

## ***An Enquiry into Godly Sentiment with special reference to CS Lewis (Abolition of Man) & Jonathan Edwards (Religious Affections)***

*The fear of the Lord is to hate evil;  
Pride and arrogance and the evil way  
And the perverse mouth I hate. [Proverbs 8:13]*

I am sometimes chided for speaking with an unduly 'aggressive or impassioned' tone. 'It's not WHAT you say that offends, but rather the TONE with which you say it,' I am instructed. 'Character first!' I am told is what I need to consider. Now most certainly there is more than a grain of truth & proper warrant in such expressions of concern. We may certainly give UNDUE offense by the manner or tone of our declaration. We *must* retain a proper degree of respect & deference towards all men – especially those entrusted with the leadership and governance of others. The natural tendency for our tone to degenerate when confronting sin is doubtless anticipated by St Peter when he writes, '*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.*' (1Pet 3:15-17) Here the key characteristics commended are 'meekness and fear.' The Scriptures abound with admonitions for us to be gentle, humble and loving in general.

However, I dare to believe that a certain pseudo-wisdom has crept into our thinking if in fact we allow 'gentleness' & a sort of persistent 'mild-manner' to dominate all our utterances. In contrast with what is popularly now reckoned to be authentic Christian Character – even within the Christian Church – I want to suggest that there is not only room for, but that there *MUST* at times be, quite a different exhibition of affection. I am going to present the case for 'ordinate affections', i.e. that response is warranted that corresponds to God's own response of heart and mind. That, I submit, includes angry, displeased and censorious sentiment. In brief, I am going to argue that it's OK to display passion, even 'holy hatred' if the object of our address warrants it.

CS Lewis cites numerous sources lifted from centuries of tradition in literature in his pertinent discourse – The Abolition of Man:

- Until quite modern times all teachers and even all men believed the universe to be such that certain emotional reactions on our part could be either congruous or incongruous to it—believed, in fact, that objects did not merely receive, but could merit, our approval or disapproval, our reverence or our contempt.
- 'Can you be righteous', asks Traherne, 'unless you be just in rendering to things their due esteem? All things were made to be yours and you were made to prize them according to their value.'
- St Augustine defines virtue as *ordo amoris*, the ordinate condition of the affections in which every object is accorded that kind of degree of love which is appropriate to it.
- Aristotle says that the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought. When the age for reflective thought comes, the pupil who has been thus trained in 'ordinate affections' or 'just sentiments' will easily find the first principles in Ethics; but to the corrupt man they will never be visible at all and he can make no progress in that science.
- Plato before him had said the same. The little human animal will not at first have the right responses. It must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likeable, disgusting and hateful.

- In the Republic, the well-nurtured youth is one 'who would see most clearly whatever was amiss in ill-made works of man or ill-grown works of nature, and with a just distaste would blame and hate the ugly even from his earliest years and would give delighted praise to beauty, receiving it into his soul and being nourished by it, so that he becomes a man of gentle heart. All this before he is of an age to reason; so that when Reason at length comes to him, then, bred as he has been, he will hold out his hands in welcome and recognize her because of the affinity he bears to her.'
- The Chinese also speak of a great thing (the greatest thing) called the Tao. It is the reality beyond all predicates, the abyss that was before the Creator Himself. It is Nature, it is the Way, the Road. It is the Way in which the universe goes on, the Way in which things everlastingly emerge, stilly and tranquilly, into space and time. It is also the Way which every man should tread in imitation of that cosmic and super-cosmic progression, conforming all activities to that great exemplar.
- 'In ritual', say the Analects, 'it is harmony with Nature that is prized.'
- The ancient Jews likewise praise the Law as being 'true'. This conception in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Oriental alike, I shall henceforth refer to for brevity simply as 'the Tao'. Some of the accounts of it which I have quoted will seem, perhaps, to many of you merely quaint or even magical. But what is common to them all is something we cannot neglect. It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are. Those who know the Tao can hold that to call children delightful or old men venerable is not simply to record a psychological fact about our own parental or filial emotions at the moment, but to recognize a quality which demands a certain response from us whether we make it or not. I myself do not enjoy the society of small children: because I speak from within the Tao I recognize this as a defect in myself—just as a man may have to recognize that he is tone deaf or colour blind. And because our approvals and disapprovals are thus recognitions of objective value or responses to an objective order, therefore emotional states can be in harmony with reason (when we feel liking for what ought to be approved) or out of harmony with reason (when we perceive that liking is due but cannot feel it). No emotion is, in itself, a judgement; in that sense all emotions and sentiments are allogical. But they can be reasonable or unreasonable as they conform to Reason or fail to conform. The heart never takes the place of the head: but it can, and should, obey it.
- We were told it all long ago by Plato. As the king governs by his executive, so Reason in man must rule the mere appetites by means of the 'spirited element'.
- The head rules the belly through the chest— the seat, as Alanus tells us, of Magnanimity, of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments. The Chest-Magnanimity-Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man. It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal.

Now, Lewis drew attention to all of this to make another point, namely that there exists a universal moral standard of right and wrong. St Paul argues to the same conclusion in Romans 1-3. There he explains that not only do both Jew and Gentile know this law (God's Law) – it being written as it were on the tablet of our heart (i.e. conscience) BUT that universally, all men fall short in living and speaking of that same standard. Hence Lewis concludes,

- We have been trying, like Lear, to have it both ways: to lay down our human prerogative and yet at the same time to retain it. It is impossible. Either we are rational spirit obliged for ever

to obey the absolute values of the Tao, or else we are mere nature to be kneaded and cut into new shapes for the pleasures of masters who must, by hypothesis, have no motive but their own `natural' impulses. Only the Tao provides a common human law of action which can over-arch rulers and ruled alike. A dogmatic belief in objective value is necessary to the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny or an obedience which is not slavery.

Regarding my own enquiry, I want to suggest that these citations of Lewis, together with his annotations, teach us that WHAT we say WARRANTS a certain WAY of saying it. That is, the subject under discussion warrants a certain ASSOCIATED sentiment which, if absent, would undermine (or at least be incongruous with) the message communicated. CS Lewis argues persuasively for the existence of 'Ordinate Affections'. As a Van Tillian, I would say that Lewis is right, but that what he (vindicated by his various citations) deems 'ordinate affections' are quite simply those affections that God warrants in His word – i.e. 'analogical affections', i.e. the way God 'feels' about certain things in contrast to 'univocal affections': the way I subjectively (or better – autonomously) feel about certain things. Just as, in honourable thought, we are supposed to trace lines of reasoning back to God, for honourable affections to prevail we must likewise necessarily trace them back to God.

For just this reason, St Paul explains,

*'Everyone who competes for the prize is **temperate** in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore, I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.'* (1Cor 9:24-27)

Here St Paul warns against being 'intemperate'. We may comprehend the virtue then of being 'temperate' as that facility duly exercised in a godly man whereby he brings even his passions (affections, feelings, etc.) under the Lordship of Christ, rather than leaving them to give unfettered expression to his own capricious impulses.

I dare to suggest that there prevails much confusion in this arena. We are, I reckon, wont to allow our affections to lead our actions & words rather than the opposite. The goal is for our words & actions to CONSTRAIN our affections. Worse still, we are tempted to imagine that raw sentiment may be abstracted from its immediate context, so that it exists in its own independent right. Nonsense!

Two examples from Scripture illustrate the danger of giving undue weight to our emotions:

1. When inheritance was being determined, OT saints – among whom limited polygamy was permissible – would be sorely tempted BY INORDINATE AFFECTION to allocate a disproportionate inheritance to the first born (son) of his 'beloved' wife. God's Law cautioned him from doing so:

*'then it shall be in the day he wills what he has to his sons, he cannot make the son of the loved the firstborn before the son of the unloved, who is the firstborn. "But he shall acknowledge the firstborn, the son of the unloved, by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the firstborn.'* (Deut 21:16-17)

2. When a villain had committed a crime worthy of a capital sanction, God required the civil magistrate to carry out execution – often publicly. As is the case today, there was the distinct prospect of well-meaning but misguided spectators (or bureaucratic administrators!) expressing disquiet on account of ‘false humility’ – a sense of sorrow on behalf of the plaintiff or his family, etc. Listen to the Word of God:

*“If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, **nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you.**” [Deut 13:9ff]*

Passages such as this present a difficulty for many contemporary Christians who cannot conceive of any period of redemptive history in which a capital sanction, such as this outlined here and required by God, might apply. I’ll address, if necessary, their objections another time. Suffice to say here, at any rate, is the same sort of caution against allowing ‘sinful sentiment’ to subvert ordinate affection.

Now, more briefly from the 18<sup>th</sup> century theologian of Revival, Jonathan Edwards. Edwards argues rigorously, clinically and persuasively that true religion consists much in a heightened and noble exercise of the affections. One or two quotes must suffice:

- God has endued the soul with two faculties: one is that by which it is capable of perception and speculation, or by which it discerns, and views, and judges of things; which is called the understanding. The other faculty is that by which the soul does not merely perceive and view things, but is some way inclined with respect to the things it views or considers; either is inclined to them, or is disinclined and averse from them; or is the faculty by which the soul does not behold things, as an indifferent unaffected spectator, but either as liking or disliking, pleased or displeased, approving or rejecting. This faculty is called by various names; it is sometimes called the inclination: and, as it has respect to the actions that are determined and governed by it, is called the affections and the will: and the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart. The exercise of this faculty are of two sorts; either those by which the soul is carried out towards the things that are in view, in approving of them, being pleased with them, and inclined to them; or those in which the soul opposes the things that are in view, in disapproving of them, and in being displeased with them, averse from them, and rejecting them.
- That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference: God, in his word, greatly insists upon it, that we be good in earnest, *“fervent in spirit,”* and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion:

*“Be ye fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.” Rom. 12:11,*

*“And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord the God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul?” Deut. 10:12,*

and chap. 6:vs 4&6,

*"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy might."*

It is such a fervent vigorous engagedness of the heart in religion, that is the fruit of a real circumcision of the heart, or true regeneration, and that has the promises of life;

*Deut. 30:6, "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."*

Further on in his treatise Edwards extols BOTH the presence of love and hatred in the affections of true saints. He writes,

- The Scriptures place religion very much in the affection of love, in love to God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and love to the people of God, and to mankind. The texts in which this is manifest, both in the Old Testament and New, are innumerable.
- The contrary affection of hatred also, as having sin for its object, is spoken of in Scripture as no inconsiderable part of true religion. It is spoken of as that by which true religion may be known and distinguished;

*Prov. 8:13, "The fear of the Lord is to **hate** evil."*

And accordingly, the saints are called upon to give evidence of their sincerity by this;

*Psalms 97:10, "Ye that love the Lord **hate** evil."*

And the Psalmist often mentions it as an evidence of his sincerity;

*Psalms 101:2,3, "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes; I **hate** the work of them that turn aside."*

*Psalms 119:104, "I **hate** every false way."*

So verse 127.

Again, Psalm 139:21, "*Do I not **hate** them, O Lord, that **hate** thee? I **hate** them with perfect **hatred**;*"

What the psalmist here approves of – ‘perfect hatred’ – I maintain seems to be anathema in the modern ‘evangelical’ mind. We are, of course, to love and express strongly our approval of those things that are excellent as per the famous injunction of St Paul in Phil 4:8:

*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.*

**BUT**, we must also countenance & cultivate within ourselves a spirit of ‘controlled temper’ – one that is capable of expressing passionately disapproval of all that is contrary to manifestations of honour wherever they be found.

So, the case is easily made that the godly saint, truly following Christ must at times display this antipathy towards wickedness & sin. Most pertinently therefore I ask, “Are there grounds for the Christian to FEEL and to express himself PASSIONATELY against the various vices & manifestations of wickedness occurring around him?” I say there are. I’ll enumerate a few:

- The prevalence of false religion
- The abandonment of true religion in the Christian Church
- The perceived ‘acceptability’ of abortion, pornography, homosexuality, euthanasia, etc.
- The prevalence of naturalism/materialism in pop’ culture

- The ridicule of the Bible in academia
- The dominance of secular humanism in the BBC (media)
- The widespread prevalence of hedonism in 'night-life & binge-drinking'
- The acceptability of gambling
- The loss of Sunday as the Lord's Day
- The neglect of preaching God's Law as the standard of moral acceptance with God
- The casual violation of Sabbath-keeping by the Lord's own people
- The acceptance of debt as a way of life
- The presence of a Koran together with a Bible under the parliamentary dispatch box
- The revision of history to negate the edifying influence of Scripture in national life
- The cult of celebrity
- The worship of football & sport
- The neglect of Bible reading
- The abandonment of Christian marriage
- The lack of reverence in Christian worship & the neglect of the 'regulative principle'
- The forfeiture of national sovereignty, etc, etc.

Not only MAY the godly Christian feel & express holy outrage against such vice, he is OBLIGED and EXPECTED by God to EXPRESS such sentiment. He is to be 'a watchman to the House of Israel' – the Christian Church – blowing the trumpet & drawing special attention to those places & occasions where the Truth of God is under attack & the Church is under siege from false shepherds & spurious pseudo-spiritual leadership. Failure to sound the trumpet, Ezekiel warns us, will bring judgement upon all! Christian leaders who shrink back from this weighty responsibility are, in God's eyes, in partnership with the perpetrators of evil in their midst. The author of Proverbs puts it this way,

*If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. Deliver those who are drawn toward death, And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, "Surely we did not know this," Does not He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, does He not know it? And will He not render to each man according to his deeds? [24:10-12]*

The exhortation is clear: we are to speak up and speak out in the face of injustice & adversity. So widespread today is the conviction – even within the visible Church! – that we must not 'JUDGE' others, we have become sanitised to sin. But God indicts those who call good evil and evil good (Is 5:20). To the extent that we hold back from drawing attention to evil when it is publicly manifest, we sin against God and our salt loses its saltiness. Again,

*He who says to the wicked, "You are righteous," him the people will curse; nations will abhor him. But those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come upon them. [Prov 24:24-25]*

Wilberforce, Shaftesbury & many others have honourably drawn attention to evil practice within the civil sphere. Their legacy is honourable indeed. Where are the same expressions of indignation and outrage today? Who has taken up their mantle in the face of widespread societal evil and public iniquity?

*Whoever is a partner with a thief hates his own life; he swears to tell the truth, but reveals nothing. [Prov 29:24]*

This text is one of the most damning of the present crisis. Lamentably, we are afraid to measure virtue and vice by the old conceivable absolute standard of God's Word. Our failure to proclaim the

justice God requires of ALL MEN by the faithful publication of His Law makes us, in a great measure, complicit with those who live profligate lifestyles. Solomon says much the same thing again here:

*Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law contend with them. [Prov 28:4]*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer concurs, "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

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Further discourse is required to demonstrate the loss of vision among many 'evangelical' leaders who have reduced the gospel to bare minimum. A minimum that supplants the full-orbed scope of Christian duty to a matter of a personal life-style choice. The God of creation is thereby effectively silenced or else gagged, having nothing relevant to comment concerning the various ills and sins of the age. Contemporary secular & multiculturalism has demonised ANY and EVERY expression of diffidence. Anyone speaking passionately against wickedness and vice in the public sphere is deemed to be unloving, censorious or mean-spirited, etc. 'Hate crimes' proliferate in popular political culture. Once again, the spirit of the world has infiltrated the Church. Simply put, hate is **not** a crime. God hates sin; so must we. God hates injustice, so must we!

In recent years, I have woken up to the realisation that the Christian message of redemption was given with a view that all human culture & civilisation might gradually be overturned & renovated. This is the clear & plain import of the Great Commission. Regrettably, the evangelical constituency has so thoroughly withdrawn itself from 'political affray' that its message has all but lost relevance & application. I have sought to comprehend FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE what honourable & legitimate politics looks like & where the principle fault lines & faulty foundations lie, etc. My quest for truth in the civil arena has led me, from time to time, to listen to passionate, highly driven 'lone voices' daring to expose falsehoods and injustice endemic within the mainstream narrative. I have appreciated help received from certain outspoken pundits. I have found the BBC to be so dominant in British mainstream news that my attention has turned to the American situation which is more transparent & amenable to independent so called 'alt-right' hegemony. My colleagues & friends (& family!) are puzzled by my empathy with some of these – not generally on account of their substance & content but rather - on account of their alleged 'angry spirit', etc. I hear their concern but reckon, for the most part, their misgivings are misplaced. They spring from a pseudo-spiritual belief that passionate expression of heart conviction is somehow necessarily misguided. Ironically, it is they who are smitten with spiritual pride & blinded, as was I for years, by political indifference and spiritual coldness. They are deaf and numb to heaven's outcry against the injustice that we, God's people, tolerate as custodians of His creation. Didn't Jesus command us to 'occupy till I come'?

Well did Jesus say to those faithfully looking to God in His day and sensing, as did the children of Issachar (2 Chron 112:32), *'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. .... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled.'* [Matt 5:4-6]

### **The Remedy**

Given that our hearts are so inclined towards sin and our passions so tied up with the spirit of the age it is pertinent to wonder how we might remedy our coldness and lethargy? Where, in the Word of God, are we shown the true nature of godly affection? Where do we hear, and read of honourable sentiment? I answer, 'in the Book of Psalms!' Therein especially are we confronted with the heart of one who is described by God Himself as 'a man after my own heart'. Now, I contend

that David's affections were as extraordinary as they are exemplary. The challenge that is ours is to emulate them – to feel as he feels, to love what he loves, to hate what he hates, etc. Surely, one simple counter to false sentimentalism is the recovery of 'psalm singing'. The more I consider it, the more I am persuaded that one significant cause of 'pietism' (privatised, existential spirituality) in our churches is the woolly, shallow & unbalanced spirituality that dominates the content of modern worship songs – and not a few traditional hymns too!

### **Hell in the Christian Worldview**

The doctrine of Hell as taught plainly and persistently throughout the pages of the NT stands as a gigantic witness against contemporary evangelicalism. It isn't preached & taught anymore (except in the small print!) for the simple and obvious reason that it jars with the spineless & passionless narrative that oozes from most pulpits. It is the elephant in the sitting room within the evangelical sub-culture.

The God that is preached & proclaimed is far from being angry & vindictive. He is 'measureless grace & infinite mercy'..... These latter characteristics so dominate mainstream evangelicalism's message that God's righteousness, holiness & justice are all but forgotten. God holds all His creatures to account for having violated the terms of His Law covenant as set forth in the Ten Commandments. That Law applies extensively throughout all human spheres – family, church, state, school, etc.

God expects & requires us to address injustice everywhere it is manifest in order to curtail His own judgement. Hell is the proof that this is a pressing, great & hugely important aspect of the Church's temporal vocation to 'judge' etc. Several times in the Book of Revelation we read, 'But still the inhabitants of the earth refused to repent (see Revelation 16)'

The doctrine of Hell stands as a cosmic incentive in a fallen world for us to start immediately and with great effort & determination the work of repairing the breaches and rebuilding the broken walls of the city. We are to articulate God's judgement in advance to mitigate its intensity & scope in eternity to come. May God Himself furnish us with the courage AND the passion to do so. Amen.