's His nature, to pour out Himself into us from within us. He is, in Christ, the artesian well in us springing up into aeonian life.

The goal of that up-springing is that the artesian well in us should become rivers of living water flowing out of our innermost being as we become extensions of the out-pouringness of the Divine Nature, that is, to love as He loves, to give as He gives.

God gives out of His infinite supply, and the supply, paradoxically, is infinite because God is always emptying Himself into His Son, and His Son into others, and by that emptying, His own fulness is always a fresh supply. I dare say that God's fulness in the aeonian flow of His life, grows by the dynamic of His self-emptying.

His fulness is not a static condition. From out of His eternal infinitude, within our creaturehood, He increases Himself so that in the interplay of His eternality with His aeonian immanence, the eternality of God gives increase to creation, and draws forth from itself increase in the process.

This is seen clearly in Mary's exclamation, "My soul doth magnify the Lord...." The Greek word translated as "magnify" most essentially simply means to make large, to increase. The word can include the idea of extolling God, and though we usually think of that in terms of saying great things about God, more essentially, we extol the excellence of God by His increase in our soul-life.

So enters the strange-feeling tension. We are called to walk the Jesus-Way conscious of BOTH infinite supply, and extreme need. Even God by His Spirit in the aeons experiences this consciousness, for He, with us, and us, with all creation, groans for the revealing of the sons of God.

We are often made to feel, by unbalanced teaching, that we ought to walk only in the consciousness of infinite supply, so when those times come when we are engulfed in a sense of need, we are made to feel that we're so lacking in divine consciousness that those who preach this perception to us must certainly live on a much higher spiritual plane.

Jesus didn't live that way. Paul didn't. John didn't. They prayed for God's supply. They prayed from a consciousness of infinite supply AND profound need. That's what prayer is. We have religiousized it, and turned it into a formula. In fact, prayer is living in the Presence of infinite supply with a consciousness of neediness. Prayer, dear ones, simply is having the eyes of our human need fixed on Jesus.

The process often involves being exhausted from drawing out of our own resources, from a deceived expectation that our own endurance is up to life's challenges. Just naturally, our existential state is a state of neediness, when deception enters in, things become really complicated as we egotistically try to be to ourselves what we need.

That's what creation is all about. God has brought into existence a dimension of neediness as a complement to His provision, and then He exacerbates the situation through the lie of the serpent about our capabilities. Read Paul carefully, and you meet a man keenly aware that he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him, but you meet a man of weakness also; a man in whose weakness, God's strength is perfected.

See, to know God's strengthening, you must be in touch with your weakness. God strengthens the weak. Much of what is claimed to be spiritual advancement, is simply the practice of denial supported by very selective proof-texting.

That's why I penned a solemn warning in the article, "What's Happening"

---the warning that if we give ourselves to the practice of cultivating the mind-discipline that attracts to ourselves everything we want in a way that such a discipline becomes our strength, God will ensure, sooner or later, that we will be faced with a challenge that our discipline cannot handle; the challenge of the divine imperative that we become the embodiment of the glory of His GRACE.

The sin of self-enhancement is judged in some early on compared with the experience of others. But it will be judged in us all. God will prick our self-inflation and let out all our hot air. But lest the reader misunderstand what I'm saying, let me hasten to say that, as part of His mercy, God allows us practices of self-help along the way, and this does, in a way, give us some relief from "the sufferings of this present time." This is God's discipline tempered by His mercy.

While we are still in the process of learning the faith of Christ which draws not from its own resources, but entirely from the Father's, God does incorporate into His dealings with us a certain allowance of soul-crutches. The observation that religion is a crutch has an element of insight, most certainly, but Christ is not our crutch, He is our life, a life of wholeness, of wellness of being, of what we usually call salvation.

Until we learn well THAT faith---the faith that thinks positively, not the faith of positive thinking---there is a place accorded by God for us to exercise our souls by various versions of the philosophy of positive thinking, for instance----and I'm amused how folks fail to see that each new version is just a re-marketing of the same old life-posture; "God-helps-those-who-help-themselves."

There is a place for certain personal soul-interests that provide relief and release on the Way. If we try to, with subtle egotism, strip ourselves of every vestige of that which is less than the faith of Christ, we simply have switched to a different groove in the playing of the same old record.

Folks need to feel that they're doing something to improve themselves until they fully come to know as they are known. Some of

us talk a good game, but when the chips are down, the revelation of our sonship hasn't reached us at the deepest cellular level.

So we exercise, eat better, submit to therapy, give serious, honest thought to our bad habits, compulsions and addictions (yeah, some of you exalted spirit-beings out there have some very earthly addictions); in short, we work on ourselves knowing that we are a work in progress.

But, fellow pilgrims, let's keep these things in their place. Beware of the boasting that creeps in as you're aware of working on an area where most other folks are letting themselves go to pot. In terms of "the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," all those undertakings plus a buck and a half will get you a cup of coffee, as they say.

All those things amount to "all the trees in the garden." Go ahead, eat of them, but don't confuse all those generally permitted trees with the Tree of Life. All those other trees, even before the entrance of sin, were allowable natural supports for body and soul. None of them infused the soul with the Divine Nature. Only the Tree of Life, Christ Himself, does that.

Can God use such things in such a way that He confronts us with Jesus in the practice of some natural discipline? Most certainly He can, and does. But distinctions need to be made, and I think most of my readers understand the distinction I'm pointing out. Peter needed, in the hour of his humiliation and confusion to calm his soul by getting back to what he knew he could do well. "I go a-fishing," he said. Jesus showed up.

When once we understand that the essential nourishment of the soul comes from the Tree of Life, then that blessed Tree sanctifies the partaking of all the other permissible trees, but we ought not to impose a our little helps along the Way on others. That's legalism in a very subtle form.