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Semiotic Transfiguration: Becoming More Fully Human

Vern Hyndman

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

SEMIOTIC TRANSFIGURATION: BECOMING MORE FULLY HUMAN

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

DR. DAVID MCDONALD

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

Jesus invites us into a new life, not simply adherents to a set of standards. Jesus invites us through a power not our own to become *most fully human*; alive Spiritually, Physically, Intellectually, Relationally, and Emotionally (SPIRE). We become Jesus-InSPIREd holistic human beings, invited to participate in God-powered transfiguration of ourselves and others.

The United States Military uses challenge coins to encourage soldiers, and the coins display visual metaphors that echo the values and objectives of the donor and the donor's unit. I made a challenge coin for Leonard Sweet as a gift of thanks for his generosity to me as a mentor, professor, and friend. The coin bears Christian visual metaphors, words invented or repurposed by Sweet, and other visual metaphors. In this dissertation, I exegete each element of the coin from multiple perspectives; the perspective of two thousand years of Christian tradition, meaning Sweet has imbued, and an example of meaning for use between a mentor and mentee. I offer an example conversational prayer for each element.

I provide practical application examples, including grief mitigation, a coming-of-age gift and affirmation process, and a replacement for minor league sports participation trophies.

The Challenge Coin, loaded with historical, borrowed, and custom-created meaning, can serve as a tangible semiotic to help orient personal agency with the transfiguring, integrating, resurrecting power of the love of the Father, the power of the Spirit, and the way of Jesus. We hot-wire our distracted, dissipated, and disconnected

humanity, and enhance our surrender to the promise of Jesus of life and life more abundantly. It's a Jesus-life-hack too comprehensive to fit in a TikTok.

INTRODUCTION

Jesus invites us into a new life. We are not simply adherents to a set of standards, rather Jesus invites us through a power not our own to become new beings.¹ In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus intensifies the law of Moses encapsulated in the Ten Commandments from difficult to impossible. “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.”² In making the difficult impossible, Jesus underscores that we need the power of the Spirit of God to live in the way of Jesus temporally and eternally. Jesus models this new life by receiving the Holy Spirit at his baptism.³ Referring to Jesus as “the last Adam,” Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:22 says “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ, all will be made alive.”⁴ The New Testament records Jesus as *most fully human*.⁵ Jesus is alive Spiritually,⁶ Physically,⁷ Intellectually,⁸ Relationally,⁹ and Emotionally¹⁰ (SPIRE).

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV.

² Matthew 5:21-22, NIV.

³ Matthew 3:16, NIV.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:22, NIV.

⁵ John 1:14-18, John 14:9, NIV.

⁶ John 3:34, NIV.

⁷ Matthew 1:23, NIV.

⁸ Luke 2:41-48, NIV.

⁹ John 15 9-17, NIV.

¹⁰ Galatians 5:22-23.

To be fully human is to be alive in each segment of SPIRE, to have the elements of SPIRE growing commensurately and operating interactively within. When we are inSPIREd fully by Jesus, we become holistic human beings.¹¹

The elevation of one aspect of SPIRE over the other segments produces a distorted human, not the *most fully human* of Jesus' example.¹² American culture has elevated knowledge and cerebral assent over becoming a new being and living as a holistic human. Dietrich Bonhoeffer's famous term "cheap grace" comprises "grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."¹³ To be fully human is to engage one's intellect as a piece of a whole, as the letter *I* of the acronym SPIRE. Original sin, as recorded in Genesis, is the choice of *knowledge* over *sustaining relationship*. Faith that leans on intellect alone is an echo of original sin.¹⁴ A significant challenge to the contemporary church is to become fully invested and developed as humans and to resist faith that is limited to cerebral ascent alone.

Our culture has allowed the transfiguring death-to-life baptism and rebirth of Jesus to diminish and has become confined to a cerebral activity.¹⁵ "Jesus did not come

¹¹ John 1:14-15, NIV. See also Luke 2:52, NIV.

¹² Romans 3:21-26, NIV.

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1995), 37.

¹⁴ The *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil* represents knowledge. Humanity before awareness was sustained by relationship to God. See Genesis 2-3, NIV.

¹⁵ Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1978), 155.

into this world to make bad people good. He came to make dead people live.”¹⁶ We are called to become most fully human as demonstrated by Jesus, to whom all of scripture points. The aim of this dissertation is to show that semiotics can help align human will with the power of God, resulting in Jesus-followers becoming more fully human.¹⁷ “You just need a listening heart or semiotic stethoscope to hear the story.”¹⁸

For example, God used a stone structure called an Ebenezer as a tangible symbol to encourage the faith of the Israelites.¹⁹ The project documented here involves an artifact that concretely addresses a ministry opportunity. The Challenge Coin demonstrates multiple facets of practical semiotic power available to Christians. The United States military has used Challenge Coins to honor and inspire members, employing semiotic power, in a way that has echoes of the Israelite use of the Ebenezer. As a symbol of the birthright of rebirth as Christians, the coin itself has no power, and it is not magical. The coin is a sign that corrects, affirms, redirects, encourages, reframes, and strengthens Jesus-followers as they mature step-by-step.

Faith-infused semiotics can make a connection between human neurology, psychology, physiology, and theology to bind all the segments of humanity together, a

¹⁶ Ravi Zacharias, *The Grand Weaver: How God Shapes Us through the Events of Our Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 82.

¹⁷ Leonard I. Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus: A Theography* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012), loc. 1704.

¹⁸ Leonard I. Sweet, *Mother Tongue: How Our Heritage Shapes Our Story* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2017), loc 214.

¹⁹ 1 Samuel 7:12, NIV. See also Deuteronomy 8, NIV.

direct challenge to cultural demands that segment and leverage our humanity.²⁰ The re-binding of the segments of a human together is a fresh take on “He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted.”²¹

This paper will explore the underlying value and principles Challenge Coins provide, and then identify and exegete each element in terms of history, meaning, and value to a current disciple.²² How can a Challenge Coin as a tangible semiotic help orient personal agency with the transfiguring, integrating, resurrecting power of the love of the Father, the power of the Spirit, and the way of Jesus?²³ How can we hot-wire our distracted, dissipated, and disconnected humanity, and what are practical aspects of our surrender to the promise of Jesus of life and life more abundantly?²⁴

CHAPTER 1: SEMIOTICS, FAITH, AND HUMANITY

A semiotic sermon reads the signs of what God is up to in the world, connects those signs in people’s lives with the Jesus story, and then communicates the gospel by connecting people in relationship to Jesus through stories, images, and gestures. A semiotic sermon is a search for that holy grail receptacle that conveys Christ’s incarnational presence from giver to receiver. And every preacher knows how often that semiotic receptacle can feel just as elusive and unobtainable as the Holy Grail itself.²⁵

²⁰ Isaiah 61:1, NIV.

²¹ Isaiah 61:1, NIV.

²² Tony Palm, interview by author, Boiling Springs, July 5, 2022, regarding the tradition of Challenge Coins in the Navy.

²³ Sweet, and Viola, *Jesus: A Theography*, 44.

²⁴ This dissertation is a thesis in the form of an intellectual argument, and all subject matter is evaluated within that scope of the intellect. The dissertation includes the caution against abandoning SPIRE engagement in favor of an intellectual argument. There has therefore been significant wrestling in the process.

²⁵ Leonard I. Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 22.

To demonstrate that semiotics help align human will with the power of God, resulting in Jesus-followers becoming more fully human, it is necessary to explore how people are transfigured into new beings. When a believer trusts Jesus, there is a metaphysical change that is described repetitively in the gospel, the study of the nature of salvation called soteriology. Examples of salvation metaphors in scripture include born again, raised from death into life, and adopted as a child of God. This dissertation is not about the mystery of salvation, but rather about the iterative process of maturing and becoming more Jesus-like. It is not about justification, but about the process that John Wesley called sanctification. In order to understand how visual metaphors bypass the linguistic coding and decoding that language requires and encourage a Jesus-follower to press into trust and change, it is necessary to understand how maturing and sanctification work. This chapter discusses undergirding concepts that are key to understanding the cooperative nature of human agency with the transfiguring power of the Spirit of God. Surrender is framed in marriage and in recovery from addiction. These two intense contexts illustrate general principles and signs that can be used as metaphorical guides, as well as the key idea that God and humans participate together and that God invites and requires human participation. The chapter discusses how a visual metaphor can help break denial. A discussion of the centered set/bounded set theory of sin provides a Christ-centric practical metaphor for orienting life away from sin and toward life in Jesus. Visual metaphors bypass the linguistic coding and decoding that language requires, and the image delivers a payload of understanding without requiring linguistic involvement. The figures and theory in this chapter are intended to build a practical framework in

which I can demonstrate the value of the Challenge Coin to orient the personal agency of the disciple with the transfiguring, integrating, resurrecting power of the love of the Father, the power of the Spirit, and the way of Jesus.

Transfiguring

The Christian life is less about conforming to a religious standard and more about the Spirit of God raising people who are dead in their sins to new life in Jesus. Christians are transformed by a power greater than themselves and become new beings. In order to understand how semiotics can encourage Jesus-followers to become more fully human, it's important to understand how the new life of Jesus occurs. How does a Jesus-follower become a new being? John Lynch uses the metaphor of a butterfly. Caterpillars have the same DNA as butterflies. The caterpillar simply has to mature into what is already true of it.²⁶

Christians trust that a life committed to the way of Jesus and powered by the Spirit of God is the best life temporally and eternally. Christians believe that faith in Jesus produces eternal life. Humans have agency or the capacity to make decisions and take actions that produce results. Sinning is missing the best that God has for us. Every sin is an illegitimate means to meet a legitimate need. By orienting our agency with the will and power of the Father, in the power of the Spirit, in the way of Jesus, we're transformed.

²⁶ J. Lynch, B. Thrall, and B. McNicol, *The Cure: What If God Isn't Who You Think He Is and Neither Are You?* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2016), loc. 724.

Marriage Metaphor

Jesus uses marriage as a metaphor for our relationship to him. Using a marriage metaphor, if a man were to marry in a small Pennsylvania town, immediately thereafter move to Los Angeles, and choose to never contact his wife ever again, the man would be legally married, but the marriage would be legal only. A good marriage requires both an event and a process. The wedding initiates the covenant relationship. Every day after the wedding, the bride and groom wake up each day and engage their marriage. In the same way, the power of the Spirit of God saves Christians, and they engage in processes from that time forward that orient their agency with what God is doing in, through, and around them. This process of cooperative maturing of a Jesus-follower is initiated by a decision but is then re-engaged every day thereafter.

The trinitarian echo of marriage, *husband, wife, and Jesus*, plays out repetitively in the Christian life and differentiates Jesus-followers from those who believe self-effort is the best humanity can accomplish. Self-help is no help. Human cooperation in Christian sanctification is an orientation and agreement to the work of Jesus in our lives, but it is the Spirit within us that guides, directs, initiates, and completes the work.²⁷

²⁷ Newlyweds often look for shared responsibility, a 50/50 percent split of effort. With maturity they soon discover that marriage is a 100/100 percent deal, 100 percent husband, 100% wife. Jesus followers set themselves up for success with a 100/100/100 percent split, 100 percent husband, 100% wife, 100% Jesus.

Addiction and Discipleship

Heroin addicts learn that they cannot find sobriety by force of their own will. Those who escape addiction alive learn that they have to surrender to a power greater than themselves. Again, self-help is no help. Addicts learn that their addiction is based on control in their lives. Heroin and other opiates are powerful pain relievers. Once addicts experience relief from the pain they live in, the addiction is the relentless pursuit of pain management. On the flip side of control is resignation, in which the addict realizes the futility of control and chooses instead to not participate. Between control and resignation is a tension that addicts call surrender. The tension of surrender never resolves, and it takes intentionality to remain in that tension. A metaphor to sign positive tension is the violin and the tension of the strings. If the tension of the string resolves, the violin cannot make music. Resolving the tension renders the instrument inoperable.

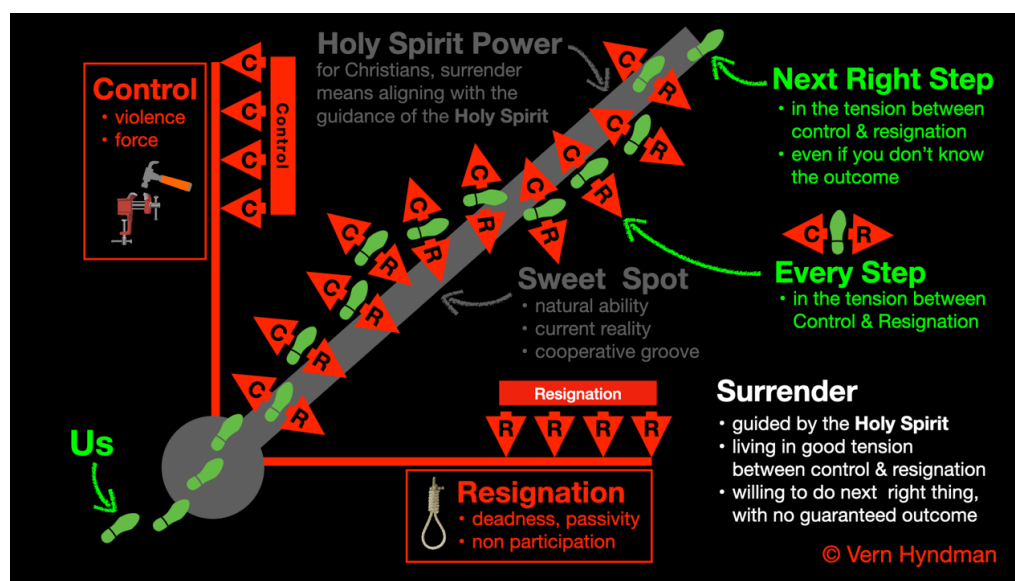


Figure 1: Surrender, Control, and Resignation^{28,29}

Figure 1 outlines surrender. The concept of surrender makes more sense when presented in tension with the alternatives, control and resignation. Control is the drive to have an outcome regardless of the process, for example, the desire to have well-behaved kids even if you have to kill them to achieve good behavior. Control is a bad position and is the root of all addiction. The opposite, flip side of control is resignation. Resignation is the commitment not to participate. When control fails and we recognize that control is not producing the desired outcome, resignation is quitting. We might consider resignation the very last element of control. If we cannot achieve the desired outcome by control, then the last act of control is to refuse to participate. The genius of differentiating between surrender and resignation is that resignation is a terminal, static position,

²⁸ I developed this framework of control, resignation, and surrender from ideas in the recovery movement.

²⁹ This a diagram I have personally developed using ideas from the recovery movement that I learned while helping heroin addicts in the Cumberland County, PA prison.

whereas surrender is always in tension, never resolving, and participatory.³⁰ Surrender is the tension between resignation and control. We surrender as we participate with Jesus in the maturing process that renders Christians us as new beings.³¹



Figure 2: Mine and/or God's

A second point of confusion developed over how the participation between us and God works. Figure 2 outlines how we participate with God. Initially, the top of the diagram labeled *Mine or God's* assumes that there are some things that are mine to do, like go to work each day, and there are some things only God can do, like cure the sick or

³⁰ A turning point in my development as a Christian occurred when I understood the difference between surrender and resignation. When my parents would suggest *give it to Jesus*, I would respond internally, *should I wrap it first?* The idea of *give it to Jesus* made no sense until I realized that giving it to Jesus was participatory and that Jesus would involve me in the process.

³¹ A visual metaphor for control is a vice and a hammer; if you want well-behaved kids, you put them in the vice and hammer them into the shape you desire. The kids are damaged, but they are in the desired shape; control has short-term advantages and long-term consequences. The visual metaphor for resignation was more challenging, and I eventually chose a noose. The metaphor for resignation had to never be appropriate, and a suicide noose made a perfect, if not disturbing metaphor. I initially wanted to replace the noose because of the discomfort I felt around it, but eventually realized that the discomfort was helpful, and that resignation should be disturbing.

raise the dead. With *Mine or God's* as the primary lens, approaching the dividing line between *what is God's* and *what is the disciple's* is paralyzing. The line between *what is God's* and *what is ours* creates indecision.

The *Mine and God's* lower diagram in Figure 2 represents a better understanding of how Christians participate with God. Some things are the disciple's task. The disciple sets the alarm to wake for work, even if this is done in the strength of the Spirit. There are other things that are primarily God's that God arranges without the disciple's participation. The majority of the work of God is participatory. Jesus includes humans in the work. This *God With Me, 100% / 100% Overlap* area is a continuum. In this realm some tasks are weighted toward the disciple, while others are almost all God. In the extreme, tasks are mostly God's, and yet God invites the disciple's participation as a witness. Understanding the shared and participatory nature of surrender helps reduce indecision and confusion.

Centered-set/Bounded-set Refocus

Every sin is an illegitimate means to meet a legitimate need. Sin entered the world through Adam. The essence of Adam's sin was that Adam abandoned the sustaining relationship of God for the pursuit of knowledge. The way into sin is a break in sustaining relationship, and the way back from sin is to return to sustaining relationship. Jesus does not ask us to remediate our own sin, but rather our sin is forgiven by Jesus and we are given his righteousness. This does not mean that we don't make amends for the sins that have caused damage, but it is important to understand how we participate in dealing with sin. Theologians refer to the theory around sin as hamartiology.

Comparison of centered-set hamartiology with bounded-set hamartiology underscores the effect of embracing a Jesus-focused understanding of scripture. Where we focus, we give our energy.³² This concept is based on the centered set/bounded set theory presented by Paul G. Hiebert.³³

Centered-set Hamartiology

Imagine if Jesus were in the center, and around Jesus was a concentric line circling him. Between Jesus and the line is righteousness signified by green, but the black line represents the first sin.

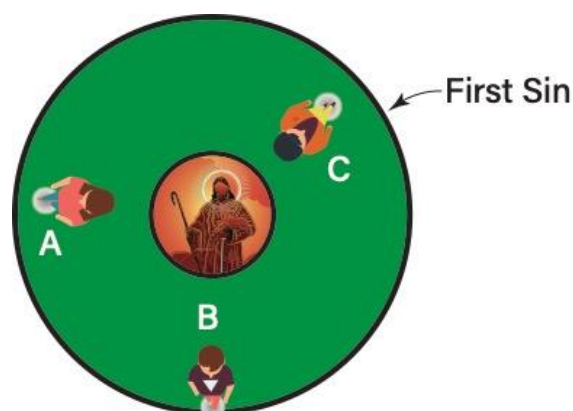


Figure 3: Centered-set Sin-focused.^{34,35}

In the centered-set sin model, the believer intends to be near Jesus and away from the circle around Jesus that indicates a first sin. For example, the believer might desire to avoid resentment towards a brother, given that Jesus in the sermon on the mount

³² This is a truism I have developed by observation.

³³ Michael L. Yoder, et al., "Understanding Christian Identity in Terms of Bounded and Centered Set Theory in the Writings of Paul G. Hiebert," *Trinity Journal* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 177-78.

³⁴ Adapted from the ideas of Paul G. Heibert.

³⁵ Elements of the illustration are licensed from 123RF.com.

correlated resentment and anger to murder. In the centered-set model, the disciple will purposefully focus on avoiding resentment. To focus on not sinning is like being asked not to think of a pink elephant. Where we focus, we give our energy. In this model, we focus on sin and thereby give our energy to sin, rather than focusing on Jesus and giving our energy to life. To focus on the sin line is to have our backs to Jesus, as each of the characters *A*, *B*, and *C* demonstrate. If Jesus is life and sin is death, by focusing on the line we're focusing on death with our back to life. To focus on sin, even with the best intentions, will give energy to sin and produce more sin.

This model breaks down in scriptural applications as well. In the cases of the woman at the well, Zacchaeus, the woman caught in adultery, and the woman with the alabaster jar, Jesus is never in the center away from people. Jesus is always with sinners, even though he does not sin. This model does not reflect reality.

Bounded-set Hamartiology

Imagine Jesus at the center and people scattered at varying distances around him. Bounded-set theory determines positivity or negativity not based on an arbitrary line, and not by proximity to Jesus, but rather in orientation to Jesus. In the diagram, characters *G*, *J*, *L*, *O*, and *Q* are near Jesus but pointed outward. They are sinning, whereas *D*, *E*, *F*, *H*, *I*, *K*, *N*, and *P* who are oriented toward Jesus are righteous. Notice that *P* is the furthest from Jesus but is considered righteous because she's pointed inward toward Jesus.



Figure 4: Bounded-set Jesus-focused.³⁶

O, nearest to Jesus, might be the religious leader to whom Jesus said, “You’re standing right in front of me and you don’t see me.”³⁷ *P* further out, but pointed toward Jesus might be the woman caught in adultery. Proximity to Jesus is not relevant, but orientation toward or away from Jesus is critical. This model does not deny sin but focuses everyone on Jesus, who is life.

Semiotics and Transfiguration

Semiotics is the study of signs, where a sign is “an image, gesture, sound, object, or word that stands for something else.”³⁸ As Leonard Sweet points out, for a sermon to be effective in conveying Christ’s incarnational presence, the sermon must be rich in the semiotic elements of stories, images, and gestures. Through belief Jesus promises that we

³⁶ Adapted from the ideas of Paul G. Heibert. Elements of the illustration are licensed from 123RF.com.

³⁷ John 8:19, MSG.

³⁸ Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*, 22.

will become new beings.³⁹ Humans are incarnate beings. We are a spirit with a soul in a body.⁴⁰ According to Holman, our soul links people to the spiritual realm. As Christians we are inhabited by the Spirit of God.⁴¹ The words of U2's Bono in the song *Walk On* employ an upending twist on a common English saying; "You're packing a suitcase for a place none of us has been, a place that has to be believed to be seen"⁴²

³⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV.

⁴⁰ Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000), 178-79.

⁴¹ Romans 8:9, NIV.

⁴² U2, musical group, "All That You Can't Leave Behind," recorded in by Island Records, 2020.

In this chapter I've outlined basic elements of the cooperative nature of maturation or sanctification. Christians are saved through faith which provides a new identity as children of God. They then iteratively mature into the identity they already have. We surrender in tension and orient our will with the work of the Spirit in our lives. Maturation is accomplished through the power of the Spirit, but we are invited and required to participate in the process. We do not set about to conquer sin. Sin is remediated relationally. As we focus on and trust Jesus, sin is displaced. Our desires are transfigured, and we increasingly experience the world with the senses of Christ. Denial can be addressed through art, and communication may occur with symbols in modes that bypass linguistics such as art.

Symbols provide an alternative means of access to the brain and to our sense of knowing. Therefore, semiotics is a valuable means of encouraging disciples along in their growth and maturity. The Challenge Coin supports, encourages, and inspires Jesus-followers to actively participate in these processes.

CHAPTER 2: INCARNATIONAL FAITH AND SEMIOTICS

Becoming New Beings and SPIRE Maturity

Jesus transfigures followers into new beings, and scripture employs various metaphors to describe this new creation. Ezekiel describes this as removing a heart of stone and replacing a heart of flesh.⁴³ “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”⁴⁴ Becoming a Cristian is to become an heir of the Father, to become family. Most world religions require conformity, whereby reaching and maintaining some defined standard produces acceptance. Christians describe righteousness as a coat we wear. Our righteousness is an attribute on loan from Jesus. We are righteous because of Jesus, not because of our internally generated effort.⁴⁵ Christians are immediately righteous, and yet maturing produces more Jesus-like disciples.⁴⁶ John Wesley referred to the maturing process as “sanctifying grace,” “having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked.”⁴⁷

The maturing of a Christian is accomplished by “the renewing of the mind” as referenced by the Apostle Paul.⁴⁸ The Apostle Paul’s words are not to limit

⁴³ Ezekiel 11:19, NIV. See also Ezekiel 36:26, NIV.

⁴⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:17, NIV.

⁴⁵ Romans 3:24, NIV.

⁴⁶ Romans 12:2, NIV.

⁴⁷ United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2016* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 53.

⁴⁸ Romans 12:2, NIV.

transfiguration to a cerebral-only process. Educated but emotionally immature leaders do tremendous damage. “Christian spirituality, without an integration of emotional health, can be deadly –to yourself, your relationship with God, and the people around you.”⁴⁹ The best life as demonstrated by Jesus is a life of SPIRE⁵⁰ maturity, in which all the segments of our humanity are maturing together.⁵¹ How often do we consider maturity and leave out one of the SPIRE slices? How often is the relational slice neglected in our hyper-individualized culture?

Religious leaders asked Jesus a trick question, “should we pay our taxes?” When Jesus asked in return, “whose image is on the coin?” he was pulling on the Jewish awareness that they are “made in the image of God.” Jesus reiterated to them that to “give to God what is God’s” is to give their whole selves.⁵² Metaphor is powerful when it references deeply buried cultural awareness.

Affirmation

Biblical stories of the “father blessing the son” include Isaac blessing Jacob and Jesus receiving the Father’s blessing. Scripture works on patterns that permeate the text, and we recognize these patterns not only throughout the Bible but also in popular culture. The baptism of Jesus had a prequel, which was the story of Noah. By examining the

⁴⁹ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature, While Remaining Emotionally Immature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 9.

⁵⁰ Spiritual, Physical, Intellectual, Relational, and Emotional (SPIRE)

⁵¹ Luke 2:52, NIV.

⁵² Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*, 213.

repetitive signs in scripture and in culture, we can better understand how metaphor works in humans by awakening something already embedded in the observer's awareness. The presentation of a Challenge Coin is an act of affirmation, the giver affirming the identity of the receiver. The coin's manufacturing is elegant and it looks and feels expensive; it is a nice gift. Some Challenge Coins are given in a context of shared signs. The recipient is well aware of the meaning and is honored by the gift. For example, the captain of a submarine gives a Challenge Coin to a sailor whose action made life easier for the entire submarine. Other gifts require storytelling to impart significance. The storytelling might be an important part of the gift. "Here son, you've become a man, and over the next year, we'll talk about what each of the icons and words represent. I'll buy the breakfasts."

CHAPTER 3: PRACTICAL METAPHORS IN MENTORING

Tangible signs are a powerful way of keeping Jesus-followers on track. Each day they renew their true identities as adopted children of God. Jesus invites us to participate in his generous process of creation. In Chapter 3, we will explore examples of historical Christian integrative SPIRE⁵³ practices to provide a new perspective on the use and value of the Challenge Coin.

The Rosary as a SPIRE Practice

To understand the integrative effects of a tangible semiotic, the Roman Catholic Rosary beads and praying the Rosary provides a historic example.⁵⁴ Focusing on the areas of praying the Rosary that all Christians can fully support, the act covers the entire SPIRE. It is at once spiritual by praying and worshiping, physical by sequentially touching beads, intellectual by inviting the mind to visualize the major storyline elements of the life of Jesus, relational with the Trinity and the saints, temporal, eternal, and emotional in the experience of the five senses. Praying the Rosary is a SPIRE practice.

The Rosary beads themselves are a common gift for birthdays, baptisms, and christenings. The gift of the physical bead set is a gesture of goodwill and carries affirmation and positive meaning for the recipient. Not only does the Rosary play a part in worship, but the remembrance of the giver and of the significance of the event of the gift are also powerful signs.

⁵³ Spiritual, Physical, Intellectual, Relational, and Emotional (SPIRE)

⁵⁴Lutherans and Anglicans have alternative versions of the Rosary or prayer beads. Orthodox use knotted rope.

Habits, repetitive actions, and gestures are signs. A lifetime of praying a sequence of prayers, while carefully guiding the imagination to experience faith-supporting beliefs, produces a sense of well-being and can sustain a person through unexpected circumstances or contexts. WWII soldiers used the habits and gestures of the Rosary to maintain a sense of linearity and connection in the circumstances of stress that war produced.

A Beginners Guide to the Rosary eloquently details the Catholic Rosary.⁵⁵ Using Rosary Beads and prayer along with creative imagination around the life of Jesus is a powerful SPIRE-type endeavor. As the Beginner's Guide to the Rosary outlines, over years the signs become more powerful and more valuable to the encouragement of the Jesus-follower.

Over the years that a Jesus-follower uses the Rosary Beads, praying the prayers, opening up to the Spirit, and purposefully focusing the imagination on the sequential mysteries, the practice makes elements of Jesus's story both real and familiar. All elements of SPIRE are engaged, and so the net result of having prayed the Rosary is integration, the ability to center on Jesus and his story. Catholic sources instruct Rosary users to meditate upon specific movements in the story of Jesus, and using the five senses, to imagine witnessing the scene in person.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ "A Beginner's Guide to the Rosary," The Mary Foundation, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.catholicity.com/prayer/rosary.html>.

⁵⁶ "A Beginner's Guide to the Rosary."

Brown indicates that mundane tasks can enhance the outcome of mindfulness practices.⁵⁷ “To assist clients in integrating mindfulness into their daily activities, counselors can help clients identify activities that lend themselves most easily to mindfulness practice, which, besides driving a car, can include other mundane tasks, such as doing dishes, ironing clothes, gardening, walking, and so forth.”⁵⁸ A mundane task provides the body with unfocused awareness, which provides an enhancement that Brown has measured clinically. The counting and touching of Rosary beads are tactile tasks that enhance the mindfulness that Rosary practitioners are leaning into when they pray the Rosary. The etymology of the word *bead* is *to pray*; tactile prayer practice appears throughout Christian history and has permeated our language.⁵⁹

Tactile interaction has implications beyond direct meditation and has proven to be helpful in reading comprehension and retention. In my practice, I find men tend not to read. A large percentage of them are functionally illiterate. They can read all the words, but ideas don’t form for them as a result. Other men who can read won’t take the time. I spend time each week with my clients, but it’s the assigned reading that enhances the hour we spend together, and when the clients coalesce into a group, it’s the reading that provides shared language and experiences for the group to gel. I’ve found that if I provide books, men will attempt the *osmosis method*. They’ll stack the books on their nightstand

⁵⁷ Amanda P. Brown, Andre Marquis, and Douglas A. Guiffida, “Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Counseling,” *Journal of Counseling & Development* 91, no. 1 (2013): 96-104, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2013.00077.x>.

⁵⁸ Brown, Marquis, and Guiffida, “Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Counseling,” 96-104.

⁵⁹ “Bead: Etymology, Origin and Meaning of Bead by Etymonline,” Online Etymology Dictionary, accessed July 13, 2022, https://www.etymonline.com/word/bead#etymonline_v_42795.

and hope the reading will diffuse in by proximity and osmosis. To resolve this issue, I provided audio books, so the men who couldn't read could take part and the men too busy to read could listen on their commute, while mowing the lawn, or doing the dishes. I discovered that the men who listened on the commute or while doing a mundane task accomplished more reading and absorbed more of the content than those who dedicated time to focus on reading. Mindfulness enhances quality of attention and therefore reading comprehension. I discovered that tactile activities increase a reader's comprehension. By providing a physical object like the prayer beads or the Challenge Coin, participants can become more mindful, and because of mindfulness, more SPIRE integrated.

In Chapter 3, the Roman Catholic practice of Praying the Rosary provided a multifaceted example of the integrative effects of a tactile activity as a framework for prayer and worship. The chapter evaluated the power of self-guided meditation and structured imagination in prayer and worship. Finally, we discussed the value of tactile interaction on reading comprehension.

comprehension.

CHAPTER 4: SEMIOTIC IMAGES

The Challenge Coin is an example of a physical icon used in a tactile activity to aid in maturing and transfiguration. United States Military personnel traditionally present Challenge Coins to service members as tokens of affirmation and respect. Chapter 4 is a light exegesis of the symbols on the obverse side of the coin, as well as each of the sign elements that adorn the coin, and Chapter 5 similarly exegetes the front side of the coin containing symbolic words and acronyms. We evaluate each element in Chapter 4 in each of the following perspectives;

- historical/scriptural meaning as recorded in available texts
- meaning as shown by Sweet in his writing and social media posts
- meaning provided to a Christ follower who has experienced a trauma or discontinuity in their Christian journey. (This meaning is custom-created and preloaded in conversation and storytelling for a specific person or context and is not definitive.)
- I've provided a sample prayer for a specific recipient to pray conversationally with Jesus. These prayers are suggestions, and they are intended in this case to demonstrate to the recipient conversational prayer with Jesus.

To present the Challenge Coin to a recipient who is unfamiliar with Sweet and his work or to present coins to a cohort on the first week of the doctoral studies is wasteful, because the cohort would not know what the symbols mean. To the uninitiated, the coin covered in symbols might seem like the walls of a freshly opened ancient Egyptian crypt, covered with indecipherable hieroglyphics. The Challenge Coin might serve another

purpose, however, as a tangible series of prompts to tell the stories that together create a Gospel narrative.

Signs Embedded in the Coin Face Composition

Challenge Coin - Face



Figure 5: Challenge Coin - Face⁶⁰

The center of the coin face has a picture of Dr. Leonard Sweet serving the Eucharist on the deck of his home in East Sound, Washington. East Sound is on Orcas Island, in the San Juan Islands off the coast of Washington State. The water behind the deck is the Salish Sea, containing both resident and transient Orca Whales. Sweet blesses the elements. The cohort and the other guests receive the blessing and by intinction consume the body and blood of Jesus. Inscribed across the top of the picture is the phrase, “Leonard I. Sweet, Orcas Island, WA” in a sanserif font and blue-colored gradation

⁶⁰Vernon Hyndman, *Challenge Coin*, 2019.

darker than the water. The phrase identifies that the coin was custom-made for Sweet. The de-accentuation of Sweet's name in color, font, and size is a semiotic nod to his humility and to his consistent commitment to making Jesus the center of attention, followed by his guests; never himself. His name in the color of water also connotes his incarnation, as the human body is mostly water. His name and his location on Orcas Island, Washington is married in color, font, and arc purposefully to connote that an incarnate life is inextricably located within a place. I have purposefully left the *I.* initial, as Sweet often uses that bit of trivia in his classes. I avoided revealing that *I* stands for *Ira* his paternal grandfather.⁶¹ *Mother Tongue* repetitively reveals the secret. May no student of Dr. Sweet's miss this literary and emotional masterpiece.⁶² The Challenge Coin bears a couple of Easter Eggs or embedded secret elements. On the table in front of the seated student, I have signed the coin.



Figure 6: Easter Egg - Provenance, Signature, and Date.

⁶¹ Sweet, *Mother Tongue: How Our Heritage Shapes Our Story*, 135.

⁶² The class in the picture is Doctor of Ministry Semiotics and Future Studies Cohort 13, and the photo credit is Loren Kerns.

Above the picture of Dr. Sweet serving the Eucharist is the name of Jesus. His name tops both sides of the coin and signifies that Sweet and the entire cohort serve Jesus.

Around the cohort but under Jesus is a guiding scripture, 1 Chronicles 12:32, which Sweet paraphrased as, “We are the tribe of Issachar. Issacharians know the times and know what to do.” This scripture surrounds and binds the community of George Fox University, Portland Seminary cohorts together. Yearly events in which graduates of many disparate cohorts gather for *a Future Church Think Tank* represent the link that the scripture signs as it encircles the cohort pictured.

Around the coin face are linguistic signs that Sweet has either originated or borrowed. Each of these linguistic signs will be discussed later in the chapter.

Signs Embedded in the Coin Obverse Composition

Challenge Coin - Obverse



Figure 7: Challenge Coin - Obverse⁶³

The largest and most prominent sign on the edge of the obverse of the coin is Jesus. The donkey is the symbol of the tribe of Issachar, to be discussed later in the chapter. The hair of the donkey's neck hides an Easter Egg. The name "Peirce" stands for the American founder of semiotics, Charles Sanders Peirce.



Figure 8: Easter Egg, "Peirce"

"TRIBE OF ISSACHAR" and the maxim "SEMIOTICIANS TURN SIGNALS INTO SIGNIFICANCE" circle the donkey's head in white. The Alpha and Omega Greek

⁶³Vernon Hyndman, *Challenge Coin*, 2019.

letters are on either side of the name JESUS, signifying that Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

Stories, Fables, Scripture, and Icons

Each of the signs in this chapter are significant when connected to a story, and by this connection, each visual metaphor will become both metaphor and story.

Stories, fables, scripture, and ideas that we might today call *urban legends* together tell a larger story that is held together on the coin. Coin recipients told the stories. The coin therefore becomes a visual and tangible centering of the SPIRE of each recipient in the flow of the larger story.

Alpha & Omega



Figure 9: Alpha & Omega ⁶⁴

Historical/Scriptural - ΑΩ.

Revelation 1:8 quotes the Lord God directly, “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” The first and the last letters in the Greek alphabet, Jesus, is describing himself as God.

⁶⁴Vernon Hyndman, *Alpha and Omega*, font Times New Roman, 2019.

To be *alpha and omega* is to be a paradox.⁶⁵ A paradox is an irresolvable tension, opposite statements living together in a statement. Family therapists observe marriages are often partnerships of opposites.

Jesus' assertion of alpha and omega, beginning and end, reminds Jesus-followers that to understand the future, one must consider the past. The past and the future help triangulate the present, providing a guide. What we believe about Genesis and what we believe about Revelation colors everything in between.

The second creation story in Genesis 3 specifically shows the reason God removes humans from the Garden of Eden. This brief passage is an implication of the Trinity, as God is talking *to himself* or *amongst himself*. Genesis 3 says that we were driven out to protect us from also eating of the tree of life and thereby living forever in our fallen state.⁶⁶

Revelation is Jesus-centric. Jesus is the center of concentric rings of the chiasmic structure.⁶⁷ The apocalypse of Revelation is the love and salvation of Jesus. Scripture starts with humanity choosing knowledge over a sustaining relationship with God and ends with the Tree of Life's restoring that sustaining relationship back to humanity.⁶⁸ Knowing the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, informs our temporal

⁶⁵ Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*, 112. Leonard Sweet suggests that Jesus' practice of paradox is not absurdity, but "practiced paradox from a Trinitarian mind-set in which only contradictions make it possible to apprehend the real within its confounding totality."

⁶⁶ Genesis 3:22-24, NIV.

⁶⁷ Dan Liroy, *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus, Studies in Biblical Literature*, vol. 58 (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2003), 51.

⁶⁸ Revelation 22:1-5, NIV.

decisions. God’s protective love removed us from the garden, and his redemptive love promises to restore us now and forever.

Leonard I. Sweet - ΑΩ; Alpha and Omega in Art

In a work called *Our Alpha and Omega God*, Sweet exegetes the “God Creates Adam” panel of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.⁶⁹

Sistine Chapel art underscores Sweet’s admonition, “we find the universal in the particular.”⁷⁰ The panel *God Creates Adam* is set in a larger story that is often ignored. The following figures put the Creation of Adam in perspective: the entire ceiling with all paintings visible, then an overlay of the entire room labeling the stories for context, and finally the entire *God Creates Adam* panel.

⁶⁹ Leonard I. Sweet, “Our Alpha and Omega God,” Preach the Story, last modified April 23, 2019, <https://preachthestory.com/our-alpha-and-omega-god/>.

⁷⁰ Personal conversations and classes with Dr. Leonard Sweet.



Figure 10: Sistine Chapel.⁷¹

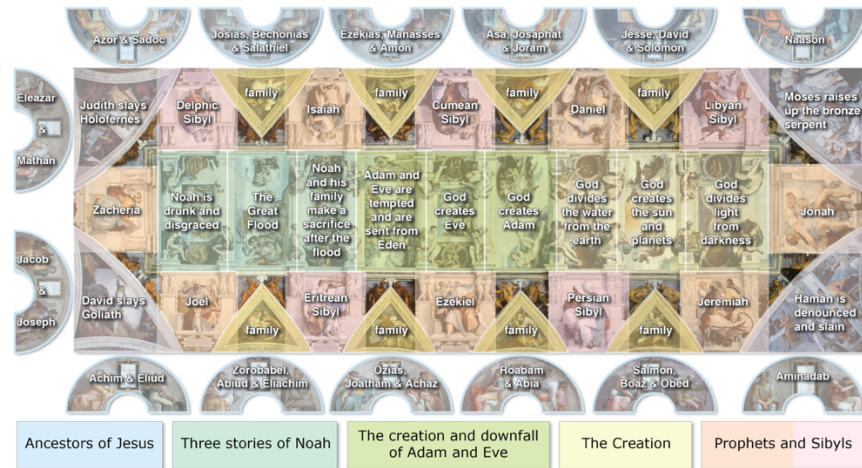


Figure 11: Sistine Chapel Ceiling Diagram Overlay Composite.⁷²

⁷¹ “Sistine Chapel Ceiling,” Wikimedia Commons, accessed June 30, 2022, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sistine_Chapel_ceiling_02_\(brightened\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sistine_Chapel_ceiling_02_(brightened).jpg).

⁷² Begoon, “Sistine Chapel Ceiling Diagram Overlay Composite,” Wikimedia, accessed August 10, 2022, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sistine_Chapel_ceiling_diagram_overlay_composite.png.

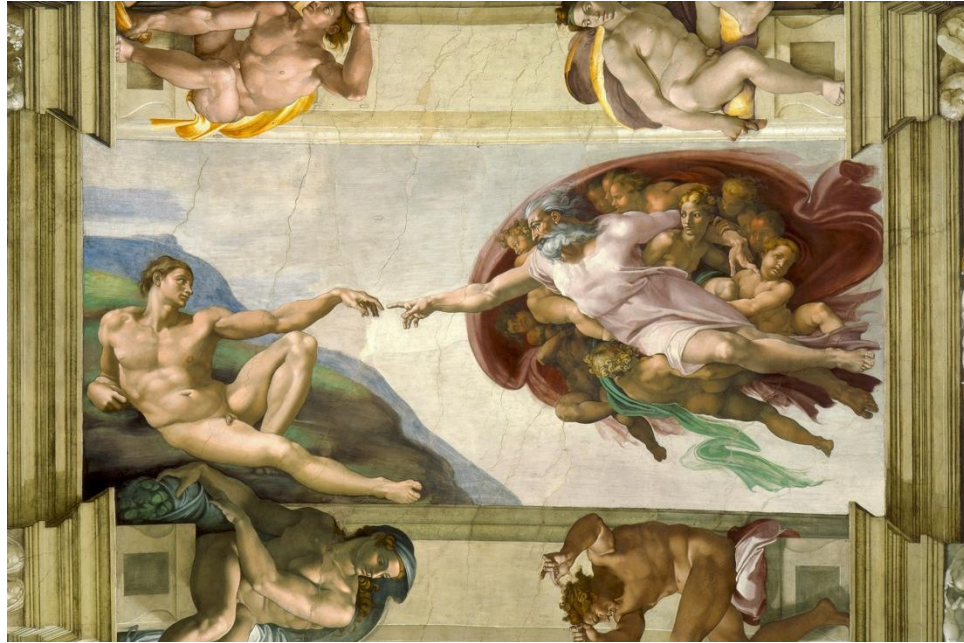


Figure 12: *Creación de Adán (Creation of Adam)* ⁷³

Michelangelo's panel *Creation of Adam* integrates details that underscore our *Alpha and Omega God*.⁷⁴

The most famous aspect of the painting is the reaching hands of Adam and God, close to touching, but out of reach. It's not uncommon to see this artwork cropped down to the arms and hands, cutting out the larger semiotic picture. Buried deeper in the painting, God's other hand encircles a red-headed woman, and his finger points to a red-haired child. Michelangelo is depicting Mary and the Baby Jesus. In creating Adam there

⁷³ "Creación De Adán," Wikimedia, accessed August 10, 2022, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Creaci%C3%B3n_de_Ad%C3%A1n.jpg.

⁷⁴ Sweet, "Our Alpha and Omega God."

is a separation between the hands, but at the time of creation God has also supplied the incarnate answer to the gap, the Son, Jesus. The Alpha of creation, the Omega of life.⁷⁵

From the alpha and omega revealed from Genesis to Revelation are “these three simple words and how the Christian metanarrative offers people a new identity (‘I’), a new integrity (‘love’), and a new intimacy (‘you’).”⁷⁶

As illustrated in Figure 2: Mine and/or God’s, God invites us into the process of creation. The movement from Genesis to Revelation is all God’s, and yet all ours. Our part might be simply to bear witness, although God invites us into active co-creation with him. Dr. David McDonald reminds us,

Both our passivity and our deviance have allowed the world to deteriorate from a planetary paradise into something resembling a cosmic apple core.
But good news: we get to fix it. Because the world, and the work, is ours.⁷⁷

Leonard Sweet asserts that the greatest love story doesn’t begin with us and is not our story but God’s story, in which God invites us to participate. Halsey’s sage advice doesn’t go far enough: “I think the hardest lesson a young person has to learn in their 20s is that you are not the main character in everybody’s story. You’re the main character in your own.”⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Sweet, “Our Alpha and Omega God.” See also Leonard I. Sweet, “How to Recognize Jesus,” *Lectionary LenTalk*, May 2, 2021, podcast, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EBMKGbBZbTM>.

⁷⁶ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Three Hardest Words in the World to Get Right* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2006), 62.

⁷⁷ David McDonald, *Heirs of Eden: Creating the World We Want with God’s Help and for God’s Glory* (Plano, TX: Invite Press, 2022), 44.

⁷⁸ Halsey, “The Hardest Lesson a Young Person Has to Learn,” accessed 08/10/2022, youtube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWUteMJr-7s>.

God's story comprises the beginning and the end, and we find out who we are when we discover who God is. Individual human stories are a fresh telling of God's story.⁷⁹ "Christianity is a storied spirituality. To fully experience the God Life relationship, we must fully immerse ourselves in God's Story."⁸⁰

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - ΑΩ.

To recipient: Be present in the present. Jesus is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, and you are beloved of Jesus. To dwell on the past produces regret. To dwell on some possible future produces worry. We live our best life by being fully present in the present. Jesus is the alpha and omega; therefore, Jesus has handled the past and the future. Meditate on the truth that Jesus and others love you. In the same way that God cares for the flowers and the birds, God also cares for you. Your situation does not define you. God defines you as his beloved child.

Prayer: Jesus, the alpha and omega, I trust you to provide for my future and to remediate the past. Please help me be present and centered in you. In you I have my being, and I pray that the generosity of your presence in me might overflow to everyone I encounter. Amen.

⁷⁹ Leonard I. Sweet, *Out of the Question - into the Mystery: Getting Lost in the Godlife Relationship* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2004), 74-75.

⁸⁰ Sweet, *Out of the Question - into the Mystery: Getting Lost in the Godlife Relationship*, 75.

Flame



Figure 13: Flame⁸¹

Historical/Scriptural - Flame

The Flame sign in Christian history has a Holy Spirit connotation. As Sweet says, “We are ‘saved’ by both water and fire, but prefer the water. With ‘love like water,’ love soothes and satisfies. It makes everything grow. But with ‘love like fire,’ love burns and sears. Or in the words of the Scriptures, ‘Love is a flame of the Lord.’”⁸² “God’s love will flame within you, igniting all that once lay cold and forgotten. God loves all of you, and you, Beloved, are God’s treasure. Unearthed and open to the glory of *The One Who Made You*.”⁸³ The Genesis creation still resounds even today, and scientists are picking up on the soundings. In more romantic terms, the melody lingers on.⁸⁴

⁸¹ “Flammable Sign,” Esquilo.IO, accessed April 21, 2019, <https://esquilo.io/png/flammable-sign-png-hd>.

⁸² Sweet, *The Three Hardest Words in the World to Get Right*, 118. See also Song of Solomon 8:6, NIV.

⁸³ Leonard I. Sweet and Lisa Sampson, *Songs of Light: Words of Grace to Read Aloud with Those at Life’s End*, 2nd ed. (Eastsound, WA: The Salish Sea Press, 2021), 22.

⁸⁴ Leonard I. Sweet, *A Cup of Coffee at the Soul Cafe* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 64.

The flame of God is a purifying flame. Metaphors in scripture include the refiner's fire that purifies gold.⁸⁵ The refining process in a human life may involve pain, but it is a mistake to believe that the pain of the refining process is the pain of punishment. Jesus came not to condemn, but to save the world through himself.⁸⁶

Jesus explained he does nothing in his own power, that whatever he does the Father is already doing and that Jesus joins the Father in the work. "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does."⁸⁷

The Flame icon on the Challenge Coin reminds us that even in difficulty, the pain that comes with growth is not condemnation or punishment, but rather a side-effect of maturing. The Flame also indexes the Holy Spirit, who not only directs our maturing process, but powers the process as well. Self-help is no help.⁸⁸

Leonard I. Sweet - Flame

Sweet references the flame creatively in *Rings of Fire* where he uses flames and fire poetically to correlate Moses' burning bush and to "gather around the fire to get warm, not burned."⁸⁹ Sweet reminds us that the Good News is actual good news, and that

⁸⁵ Malachi 3:2, NIV.

⁸⁶ John 3:17, NIV. See Leonard I. Sweet, *Rings of Fire: Walking in Faith through a Volcanic Future* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2019), 41.

⁸⁷ John 5:19, NIV.

⁸⁸ Alcoholics Anonymous.

⁸⁹ Sweet, *Rings of Fire: Walking in Faith through a Volcanic Future*, 183.

it's around campfires and fireplaces in which relationships form that demonstrate the love of Jesus.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Flame

To Recipient: Jesus promises that the Spirit will power any change that is required in your life. We have a tendency to rush around, doing busy work trying to improve, but we may be busily avoiding the critical work God has for us. Let the flame remind us that the power to change comes from the flame of the Spirit within us and that we can trust Jesus to finish the work he has started in us. God and others love you as you are. God has redeemed you as you are. You already have been blessed with the righteousness of Jesus. The Spirit will power your journey to maturing into what is already true of you.

Prayer: Jesus I trust that the Spirit of God is within me, that the flame of the Spirit will lead me to the changes you are about in my life, and that this same flame will power these changes as I orient my agency to cooperate with you. Give me courage to step past all that I know and into the future that you have gone before and prepared for me. Make me generous with your gifts. Amen.

Chi-Rho



Figure 14: Chi-Rho⁹⁰

Historical/Scriptural - Chi-Rho

Chi-Rho is an ancient Monogram of Jesus, found in the catacombs of the early Christians, but which is also used in practical matters such as wax seals used to validate paperwork.



Figure 15: Votive plaque with Chi-Rho, Fourth Century⁹¹

⁹⁰ Aethralis, "Simple Labarum - Chi Rho," Wikipedia, accessed June 25, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Simple_Labarum.svg.

⁹¹ Neil MacGregor, *Seeing Salvation: Images of Christ in Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 67.

Constantine said that the vision of Christ's monogram in the heavens caused him to convert. Starting with Constantine, the Chi-Rho replaced the Roman Eagle on the Roman standard, and until the reign of Emperor Marcian in the 5th century, Roman imperial coins bore the stamp.⁹²

"Christos means 'anointed.' Who was anointed? It happened to be Joshua, so his name is IECOYC (Jesus), 'Jesus, the Anointed One.' Gradually, the definition has gotten closer to symbolism."⁹³

Persecution led Clement of Alexandria in the second century to leave written instructions for Christians to use allusive symbols.⁹⁴ In an era of persecution, using signs to identify fellow believers prevented accidental identification.

Leonard I. Sweet - Chi-Rho

Jesus Manifesto by Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola discusses an important historic sign of Jesus co-opted by an earlier empire. Cambridge historian Eamon Duffy said, "From the very beginning, Christian art was hijacked to serve the powerful and the

⁹² William Audsley, *Handbook of Christian Symbols* (London, UK: Day & Son Limited, 1865), 79. See also Louisa Twining, *Symbols and Emblems of Early and Mediaeval Christian Art* (London, UK: Longman, Brown, Green & Longman, 1852), 8.

⁹³ Edward N. West, *Outward Signs: The Language of Christian Symbolism* (New York, NY: Walker, 1989), 17. See also Heather Child and Dorothy Colles, *Christian Symbols, Ancient & Modern: A Handbook for Students* (London, UK: Bell & Hyman Limited, 1971), 10. See also Alva William Steffler, *Symbols of the Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 66.

⁹⁴ Child and Colles, 10. Steffler, 66.

successful.”⁹⁵ Jesus is everywhere in Sweet’s work and life, and yet chi-rho is a less-used sign, possibly because initials are so obvious. *Rings of Fire* by Sweet mentions “those bearing the monogram of the Messiah in their hearts,” which illustrates the most central concept of his life and his work. Leonard I. Sweet bears the monogram of Jesus on his heart.⁹⁶

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Chi-Rho

To Recipient: The United States is currently wrestling with Christian Nationalism, in which the American empire merges with the Church and the Church becomes a vassal of the Empire. The Chi-Rho is a reminder that our focus needs to be on Jesus. As historically *all roads lead to Rome*, the crossed members of Chi-Rho remind us that all of creation centers on Jesus. There is no place for those living in Christ for populism, the political jiu-jitsu of forming an enemy to coalesce a constituency. Radical inclusion of Jesus dissipates the political power of empire. Jesus includes marginalized people. The DNA of the empire is fear and scarcity, and the DNA of the Kingdom of Jesus is love, generosity, creativity, and grace.

Prayer: Jesus, renew our Christ-center, but when centered, may we join you on the edges where the growth is. May the marginalized sense our acceptance because of the gravitational pull of the Spirit within us. We pray that we will surrender the urge to be

⁹⁵ Leonard I. Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto: Restoring the Supremacy and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), loc. 1886.

⁹⁶ Sweet, *Rings of Fire: Walking in Faith through a Volcanic Future*, 114.

right in proposition over being connected in relationship. May we recognize our need for community found in you, and may we seek you first. Amen.

Anchor



*Figure 16: Anchor*⁹⁷

Historical/Scriptural - Anchor

“This hope is a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls.”⁹⁸ Christians used peaceful signs in a time in which they were experiencing extreme persecution and violence. The anchor was a sign of hope.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Egg, “Anchor Pictogram,” accessed July 23, 2022, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anchor_pictogram.svg.

⁹⁸ Hebrews 6:19-20, NLT.

⁹⁹ Child and Colles, 10.

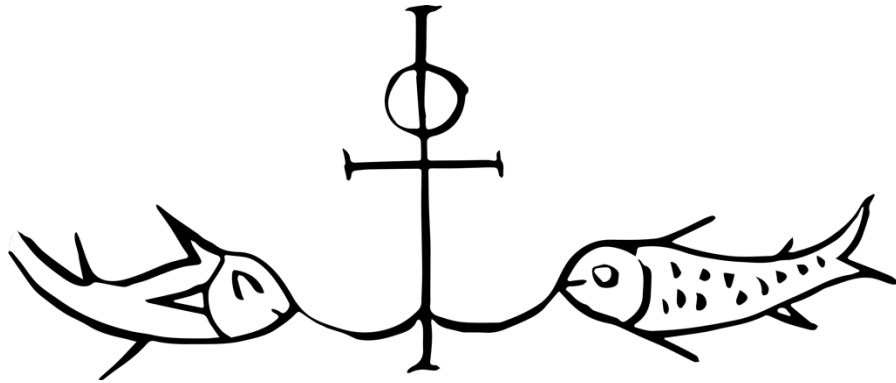


Figure 17: Anchor and Fish¹⁰⁰

“The Anchor Cross with Fishes: incised carving from the catacombs in Rome.”¹⁰¹

The anchor represented “an ancient symbol of hope, representing stability in an unstable sea or security in an insecure world. It was easy to elaborate on the top part of the anchor to form a combination of the flukes of an anchor and the cross itself.”¹⁰²

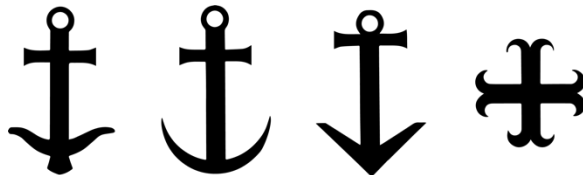


Figure 18: Permutations of Anchored Crosses¹⁰³

The permutations of the Anchor Cross shown in Figure 16 are signs of “steadfast hope, firmness, tranquility, and patience.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Steffler, 205.

¹⁰¹ Steffler, 204.

¹⁰² West, 89.

¹⁰³ West, 89.

¹⁰⁴ Audsley, 141.

Leonard I. Sweet - Anchor: Kedging Forward

“[The] ancient sailing practice of using the anchor to pull a ship along [is] called "kedging”¹⁰⁵ Sailing vessels in shallow water that could not move forward when the wind stopped could use their anchors to move forward. The crew carried the anchor in a smaller boat as far as the anchor’s rope would allow, and then drop the anchor. Crew on the ship would winch the anchor’s rope from the deck, thereby pulling the entire ship forward toward the anchor’s position. “Historically, sailing boats that could not make forward progress in shallow water under sail power, could make way by kedging forward.”¹⁰⁶

Sitting in classes or in visiting the home of Leonard Sweet, his demeanor is engaging and friendly, but Sweet isn’t the kind of person who bounces off the walls. His affect is stable. A significant characteristic of Sweet’s teaching and example is that he’s always moving forward. The kedge anchor as a sign for Sweet’s life and work signifies the continual forward progress, moving forward, even when on a sailing boat and when wind power is not available.

Paul Stillwell, Vietnam War Navy veteran, retired Navy historian, and author, provided a United States Navy example of kedging.¹⁰⁷ During the War of 1812, the USS

¹⁰⁵ Sweet, *Aquachurch 2.0: Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture*, 190.

¹⁰⁶ Leonard I. Sweet, *Aquachurch 2.0: Piloting Your Church in Today's Fluid Culture*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 88-90.

¹⁰⁷ Thanks to Tony Palm, Tony Palm, Chief Petty Officer (retired), United States Navy, retired Navy deep sea diver, for research and contacts.

Constitution escaped destruction by the British with a maneuver called kedging.¹⁰⁸ The captain of the American ship Constitution accidentally sailed directly into a group of five British warships. Outnumbered, the Constitution tried to outrun the British ships until the wind calmed and sail power was impossible. The crew used their two anchors as a means of kedging forward and thereby escaped destruction. The Constitution is still commissioned as an American man-of-war and is home-based in Boston, MA.¹⁰⁹



Figure 19: Constitution's Escape from the British Squadron after a Chase of Sixty Hours¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ W. Hoogland and Michele Felice Corn , "Constitution's Escape from the British Squadron after a Chase of Sixty Hours," NHHC, <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/art/exhibits/conflicts-and-operations/the-war-of-1812/uss-constitution-escaping-a-british-squadron/constitution-s-escape-from-the-british-squadron-after-a-chase-of.html>. Information on the Constitution comes from conversations with Tony Palm, Chief Petty Officer (retired), United States Navy. The USS Constitution, currently the oldest man-of-war is still in commission in its home port of Boston, MA.

¹⁰⁹ Naval History and Heritage Command, "USS Constitution Escaping a British Squadron," accessed August 16, 2022, <http://public2.nhhcaws.local/our-collections/art/exhibits/conflicts-and-operations/the-war-of-1812/uss-constitution-escaping-a-british-squadron.html>.

¹¹⁰ Hoogland, and Corn .

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Anchor

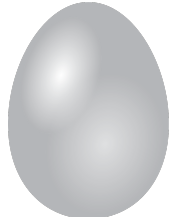
To Recipient: We live in a digital culture that in one lifetime has transitioned from a Gutenberg, or paper society to a Twitter, Google, Instagram, and Facebook (TGIF) society.¹¹¹ Gutenberg people faced a tsunami of information, competing ideologies, and versions of the truth. Former Counselor to President Trump Kellyanne Conway coined the phrase “alternative facts” for what was clearly a lie.¹¹² Into all this, Christians anchor into the Truth that we believe is a person, Jesus, not a proposition or principle. The anchor of Jesus is the kedge anchor that moves our whole ship forward.

Prayer: Jesus, we trust you to be truth. Help us in our mistrust. Strengthen us as we join others in spaces created by your presence and help us resist the urge to proposition and argue. Teach us to ask questions and lead us into better questions. Let us embrace beauty and mystery without the urge to dissect, dismantle, desiccate, and desecrate. Lead us into the work of kedging forward for the good of the whole ship, and let us not become overly focused on ourselves or on the small boat we row. Amen.

¹¹¹ Leonard I. Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking Is Poised to Ignite Revival* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2012), loc. 3.

¹¹² *Meet the Press with Chuck Todd*, directed by Rob Melnick, aired January 22, 2017, on NBC, <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/meet-press-01-22-17-n710491>.

Ostrich Egg



*Figure 20: Ostrich Egg*¹¹³

Historical/Scriptural - Ostrich Egg.

The egg is a sign of the Resurrection based on how the chick breaks through the shell at birth.¹¹⁴ As tokens of the Resurrection, colored eggs at Easter were common in Medieval Christendom.¹¹⁵



*Figure 21: Ostrich - Getty Collection*¹¹⁶

¹¹³ “Eggs with Crack Effect Illustration,” Vecteezy, accessed August 10, 2022, <https://www.vecteezy.com/vector-art/166108-eggs-with-crack-effect-illustration>.

¹¹⁴ West, 58.

¹¹⁵ Child and Colles, 241.

¹¹⁶ Hugo of Fouillooy, “An Ostrich,” The J. Paul Getty Museum, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.getty.edu/search/?qt=bestiary%20ostrich&pg=1>.



Figure 22: Ostrich; *Aberdeen Bestiary*¹¹⁷

The ostrich egg became a symbol of the virgin birth because of Job's comment that the ostrich leaves its eggs in the earth to hatch by themselves.¹¹⁸

Leonard I. Sweet - Ostrich Egg.

For Leonard Sweet, the ostrich egg is a favorite symbol for God's watchful care. During a visit to his house, he produced a hollowed ostrich egg, invited guests to handle it, and related the rich symbolism of the egg. With a small brain and large eyes, the ostrich wanders away while keeping a watchful eye on the eggs. If the ostrich loses sight of the egg, the next generation is lost.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ "Folio 41r the Ostrich," MS 24, The Aberdeen Bestiary, Aberdeen University Library, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f41r>.

¹¹⁸ Job 39:13-14, NIV.

¹¹⁹ Scott Wilson, *Steering through Chaos: Mapping a Clear Direction for Your Church in the Midst of Transition and Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

Sweet also relates the historic Christian practice of hanging an egg in a church that has been properly oriented. Churches that are oriented have the congregation or the altar facing east. The east-facing churches are oriented to the future, with Jesus returning from the east.¹²⁰

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Ostrich Egg.

The Ostrich Egg reminds us that God's gaze is never off of us, and though predators salivate and threaten to eat us, God and others love and protect us. As in oriented churches, facing east in anticipation of the coming of Jesus, may we keep our eye on the ball, and may we orient to where Jesus is and will be, more than where he was. Let the hope of the future, and the promises of Jesus, be our GPS, and may we refocus away from the materialism of the fuel gauge. May we focus on Jesus and his righteousness and believe him when he promises he'll care for what we "eat, drink, and wear."¹²¹

Prayer: Jesus, you are our salvation and our provision. You are truth, and we are slaves to you so that you can set us free.¹²² We pray that through the power of the Spirit we might keep our eyes on the ball, following in the work that the Father initiated and trusting that you always have your eyes on us. May we focus not on sin, failure, or fear, but on Jesus who is life. Amen.¹²³

¹²⁰ Leonard Sweet, *Rings of Fire: Walking in Faith through a Volcanic Future*, 44. See also Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*, 163.

¹²¹ Matthew 6: 25-34, NIV.

¹²² Romans 6, NIV.

¹²³ See Chapter 2, Centered Set/Bounded Set.

Pelican



*Figure 23: Pelican*¹²⁴

Historical/Scriptural - Pelican

Since the late Middle-Ages the pelican has been the symbol of parental sacrifice, an echo of the sacrifice of Christ for humankind. The Pelican adorns “paintings, icons, drawings, misericords, altar cloths, and stained glass.”¹²⁵

Since 1348, the Pelican has been the symbol for the Second Faculty of Medicine in the Charles University in Prague. The faculty references the Prayer of St. Gertrude in explaining their icon.¹²⁶ Gertrude was a German nun born in 1256. In her prayer, Gertrude references the “Gracious Pelican, Jesus Christ” and correlates the wounds and blood of Jesus to the Pelican.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ “Pelican Vector Illustration,” 123RF.com, accessed July 7, 2022, https://www.123rf.com/photo_149421332_pelican-vector-illustration.html.

¹²⁵ Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*, 29.

¹²⁶ St. Gertrude, 1256 - 1302.

¹²⁷ Tereza Kůstková, “The Legend of the Pelican | Second Faculty of Medicine, Charles University,” accessed August 12, 2022, <https://www.lf2.cuni.cz/en/articles/the-legend-of-the-pelican>.

The self-sacrificing legend of the pelican appears in other medically related symbols, including the blood donation segment of the Red Cross.¹²⁸



Figure 24: Pelican and Red Cross, Paul Vermeire, Belgium 1963¹²⁹



Figure 25: Pelican, a bird that revives its dead young with its own blood.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Charlie Burns, "Ceramic Red Cross Emblem with Pelican Motif," accessed July 12, 2022, <https://museumandarchives.redcross.org.uk/objects/744>.

¹²⁹ Burns, "Ceramic Red Cross Emblem with Pelican Motif."

¹³⁰ "Pelican," The Medieval Bestiary, last updated August 22, 2022, <https://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast244.htm>.



Figure 26: Pelican Feeding Her Young¹³¹

The Pelican metaphor appears in early poetry and art, such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "And, like the kind, life rendering pelican, Repast them with my blood."¹³²

Early depictions of the pelican may leave out the enormous bag under the bill and produce an icon that looks more like an eagle than a pelican. The pelican feeds its young from a large bag attached under the bill. The pelican macerates small fish in the bag, and then to excrete the food, the pelican presses the bag against its breast, transferring the food to the young.¹³³

¹³¹ Hugo of Fouilloy, "A Pelican Feeding Her Young," Getty Museum, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/105WMK>.

¹³² William Shakespeare, "Act 4, Scene 5," My Shakespeare, last modified December 26, 2015, <https://myshakespeare.com/hamlet/act-4-scene-5>. See also John Vinycomb and Howard Coppuck Levis, *Fictitious & Symbolic Creatures in Art: With Special Reference to Their Use in British Heraldry* (London, UK: Chapman and Hall, 1906), 182.

¹³³ Ebenezer Cobham Brewer, *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1927), 695.

St. Jerome relates a story about the pelican restoring its young destroyed by serpents, as an echo of the human story of creation and the destruction of man by the serpent.¹³⁴

The pelican feeding her young with her blood is called “the pelican in her piety.”¹³⁵

Leonard I. Sweet - Pelican

Sweet references the universal reminder that the Pelican represents the love of Jesus, as well as reconciliation with God. The Pelican signifies that the church is a nurturing life-giver to the congregation and to the world.¹³⁶

Leonard Sweet’s preaching book *Giving Blood* uses the Pelican metaphor as its primary metaphor. “In the ultimate act of transformation, pelican piety takes on a new identity, from female pelican to parent, from simple symbol to complex metaphor and image of Christ, and from hungry pelican to sacred purveyor of the love feast of creative redemption.”¹³⁷

The Pelican and the self-sacrifice ascribed to it are powerful images that echo the self-sacrifice of Jesus. The historical myth is clearly not an accurate depiction of Pelican behavior. The manipulation of the large bag under its bill to displace stored food while feeding its young is the source of the self-induced hemorrhaging legend. The historical

¹³⁴ Vinycomb and Levis.

¹³⁵ Vinycomb and Levis, 182-86.

¹³⁶ Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*, 30-31.

¹³⁷ Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*, 31.

meaning supplied to the Pelican is powerful enough to stand the test of modern science and rationality. Sweet employed the *narraphor* (Sweet's term for a word image that combines both narrative and metaphor) in *Giving Blood* and includes an exegesis of the myth. Sweet proves that stories and narraphors don't have to be literal to be true.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Pelican

To Recipient: The Pelican is a reminder that Jesus sustains and saves us. When we drink the blood of the Eucharist, may we know the power of the blood of Jesus that we partake of daily. The Pelican's sacrificial love is prodigally available. It is this Jesus and this love that is our Good News. May we learn to be generous as we are made in the image of Jesus whose generosity the Pelican signs. May we remember that Jesus' love and generosity extended even to serving the Eucharist to Judas his betrayer.¹³⁸

Prayer: Jesus, strengthen our trust in your faithfulness. May we remember the sign of the Pelican when we receive the Eucharist, and may we remember that the blood given for us is the blood given for everyone. Amen.

¹³⁸ Luke 22:17-23, NIV.

Coffee Cup With Orca



Figure 27: Coffee Cup With Orca¹³⁹

Leonard I. Sweet - Orca Coffee Cup

Dr. Leonard Sweet in his book *The Gospel According to Starbucks* evaluates the incredible success of the Starbucks Company. He notes, “Life is hard enough with coffee. What would life be without coffee? Or without friends to enjoy coffee with?”¹⁴⁰

Sweet has a coffee cup that has been a steady companion for decades. The cup has been lost numerous times but always finds its way back into his possession. When designing the coin, I wanted a Sign that was very personal. I contacted Sweet’s son Egil, who took a photo of the cup for me.

¹³⁹ “Killer Whale Silhouettes,” Vector Art & Graphics, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.freevector.com/killer-whale-silhouettes>. See also “Coffee Cup Collection,” FreePik, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/222576406568576439/>. Smoke adapted from the United Methodist Logo.

¹⁴⁰ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook, 2007), loc. 36.



Figure 28: Dr Leonard Sweet's Orca Coffee Cup, Compared With the Icon¹⁴¹

I created an icon of the iconic cup. The breaching Orca whale was vector art found on the freevector.com website.¹⁴² The cup is another open-source vector.¹⁴³ I wanted to personalize the coffee cup further, and in semiotic celebration of Dr. Sweet's long connection to Methodism, I used a rendering of the Holy Spirit flame from the Methodist logo to create the steam.

¹⁴¹ Photo credit Egil Sweet, April 24, 2019.

¹⁴² "Killer Whale Silhouettes," Vector Art & Graphics, accessed April 24, 2019, <https://www.freevector.com/killer-whale-silhouettes>.

¹⁴³ "Coffee Cup Collection," Freepik, accessed April 24, 2019, https://www.freepik.com/premium-vector/coffee-cup-set-six-with-steam_1544828.htm.



Figure 29: Methodist Logo

The coffee cup therefore is a very personal icon for Sweet. It is a representation of a physical and personal possession, one that has held coffee while Sweet held court in his home with cohorts of semioticians. Coffee is a drink closely associated with community, and relationships form and strengthen over coffee. The Spirit of Jesus in the incarnation of Leonard Sweet is the epicenter of a vast community that finds Jesus as they gravitate to Sweet. “There are few things I enjoy more in life than what I call Soulcafés: sharing good stories over good coffee.”¹⁴⁴

Sweet reminds his doctoral cohorts that we find the universal in the particular. His particular photographed cup has much larger truths embedded within it. In Scott McCloud’s graphic novel that explains the semiotics of graphic novels, McCloud explains that as we move further from the photo-realistic, the artist forces the audience to fill in the details themselves.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion*, 2.

¹⁴⁵ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Northampton, MA: Tundra, 1993),

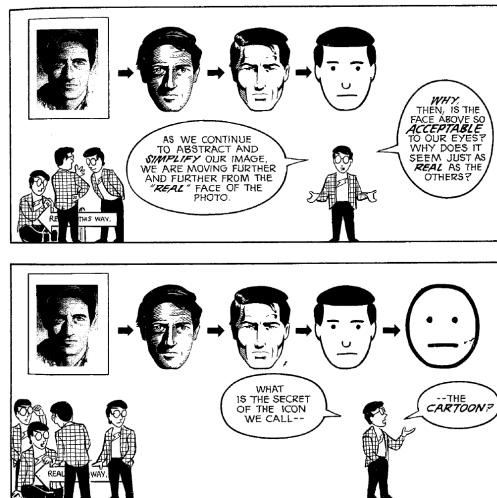


Figure 30: Scott McCloud: *Cartoons and the Transition from Photo-realistic to Cartoon*¹⁴⁶

Using a simplified icon of Sweet's cup, I accentuated the steam and related the steam to the church that invested in Sweet and that Sweet invested in over his adult life.

The breaching Orca Whale provides a symbolic connection between Sweet and his home on Orcas Island.¹⁴⁷ Orca Whales sleep with just one half of their brain at a time, as they need to remain semi-awake at all times so they can surface to breathe. I am convinced that Sweet shares this capacity with the whales he loves, as I have gotten communication from him at all hours, and there is no better explanation for his prolific

¹⁴⁶ McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, 29.

¹⁴⁷ David Suzuki, "Get to Know the Salish Sea Orcas," David Suzuki Foundation, <https://davidsuzuki.org/what-you-can-do/get-to-know-the-salish-sea-orcas/>.

capacity to produce writing, mentor multiple universities of preachers and semioticians, and maintain his own humanity and family.^{148,149}

The Salish Orcas are social, sharing their catches with each other, which demonstrates social cohesion. Sweet has said that if asked to condense the Bible down to one sentence, it would be that “Jesus ate good food with bad people.”^{150,151}

The Orca on Sweet’s cup is breaching, or shooting out of the water. According to Captain Sarah M. of San Juan Safaris, orcas breach to communicate with each other and to shake parasites off their skin. They also breach for fun. I imagine that the whale on Sweet’s cup may breach for pure joy.¹⁵² A mourning mother Orca in the Salish Sea reminded millions of people that we share community and love for our children.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ “Orca (Killer Whale),” WDC, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://us.whales.org/whales-dolphins/species-guide/orca-killer-whale/>.

¹⁴⁹ Suzuki. The Salish Orcas are “southern resident killer whales.” They eat Chinook salmon and maintain residence in the Salish year-round. Salish Orcas are differentiated from transient Orcas who eat marine mammals and off-shore Orcas who eat fish, sharks, and more.

¹⁵⁰ Leonard I. Sweet, *The Bad Habits of Jesus: Showing Us the Way to Live Right in a World Gone Wrong* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), loc. 1044.

¹⁵¹ Classroom conversations with Sweet.

¹⁵² “Orca Behavior 101: Breaching,” San Juan Safaris, January 27, 2016, <https://www.sanjuansafaris.com/whale-report/orca-behavior-101-breaching>.

¹⁵³ “Orca That Carried Dead Calf for 2 Weeks Gives Birth Again,” *CBC/Radio-Canada*, youtube video, 3:24, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2H9FrgagdXg>. In 2018 the mother orca J-35 in an epic act of mourning followed around the world, carried a dead calf for 17 days and swam 1600 kilometers before finally letting go. In September 2020, J-35 gave birth to a new baby, J-57. Calves have a 50% survival rate for the first year, and the entire population of southern resident pod members number 73.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Orca Coffee Cup

To Recipient: Sweet's Orca coffee cup is a sign of faithfulness. The cup was lost and found countless times. The Orca is a sign of cooperation and reminds us of our capacity for relationship and shared mission. The repurposed Methodist steam reminds us that there is steam from the faith given to us from those who have gone before us. No one gets it all right, but the gift of their faith still echoes within us.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for the faith that was passed on to us. Thank you for the faithfulness that finds us lost and returns us to be filled with connection and coffee. And thank you for coffee. Amen.

Jesus Monogram



Figure 31: Jesus Monogram^{154,155}

¹⁵⁴ “RootOfAllLight,” Wikimedia, accessed July 12, 2022, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:IX_Monogram.svg.

¹⁵⁵ Frederick Roth Webber, *Church Symbolism: An Explanation of the More Important Symbols of the Old and New Testament, the Primitive, the Mediaeval and the Modern Church*, 2nd ed. (Cleveland, OH: J. H. Jansen, 1938), 93.

Historical/Scriptural - Jesus Monogram

“This form of the sacred monogram is more complete and expressive than those forms which comprise the X and P; for while they only express the name of CHRIST by the use of the two first letters of that name, the present form sets forth JESUS CHRIST by combining the initial letters of that holy name in Greek (IHΣΟΥΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ).”¹⁵⁶

Historically the Jesus Monogram is Jesus’ initials in Greek. Surviving examples of the monogram are found around Christian burial sites. Lifting the X from the monogram to signify Christ adds a semiotic ring to the Xmas furor at Christmas time. Far from objectifying Jesus, the X is initialing his presence.

Leonard I. Sweet - Jesus Monogram

Sweet’s focus on Jesus is clear in reading his work. In conversation with Sweet, there is no huge political overtone, and the most likely context to experience a political reference occurs in *Jesus Manifesto*, in which he notes an instance in which Constantine usurped the monogram for his coin: “From the very beginning, Christian art was hijacked to serve the powerful and the successful.”¹⁵⁷

“It is a Christian’s fatal conceit to think he can bring in the kingdom. A careful reading of the Scriptures reveals that the kingdom is not something that we bring, or build, or cause, or create.”¹⁵⁸ Sweet reminds us that the Kingdom of God is Jesus.

¹⁵⁶ Audsley, 79.

¹⁵⁷ Sweet and Viola, *Jesus Manifesto: Restoring the Supremacy and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ*, loc. 1880.

¹⁵⁸ Sweet and Viola, *Jesus Manifesto: Restoring the Supremacy and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ*, loc. 1886.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Jesus Monogram

The power of the Bride of Christ is a constituency too tempting to resist for political operatives. The symbols of Jesus can be usurped, and the heart of Jesus that cares for the outcast and serves the poor can be co-opted to serve the whims of the rich and powerful. The Jesus monogram is a caution sign to beware the temptation for power. Temptations of Christ in the desert included an offer for the power of the empire. And why not both/and? A Christian grasping for political power is a refutation of the answer Jesus gave in rejecting the offering of power: “Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.”¹⁵⁹

Prayer: Jesus, may we center our being on the indwelling power of your Spirit, and may we resist the temptation to trade your power in humans for power over humans. May we commit to the transfiguration that you offer, and may we be aware of the limits of conformity, whether in our own hearts or in the hearts of others. Amen.

¹⁵⁹ Luke 4:8, NIV.

Peacock



*Figure 32: Peacock*¹⁶⁰

Historical/Scriptural - Peacock

Aristotle, three hundred years before the birth of Christ, believed that the flesh of the peacock was incorruptible, that the peacock's flesh did not rot after the death of the bird. St. Augustine verified the belief of the peacock's incorruptibility and correlated this peacock attribute with the belief that God will also resurrect us incorruptible as in "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ "Free Vector Peacock Logo Template," Designlove, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://thedesiglove.com/free-vector-peacock-logo-template/>.

¹⁶¹ 1 Cor. 15:52, NIV. See also Steffler, *Symbols of the Christian Faith*, 60.



Figure 33: Peacock¹⁶²



Figure 34: The Peacock, Aberdeen Bestiary¹⁶³

The Aberdeen Bestiary from the thirteenth century provides beautiful art, as well as translated reflection on the meaning that the peacock held for Christians. The Bestiary states that the peacock “gets its name, pavo, from the sound of its cry.”¹⁶⁴ Isidore

¹⁶² “Peacock,” The Medieval Bestiary, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast257.htm>.

¹⁶³ “Folio 59v of the Peacock,” MS 24, The Aberdeen Bestiary, Aberdeen University Library, <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f59v>.

¹⁶⁴ “Folio 59v of the Peacock.”

explains: “The peacock gets its name from the sound of its cry. For when it starts, unexpectedly, to give its cry, it produces sudden fear in its hearers. The peacock is called pavo, therefore, from pavor, fear, since its cry produces fear in those who hear it.”¹⁶⁵

Marcus Valerius Martialis wrote in *Martial, Epigrams*, “You are lost in admiration whenever he spreads his feathers that glow as it were with jewels, and can you consign him, cruel man, to the unfeeling cook?”¹⁶⁶ Peacocks, as well as other birds, eat both venomous and non-venomous snakes.^{167,168} Because peacocks can eat venomous snakes, assimilate their venom, and survive, this was a sign of transmutation, and observers believed that the venom gave the bird’s flesh immunity to decay.¹⁶⁹

The peacock is a symbol of effete, “no longer capable of effective action.” This meaning is a non-sequitor to other meanings. Historically it represents a handsome but ineffectual leader, someone whose focus is on their looks over substance.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ “Folio 59v of the Peacock.”

¹⁶⁶ Valerius Martialis, “*Martial, Epigrams. Book 13*,” Bohn's Classical Library, https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/martial_epigrams_book13.htm.

¹⁶⁷ April Lee, “Do Peacocks Eat Snakes?,” Farmhouse Guide, last modified June 8, 2021, <https://farmhouseguide.com/do-peacocks-eat-snakes/>.

¹⁶⁸ “Pavo,” *Constellations of Words*, accessed July 16, 2022, <https://www.constellationsofwords.com/pavo/>.

¹⁶⁹ “Pavo.”

¹⁷⁰ “Effete,” *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary*, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59728?redirectedFrom=effete>.

The Bestiary includes a written description of the peacock. A translated version compares the peacock to a preacher, which is a warning against the pride of leadership.

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Leonard I. Sweet – Peacock

Sweet's caution about pride in *The Well-played Life*, that we might "strut our own colors with glitz and glitter down the runway of life," is set in opposition to being "hidden with Christ in God." "'Come to Christ' has devolved to 'Come to church.'" ¹⁷²

In a humorous nod to over-flashiness, "Unfortunately, the birds with the biggest tails also have the biggest problem escaping predators who appreciate large birds pinned in place by their plumage. So the bird with the most sex appeal is also the worst choice as a fit mate. Not unlike high school ... or the rest of life."¹⁷³

Noting the tension between the historical perception of the peacock's incorruptible flesh and Sweet's rendering in the *Well-played Life*, a familiar theme in Sweet's work is the importance of beauty and the aesthetic, countered with a humorous warning about elevating one's self. The best reading of this is evidenced in Sweet's life, in which he always points to Jesus. Sweet often hosts advances (because retreats are unthinkable) in which other people are the key speakers. Sweet shares the stage, but the stage is always for Jesus.

¹⁷¹ "Folio 59v of the Peacock."

¹⁷² Leonard I. Sweet, *The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to Be Such Hard Work* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 59-60.

¹⁷³ Sweet, *The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to Be Such Hard Work*, 60.

Transfiguration Sign – Peacock

The peacock sign, of snake killer but also vain showoff, reminds us that our power has a purpose. Humans are created in the image of God, who empowers us with the council and energy of the Spirit. The beauty and power of our lives are not only for self-fulfillment and self-actualization. God invites us into his story, his-story, in which Jesus says he does nothing that the father is not already doing. We are followers, and with our lives and resources we return to Jesus. Maturing second-half-of-life people move from first-half resource acquisition to valuing significance. Significance is found in relational wealth, not in material wealth, because relational wealth first sustains our relationship with Jesus. In Jesus, our SPIRE selves have an inherent eternal aspect.¹⁷⁴

Ichthus



*Figure 35: Ichthus*¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Eternal life is a relational reality, and as fellow Christians I plan to be your eternal neighbor; might as well learn to get along sooner than later. May the beauty of our reflection of the peacock serve holistic SPIRE relationship and not only serve personal ego and may our snake-killing acumen be metaphorical and not literal, lest the rodent population explode.

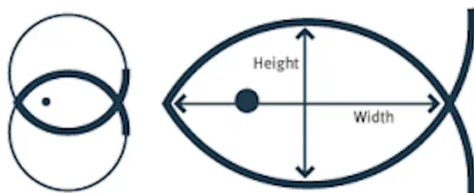
¹⁷⁵ Fibonacci, "Ichthus," Wikimedia, accessed 7/20/2022, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ichthus.svg>.

Historical/Scriptural – Ichthus

The ancient church had the fish as its icon. The anagram of the ichthys in the early Greek-speaking community stood for Iesous, Christos, Theou Yios, Soter (Jesus Christ, of God Son, Savior). When one Christian would meet another person that he or she suspected was a Christian, that person would draw half the fish symbol in the dirt. If the person completed the other half, it revealed his or her identity as a brother or sister in the faith. For our ancestors, the fish was both a metaphor and an icon of the faith, an embodied image.¹⁷⁶

The Ichthus fish as a Christian symbol predates the cross as a symbol, and I'm not sure that the cross was an improvement. In the future, I'd love to see us move back to the fish as the predominate sign of Christianity. Rather than focusing on death, I would rather focus on life. I appreciate the death of Jesus, but it's in the resurrection that we find life.

Leonard I. Sweet - Ichthus



$$\frac{w}{h} = \sqrt{3} \cong \frac{265}{153}$$

Figure 36: Fish and 153¹⁷⁷

Ichthus as Dr. Sweet says, is a mandorla with locomotion.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*, 162.

¹⁷⁷ Sweet, "How to Recognize Jesus."

¹⁷⁸ Classes with Sweet.

Early mathematicians discovered the ancient Pi approximation of 256/153 in the overlap of two circles with the same diameter with the circumference bisecting the other's center point. The origin and meaning of the Mandorla is a topic for the next section. The overlapping circles form the shape of a fish. Early Christian art portrayed Jesus in the Mandorla. Christian art signified holy people with a halo and holy scenes with a mandorla. The intersection of the two separate intersecting spheres is the meeting spot that Jesus provides between dissimilar populations: Jews and Romans, Republicans and Democrats, rich and poor. If God is one circle, and humans the other, Jesus is the overlap; fully God and fully human.¹⁷⁹

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Ichthus

The Ichthus is a mandorla with locomotion.¹⁸⁰ The mandorla in a Jesus infused meeting place of opposites.

There is a surprise mandorla that Sweet writes about in *Strong in the Broken Places*, which Greg Paul calls the "surprise of brokenness."¹⁸¹ We meet Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and Golgotha before we can meet him in his resurrection and ascension. The Ichthus is a spot of meeting, which is best prepared as a spot of humility. But Jesus doesn't invite us to wallow in our disability or bemoan our brokenness. Sure, there is a legitimate grieving time. Jesus invites us into healing and redemption from all

¹⁷⁹ Sweet, "How to Recognize Jesus."

¹⁸⁰ Saying of Leonard I. Sweet.

¹⁸¹ Greg Paul, *God in the Alley: Being and Seeing Jesus in a Broken World* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2004), 110.

of this, even what was intended for evil. Jesus wastes nothing. Scripture says that God keeps our tears in a bottle. The sign of the tear-filled bottle is a creator whose love cares for the pain and brokenness that we survive. The sphere of our pain, the overlapping the sphere of Jesus who loves beyond measure, forms a mandorla of our healed and healing SPIRE humanity. With locomotive fins, Jesus takes the entire show on the move. When we testify about the healing of the worst things that have happened to us and that we've visited upon others, Jesus redeems our humanity and our sin. Jesus re-fashions the sin we've survived into a tool of good, with which we work our way to others mired in the same traps.

Prayer: Jesus, we're so grateful for your commitment to rescue us, to empower our justification and healing, and to infuse us with the tsunami of your love that sweeps our lives and makes room for the new, full life you promise. We pray for the courage to open our brokenness at your lead, to join in making meeting spots, and for the strength to be present as you heal those we meet and make them new. Give us the vision to know that the mandorla has fins, and that the meeting spot is one of locomotion. Let us focus away from the sin and death that was killing us, and refocus on you, Jesus. Help us refocus our life in you. Lead us into the tension of surrender, avoiding control and resignation, and help us to trust you to take the next step even if we cannot see the way. Amen.

Dove



*Figure 37: Dove*¹⁸²

Historical/Scriptural - Dove



*Figure 38: A Turtle Dove – Getty Collection*¹⁸³

¹⁸² “International Day of Peace - Dove,” FreePik, accessed July 22, 2022, https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/international-day-peace-with-dove_9363361.htm.

¹⁸³ Hugo of Fouillooy, “A Turtle Dove,” accessed July 20, 2022, Getty Museum, <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/105WNX>.



Figure 39: *The Dove: Aberdeen Bestiary*¹⁸⁴

“The Dove, when invested with the divine nimbus, is the symbol of the Holy Ghost. Without the nimbus, it is the emblem of love, innocence, meekness, and purity. When depicted with an olive-branch in its beak, it is the emblem of peace. In art, the dove represents the human soul, and was depicted issuing from the lips of dying saints.”¹⁸⁵

Chukar of the Santa Monica Bay Audubon Society believes that the dove specified in the Noah story was a rock pigeon. “Ornithologists currently recognize 330 species of pigeons and doves grouped into 45 genera, so deciding which dove it was could be daunting.”¹⁸⁶ Chukar surmises the rock pigeon for these four reasons. First, the species would have been familiar to the time and area, second the bird flies far and fast, third the instinct for nest-building is strong and therefore the leaved twig, and fourth it

¹⁸⁴ “Folio 29v the Dove,” MS 24, The Aberdeen Bestiary, Aberdeen University Library, <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/ms24/f29v>.

¹⁸⁵ Audsley, 143.

¹⁸⁶ Chukar, “What About That Dove?,” Sunday Morning Bible Bird Study, last modified August 14, 2016, <https://smbasblog.com/2016/08/14/sunday-morning-bible-bird-study/>.

has a remarkable ability to find the home roost in unfamiliar and even featureless terrain.¹⁸⁷

Leonard I. Sweet – Dove

In his book *New Life in the Spirit* Dr. Sweet underscores the connection between the Holy Spirit as a dove and the dove's association with vulnerability and suffering: "The cry of a dove is more of a screech, and rather than attacking with wings and talons out, the dove uses speed and agility to avoid conflict. The dove is a bird of peace. The tale of the suffering power of the dove is the old story of overcoming evil with good, hatred with love, suffering with suffering."¹⁸⁸ "Wind" is the creative power of the Spirit. "Oil" is the comforting power of the Spirit. "Fire" is the purifying power of the Spirit. "Dove" is the suffering power of the Spirit. And "water" is the life-giving power of the Spirit."¹⁸⁹

Sweet speaks of the dove as a pigeon, and reminds us that the pigeon is a humble, common bird. Like the Jesus' donkey rather than the royal stallion of contemporary kings, the dove is a humble bird and is a symbol that contradicts the war eagles of earthly kingdoms. Sweet accentuates the humility of Jesus, and that Jesus in humility will make peace not war.

¹⁸⁷ Chukar, "What About That Dove?" See also Song of Songs 2:12, KJV and Richard Goode, "Turtle Dove – Day 4 of 30 Days [Biblically] Wild," Neumann Research Center for the Bible and Its Reception, last modified April 6, 2019, <https://bibleresearchtoday.com/2019/06/04/turtle-dove-day-4-of-30-days-biblically-wild/>.

¹⁸⁸ Leonard I. Sweet, *New Life in the Spirit, Library of Living Faith* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1982), 24-25.

¹⁸⁹ Sweet, *New Life in the Spirit*, 18.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Dove

The Holy Spirit descending as a dove at the baptism of Jesus and the booming affirmation “This is my son, in whom I’m pleased” reminds us that the Spirit empowers us as well, and that we need affirmation.¹⁹⁰ The giving and receiving of the Challenge Coin confers deep affirmation.

The sign of the dove reminds us that we follow Jesus who calls us into peace and peace-making.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for your Spirit and for indwelling and powering our lives. Thank you for trusting humans to participate in your story, whether we fully engage with your strength and resources, or whether our involvement is merely as witness. Thank you for the shared story and for the shared mission. Thank you for your affirmation, for acknowledging your love for us in a booming voice for all to hear. Amen.

Triclinium

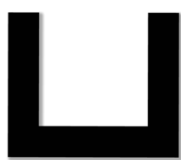


Figure 40: Triclinium¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Matthew 3:17, NIV.

¹⁹¹ Drawn by Vernon Hyndman, 2019.

Historical/Scriptural - Triclinium



Figure 41: Pompeii Triclinium¹⁹²

Tricliniums in the late Roman Republic were U-shaped and made of stone and masonry or of furniture that had moveable couches. The table was made of precious metal. The summer triclinium of the Casa del Moralista in Figure 42 and 43 is an example of a masonry triclinium. The couches were approximately 4.5 meters long.¹⁹³ Diners reclined at the table. The U shape made conversation possible across the table.

¹⁹² Jackie Dunn and Bob Dunn, “Pompeii. Casa Di Bacco or the House of the Triclinium,” *Pompeii in Pictures*, accessed August 1, 2022, <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R5/5%2002%2004%20p4.htm>.

¹⁹³ Katherine Dunbabin, “Triclinium and Stibadium,” in *Dining in a Classical Context*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 123.



*Figure 42: Pompeii Triclinium*¹⁹⁴



*Figure 43: Pompeii Triclinium Close-up*¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Jackie Dunn and Bob Dunn, “III.4.3 Pompeii, Room 3, Triclinium. Looking West,” The Wilhelmina and Stanley A. Jashemski Archive, accessed August 15, 2022, <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R3/3%2004%2003%20p2.htm>.

¹⁹⁵ Jackie Dunn, and Bob Dunn, “III.4.3 Pompeii, Room 3, Triclinium and Table,” The Wilhelmina and Stanley A. Jashemski Archive, accessed August 15, 2022, <https://www.pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R3/3%2004%2003%20p2.htm>.

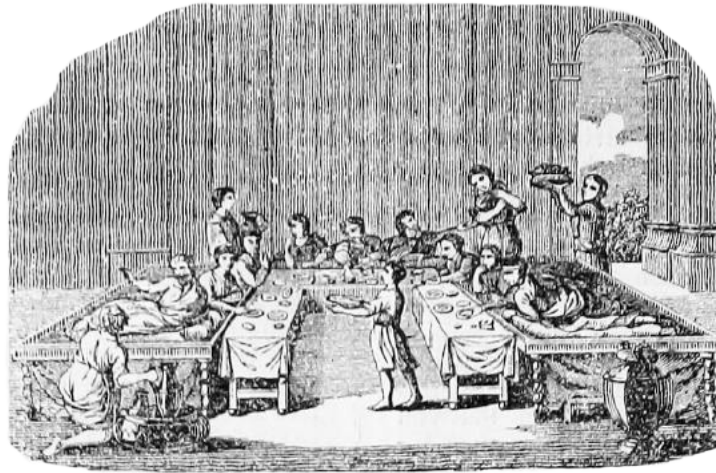


Figure 44: Triclinium - American Penny Magazine - 1846¹⁹⁶

We associate the famous Leonardo da Vinci painting in Milan, *The Last Supper*, as the typical representation of the scene of Jesus' last supper. While da Vinci's painting works artistically with Jesus at center and the apostles spread out evenly to the right and left, the last supper was served around a triclinium.

Leonard I. Sweet – Triclinium

Sweet's description in *Tablet to Table* of the scene at the triclinium in the upper room frames out not only the physical room but also the relational connection that the disciples and Jesus experienced. Jesus' betrayer was amongst the faithful. Sweet frames the last supper as well as the Eucharist that we're invited into as what "obliterates dissension, walls, bloodlines, and divisions. For Jesus the home is not what defines the

¹⁹⁶ "An Ancient Table, or Triclinium," *Dwight's American Magazine, & Family Newspaper* 2, no. 18 (June 1846).

table; the table is what defines the home.”¹⁹⁷ Leonard Sweet demonstrates in teaching and example that the table is relational and that we meet each other and Jesus eating around a table.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign -Triclinium

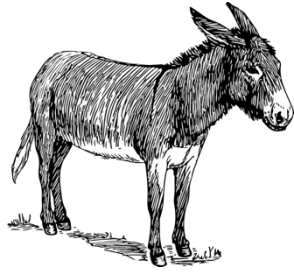
The sign of the triclinium reminds us that Jesus as the host of the last supper was bottom-up, not top-down, leadership. Jesus washed the feet of his friends, including the one who betrayed him.

Jesus at the Last Supper is showing bottom-up organic leadership, not top-down pressure-infused leadership, and the triclinium is a sign to remind us of how we organize our community. Community gathers to eat and interact.

Prayer: Jesus, mentor us in the bottom-up fertility of your leadership, and as we sink deep roots into you. Make us fertile and safe for others to become rooted in our lives, as we are all rooted in you. Help us to face each other and lovingly read each other, as we follow you. Amen.

¹⁹⁷ Leonard I. Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 15-16.

Donkey



*Figure 45: Donkey*¹⁹⁸

Historical/Scriptural - Donkey



*Figure 46: Flight Into Egypt*¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Scott Foresman, "Donkey," WikiMedia, accessed August 12, 2022, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Donkey_\(PSF\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Donkey_(PSF).png).

¹⁹⁹ Georges Trubert, "The Flight into Egypt," The J. Paul Getty Museum, accessed August 22, 2022, <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/103RX6>.



*Figure 47: Donkey - Getty Collection*²⁰⁰

Zechariah 9:9 predicts the Messiah riding on a donkey with the donkey's foal. In Matthew 21:2 Jesus sends two disciples to get the prepared donkey and her foal. John 12:15 recorded that Jesus rode the foal and not the mother.

Scripture reminds us that Mary rode to Bethlehem to Jesus' birth on a donkey, and then away from the infanticide of Herod into Egypt on a donkey. Later, Jesus rode a donkey triumphantly into Jerusalem as the people laid palms down for him. The donkey is an intelligent animal with a mind and a will of its own. The war horse of contemporary kings in the first century were powerful and majestic beings that were trained to be strictly obedient to their rider. Jesus empowers his followers with an indwelling Spirit to think and act together, to coordinate with him and others, as a donkey, not as the unthinking but powerful war stallion. Jesus convinces and draws people in the way of humility, not in the force of a warrior.

²⁰⁰ Hugo of Fouilloy, "A Wild Donkey," Getty Museum, accessed July 20, 2022, <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/105WNP>.

Leonard I. Sweet - Donkey

“Jesus' relationship with animals deserves its own monograph. Jesus was born in a home for animals, not people.”²⁰¹ The Messiah's Donkey refers to those who do the humble work of God.²⁰² The heart of Jesus for animals is apparent as he asks for the donkey and the foal.

Sweet models his life after Jesus, which is similar to modeling life after a donkey owner. Jesus, donkey owners, and Leonard Sweet offer a better way, work forward by first building trust and relationship, and all three recognize the futility of trying to yell and argue others into anything. The sign of the donkey is more often humorous than awe-inspiring. It's an inside joke that the King of Creation rides in to acclaim and welcome on the back of a donkey. Sweet suggests that we too engage the simple jobs and the dirty jobs “in the eyes of the culture, in the opposition of the culture, to the offense of the culture,” just as Jesus modeled.

Jesus washed his disciple's feet. It was the dirtiest job in a culture of his day. That's why the other disciples looked around when nobody was there to wash their feet. They said ‘I ain't doing it’ Peter says, ‘I ain't watching John's feet.’ John says, ‘I ain't washing Bartholomew's feet.’ And so, Jesus said ‘okay I'll do it.’ And here first time in recorded history, a rabbi kneels down and gets his hands. You can't watch anyone's feet without getting your hands dirty and wet, and gets his hands dirty. Showing us what it means when God says, ‘I need you.’ We say yes.²⁰³

²⁰¹ Sweet, *Out of the Question - into the Mystery: Getting Lost in the Godlife Relationship*, 162.

²⁰² Leonard I. Sweet, "The Messiah's Donkey," *Lectionary LenTalk*, in Eastsound, WA, May 2, 2021, podcast, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3zh1C3810U>.

²⁰³ Sweet, "The Messiah's Donkey."

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Donkey

To be the Messiah's Donkey is a gift. In a culture that is power-obsessed, Jesus shows a counter-cultural humility and invites us also to take part. One of the greatest advantages to living life as the Messiah's Donkey is the lack of queues and waiting. Signing up for humble service is like showing up at a theme park at 9am on the first day of school. There are no lines.

Prayer: Open our hearts to humility and grant us the wisdom and temperament of a donkey. Let us carry pregnant mothers as the donkey carried Mary. Let us shoulder the work of God's mission and let us bring our children to work with us as the borrowed donkey that carried you to Jerusalem did. Let those seeking war horses pass us by. Amen.

CHAPTER 5: LINGUISTIC SEMIOTICS

Most of the visual metaphors of Chapter 4 have historical roots that introduced the signs. Chapter 5 is comprised of words that Sweet either coined or borrowed, and few of them have long histories. Chapter 4 exegetes the words based on meanings Sweet has provided, followed by meanings to be used in Spiritual Direction to focus recipients on Jesus and transfiguration.

Sobremesa

Leonard I. Sweet - Sobremesa

The term Sobremesa is Portuguese for dessert. In Spanish sobremesa is literally *sobre* or *after*, and *mesa*, the *table*. In his interview with Chris McAlilly on a program called *The Weight*, Dr. Sweet had this to say about Sobremesa:²⁰⁴ “It’s fairly common in some cultures, more Asian cultures than European cultures, where the one thing you could do to dishonor your host was to, when you’re done eating, get up from the table, because the real meal is the conversation that takes place: “sobre,” after or over, “mesa,” the table.”²⁰⁵

Dr. Sweet framed out the Sobremesa time: “table time was story time. It was relationship time. And that’s where I would ask them questions, you know, “What are you listening to? What is the song that you kids are talking about? And your friends are all

²⁰⁴ Leonard I. Sweet, interview by Chris McAlilly, *The Weight*, August 2, 2022, <https://www.theweightpodcast.com/episodes/0018-the-weight-leonard-sweet-rings-of-fire>.

²⁰⁵ Sweet, interview.

wanting to talk about?" And so they were educating me, and at the same time, we were passing on the stories and the traditions to them."

"We've got to bring the church back to the table. We've got to bring our families back to the table. And we've got to bring this this world back to the table," says Sweet.²⁰⁶

Sweet's call to sobremesa, as he writes in his book *From Tablet to Table*, to put down the tablets and come to the table, is being recognized by mental health professionals, as well as marriage therapists. Sharing a meal and having meaningful discussion strengthens the fabric of our relational connections. An important element of sobremesa is exercising curiosity and opening up conversation for everyone. Sobremesa is not the time for the most vociferous to verbally blog. Involving everyone is important. For people who struggle to know what to say, I have sets of cards that are specifically designed to stimulate conversation. *Table Topics* cards are available online and can be used to spur conversation for various relationship types.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Sobremesa

The Spanish tradition of sobremesa developed around the heavy Spanish meal time, at around 3pm. The meal consisted of a first course, second course, and dessert, and often involved digestive liquor while hanging out in a café.²⁰⁷

Sobremesa is a sign reminding us that eating is more than a necessity of life. It is an opportunity to maintain connections. It reminds us that in the same way we have to

²⁰⁶ Sweet, interview.

²⁰⁷ "The Culture of the Sobremesa," Enforex, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://www.enforex.com/culture/spanish-sobremesa.html>.

eat, we have to remain consciously connected to Jesus and to others. Sobremesa might be the daily connection with our family and loved ones, but it can also be an opportunity for a conversation that invites new friendship. In a recent act of sobremesa, I opened a conversation with a father and son next to me in a Pennsylvania Turnpike Plaza restaurant, and the conversation produced a wonderful new connection.

Simplexity

Leonard I. Sweet - Simplexity

My theology is getting more complex, and my faith is getting more simple. I put them together into one word: simplexity. To follow Jesus is simplex discipleship. Theology conveys thoughts about Christ. Faith conveys Christ. That's simplex discipleship.²⁰⁸

The Lord's prayer overlaps the sphere of the complexity of human existence with the elegance of trust and faith in God. The mandorla overlap is a beautiful prayer that Jesus invites humans to pray. The Trinity braids the three persons of the trinity into an indescribable mystery of three-in-one, a simplexity that has baffled the brightest of theologians.²⁰⁹

To experience the presence of God is to live in simplexity, an unfathomable mystery of absolute sobriety and almost giddy intoxication. To know God is not to banish mystery, but deepen it.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ Sweet, *The Bad Habits of Jesus: Showing Us the Way to Live Right in a World Gone Wrong*, loc. 1236.

²⁰⁹ Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking Is Poised to Ignite Revival*, 37 and 44.

²¹⁰ Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking Is Poised to Ignite Revival*, 45.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign -Simplicity

The surrender required for Jesus-followers to trust Jesus with the next step even if the outcome is unclear, while maintaining the irresolvable tension between control and resignation, demonstrates simplicity. Our simple trust in God requires God to deal with the complexity of relationships, material needs, and dealing with the situation that we face in the present. Figure 1 provides a framework to understand the tension we are called to live in, and Figure 2 reminds us that we are involved in the entirety of our lives, while Jesus is also involved in the entirety of our lives: 100%/100%.

Prayer: Jesus, give us the trust we need to trust you and the strength to stand in the tension between control and resignation. Let us live humbly in simple trust in the present as you deal with the entirety of eternity and the scope of the cosmos.

Mandorla

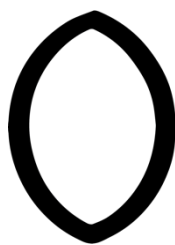


Figure 48: Mandorla²¹¹

Leonard I. Sweet - Mandorla

Early art depicting Jesus placed him in the mandorla shape shown in Figure 50. If you place two identical circles so that the circumference of each bisects the center of the

²¹¹ Steffler, 77.

other, the overlapping area forms a mandorla. Jesus brought dissimilar, often oppositional spheres together: Jews and Romans, rich and poor, religious and sinner. The mandorla, or overlap of disparate spheres, is the space Jesus provides for opposites to connect.

Ancient mathematicians Pythagoras, Euclid, and Archimedes used the intersecting circles geometrically and eventually used the shape to approximate Pi. The shape appears as a vesica piscis, or the dual air bladders ("swim bladder") found in most fish. The cultures around today's Mediterranean, including Israel and Italy, were very familiar with fish and their vesica piscis. The ratio of the width of the vesica piscis to the length is expressed in a well-known ancient fraction $256/153$. The ratio approximates Pi. Here is some mystery regarding the specific numbers used in the ratio, and it's possible that early mathematicians chose the denominator 153 because it is the sum of the first five factorials. 153 is also the sum of the first 17 integers. Because of the use of the fraction $256/153$, ancient cultures recognized the number 153 as a significant number. When 153 was mentioned, it bore cultural significance in the same way Pi does for modern culture.

The mandorla and the ichthus fish have a common root. The shape of the ichthus is the shape of the mandorla; imagine a vesica piscis with fins. The Way of Jesus is the vesica piscis with locomotion, with fins. If you consider the mandorla's closed shape, the fins of the ichthus open the closed area up.²¹² The ichthus fish "took the symbol of Judaism, the mandorla, and then opened it up. It opened it up to include the whole world."²¹³

²¹² Sweet, "How to Recognize Jesus."

²¹³ Sweet, "How to Recognize Jesus."

“The mandorla reminds us to be aware of Jesus’ double ring, that we’ll find Jesus intersecting within two otherwise impossible spheres.”²¹⁴

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Mandorla

The world offers us dichotomies and often false dichotomies: yes or no, black or white, any number of *a or b* answers. Jesus offers *the third way* or the Mandorla Way. Jesus will find mutually exclusive spheres and offer a third way that makes room for opposites to coexist and bond. When we speak of *the third way of Jesus*, it’s not uncommon for Americans to assume that Jesus is a centrist. Jesus is not on the American right/left continuum. Jesus is not a liberal, and Jesus is not a conservative. The third way of Jesus makes a one-dimension continuum line into a two-dimensional area. While Jesus occupies and owns the entire right/left continuum, Jesus makes the line into an area, an added dimension. Because Jesus is inseparable from the Father and the Spirit, the third way of Jesus adds not only a second dimension, but simultaneously all other possible dimensions. Jesus exists both inside time and outside time, and the ramifications of existing outside time are mind-bending.

²¹⁴ “Conference Resource Day with Leonard Sweet,” Faith United Methodist Church, accessed July 20, 2022, https://www.chicopeeumc.org/hp_wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/may2021connected.pdf.

CQ

Leonard I. Sweet - CQ

Issachar is the fifth one of the six sons born to Jacob and Leah, according to Genesis.²¹⁵ Issachar was the founder of the Israelite tribe of Issachar. Issacharians according to 1 Chronicles 12:32 do the following: “from Issachar, men who understood the times and knew what Israel should.”

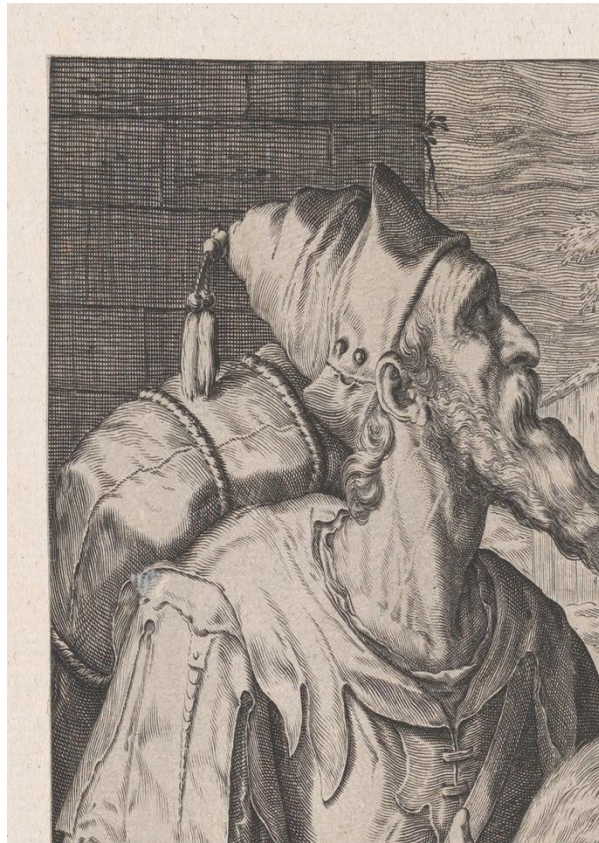


Figure 49: Issachar, from *The Twelve Sons of Jacob*²¹⁶

²¹⁵ Genesis 30:18 and Genesis 35:23, NIV.

²¹⁶ Jacques de Gheyn II, Karel van Mander I, and Jan Pitten, *Issachar, from the Twelve Sons of Jacob*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/434377>.

CQ is contextual intelligence or cultural intelligence. “[Issacharians] contextual intelligence orients toward a hermeneutic and a semiotic together: interpreting the Scriptures (hermeneutic) and reading the signs of a specific context (semiotic). The following Venn diagram highlights the CQ sweet spot of the Issachar mandorla (an almond-shaped area of two overlapping circles).”²¹⁷

In order to understand scripture, Sweet says it is necessary to understand the culture and who first received the message. In order for the Gospel to make sense for us today, the Good News has to be presented in words, metaphors, and other signs that our current culture recognizes. To become culturally intelligent is necessary to communicate the Gospel. Jesus used parables, in part because it is difficult to argue with a story, and also because the parables communicated multiple simultaneous messages. The parable of the talents was good management advice, but under the obvious message is a deeper message about trust and provision.²¹⁸

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - CQ

The post-1970’s American church embarked on a moralistic culture war, and in that culture war many people became fodder.²¹⁹ Cultural Intelligence calls for us to lay our weapons down, because people and culture are not the enemy, and more shooting

²¹⁷ Leonard I. Sweet and Michael Adam Beck, *Contextual Intelligence: Unlocking the Ancient Secrets to Mission on the Front Lines* (Oviedo, FL: HigherLife, 2021), 8.

²¹⁸ Matthew 25:14–30, NIV.

²¹⁹ Andrew R. Lewis, “Staffing the Front Lines of the Culture War: Constituency Religious Effects on Assignment to the Senate Judiciary Committee,” *Congress & the Presidency* 41, no. 2 (2014), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07343469.2014.896056>.

won't produce peace. As Lenny Bruce famously said, "'Fighting for peace is like screwing for virginity.'" The third way of Jesus is to use cultural signs to point to Jesus in the way that the Apostle Paul did in Athens.²²⁰

Prayer: Open our eyes Jesus to your work around us and help us invest our entire SPIRE being in finding the signs of you and the signs that point to you in our surrounding culture. Make us skilled semioticians to add value to the lives of people around us as we point to signs that point to you. Amen.

MRI

Leonard I. Sweet - MRI

Sweet connects the theories of Charles Peirce with being missional, relational, and incarnational (MRI). "If deduction is the language of mathematical logic, induction the language of scientific empiricism, and abduction the language of philosophical proof through a posteriori experience, then transduction (trans-incarnation) is the mind-bending, heartrending, body-spending language of MRI faith." "Transincarnational preaching doesn't aim to "influence" the hearer but to imbed in the hearer that recognition of truth, a re-cognition that is felt in the core of our being, as our humanity is ever after defined in and redefined by our relationship with our Creator."²²¹

Sweet in MRI has opened a philosophic worm-hole that has always existed but has not been easily described. Transincarnational is whole-being knowing that is

²²⁰ Acts 17, NIV.

²²¹ Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching*, 78.

mediated by Jesus and increasingly approximates the truth. In other words, through transfiguration, we become more like Jesus. The MRI that Sweet describes contains three concentric realms culminating in the incarnational. The innermost incarnational represents the integration of SPIRE.

Sweet describes MRI in pragmatic ways more easily grasped, for instance, ensuring that what we offer encompasses all three. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and to neglect an element of MRI produces unintended consequences. To engage a missional, relational endeavor but neglect the incarnational was described by my colleagues in anesthesia in gallows humor: “although the operation was a raving success, the patient died.”

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - MRI

Missional, relational, and incarnational can be used as categories that a sign inhabits. Missional signs point toward creative, collaborative, God-inspired work. Relational signs point to the connections we maintain internally, socially, and spiritually. Incarnational signs signify our humanity and the humanity we respect in Jesus and in others.

Transduction with Jesus as the mediator encompasses all of our senses but also engages and acknowledges an indwelling external Spirit that is counselor, interpreter, and mediator.

Prayer: We pray that your Spirit transfigures our being to the SPIRE incarnation you imagined for us before you laid the foundations of creation. May we daily engage and orient our agency through the guidance of the Holy Spirit to healthy and maturing

relationships internally, between ourselves and God, and between ourselves and others.

May we join you in doing what the Father is already about, in the power of the Spirit, and in your mission of ongoing salvation and creation. Amen.

Ostranenie

Leonard I. Sweet - Ostranenie

As a literary device, defamiliarization was formulated by the Russians years ago in the concept of ostranenie, which translates literally as “de-numbing” and was designed as a distancing device to help the reader see something deadeningly familiar in a totally new light.²²²

Sweet borrowed ostranenie from a Russian literary device but has highjacked the word and used it as a larger, more flexible sign. The answer to a bored multi-decade marriage? Sweet says ostranenie: see each other strangely again. The heart of ostranenie may not be that at 60 years old we accidentally see ourselves naked and wonder who is in the mirror. Once the shock wears off, ostranenie could be the grace that re-signs the wrinkles and sags as proudly earned parenting trophies.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Ostranenie

Ostranenie is the gift of seeing the familiar as strange again. It is the opposite of *Déjà vu*, what I jokingly call *of Déjà von't*. If *Déjà vu* is the strange feeling of familiarity in a strange place, ostranenie is the sense of strangeness in the familiar. Ostranenie

²²² Leonard I. Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 232-33.

provides a moment to re-group and form a new perspective. In being married thirty-nine years, an ostranenie moment with my wife Shelley allows me to see her as she really has become, the entirety of her life present and seen as though for the first time. Ostranenie may be as accidental as *Déjà vu* initially, but ostranenie is a skill to ward against the cynicism of certainty.

Prayer: Jesus, may we daily refresh our grip and trust your grip. May we see all of creation as it is, as it will be, and in a new ostranenie way each day. Amen.

Semiotics

Leonard I. Sweet - Semiotics

John Locke in the final chapter of his Essay “Concerning Human Understanding” (1690) coins the terms *semeiotics* which derives from the Greek semeion, for “sign” or “signal.”²²³

Sweet says that semiotics describes a way of paying attention and recognizing creative means of communication. Jesus used parables, which reduced argument, as it’s hard to argue with a story. Semiotics opens the mind to signs, whether the signs are linguistic, visual, or gestures that have meaning.²²⁴

Sweet cannot help but speak in metaphor. The art that fills his house show either semiotic examples or they are garage sale candidates. Jesus and Sweet’s mother lit the

²²³ Cornelis De Waal, *Peirce: A Guide for the Perplexed, Guides for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2013), 73.

²²⁴ Sweet and Beck, *Contextual Intelligence: Unlocking the Ancient Secrets to Mission on the Front Lines*, 117.

fire of metaphor in him. In the same way that the coal seam in Centralia, PA has been burning for 60 years, so the fire of semiotics is burning in the soul of Leonard I. Sweet.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Semiotics

Semiotics is a framework that helps the practitioner communicate meaning through the use of icons (likenesses of the object, for example, a flame icon), indexes (sign of the effects of, or evidence of the object, for example smoke or steam), or a symbol (a word that is culturally learned because there is no other relation, for example, the word fire in English).

Prayer: Jesus, refresh our perceptions with your signs and impart your metaphors and meaning. May we find new and creative meaning in you, and may the gift of enhanced perception benefit all who meet us. Amen.

EPIC

Leonard I. Sweet - EPIC

Experiential, Participatory, Image-rich, and Connective (EPIC) is how Sweet describes the necessary attributes of our culture. Sweet in 2007 described how “Starbucks took an old, unexciting standby - hot, dark liquid in a cup - and made it an EPIC beverage that millions of people feel they can’t live without.”²²⁵ Sweet says Starbucks does not displace or demote the literary, but rather implements EPIC writing styles and devices.²²⁶

²²⁵ Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion*, 21.

²²⁶ Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion*, 22.

“The EPIC life is organic and unscripted, an apt description of the adventure of the gospel when the scriptural and the unscripted are joined together.”

Sweet’s EPIC can function as a checklist for most of what we do: planning a talk, creating a meeting, teaching a class, taking a five-year-old to Target to spend a birthday gift card. Watch the cup rack at Starbucks as you leave. Signs can be found everywhere.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - EPIC



Figure 50: Starbucks Cup. Carlisle, PA Target Starbucks. Photo Vern Hyndman

The Starbucks cup in Figure 52 is a semiotic playground. First, it is a painting on a coffee cup, and coffee signifies an EPIC, SPIRE event. The hands show a progression from outside to inside. As the hands move toward each other, the change from dull blue/gray to hot red/yellow signifies the warmth that *together* provides. The hands are together, but they are also signing in American Sign Language the sign for *connect*. The cup, *a sign*, bears a painting, *also a sign*, of an *ASL sign*, with a color *sign*. The cup’s

color from bottom to top signifies a drink in the bottom, and empty half-way up, meaning that the conversation and connection has been happening.

This is EPIC, best experienced, as it is a SPIRE effecting metaphor and not merely an intellectual understanding. The images we experience transfigure us. Dr. Seuss' *The Grinch* said:: "Once you're stretched by love, you never return to your original size," a play on Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous quote.

Think through the day ahead of you. What mundane activity on your schedule could be EPIC if you changed your perception a little?

Prayer: Jesus, stretch our small experiences into EPIC and eternal ones and save us from being boring. Give us Jesus-vision to see possibility in the mundane, and make us generously creative to share our EPIC lives. Guard us from the faithlessness of boredom, and inspire our SPIRE. Amen.

Insonify

Leonard I. Sweet - Insonify

The strength of Methodist catechesis was its echoing back to God the "music of the spheres." For early Methodists, sacred sound was as important as sacred time, sacred space, and sacred image. Like few others in history before him, the Wesley brothers understood what Paul meant when he wrote "nothing is without sound" (1 Corinthians 14:10-11). Methodists turned the society of their day upside down because they knew the meaning of sound, and used sound to help people experience God. They listened souls into existence by hearing into song first Christ and then each other. Any chance this postmodern culture may have of achieving a new state of harmony depends on our ability to sing it to new life. For Wesleyans, to sing is a sound thing to do.²²⁷

²²⁷ Leonard I. Sweet, *Eleven Genetic Gateways to Spiritual Awakening* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 156-57.

Sweet practices what he preaches; he works in what he calls “surround-sound.” Sweet not only wants to know the story. He is looking for a soundtrack. Sweet’s long history with the Methodist church and the prolific singing of Methodists provides Sweet with artful lyrics and solid tunes. Having eaten at the Sweet residence, I believe that Sweet is also a SPIRE, whole being Christian, because at the Sweet home, no senses are left out. Sweet’s book *Nudge* provides evangelism an example for each of the human senses. Sweet’s Twitter tweet from August 15, 2022 reminds us: “Unification requires insonification. Every story needs a soundtrack.”

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Insonify

Expectant parents can now see their developing baby in three dimensions and in color.

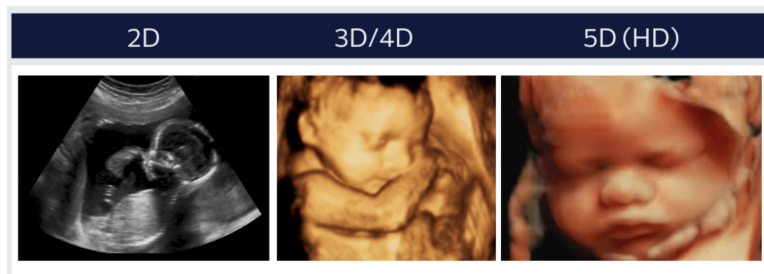


Figure 51: Comparison of 2D, 3D, and 5D (HD) Sonograms²²⁸

²²⁸ “5d, 4d, and 3d Ultrasound Machines - What Is the Difference?,” LBNMedical, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://lbnmedical.com/5d-4d-and-3d-ultrasound-machines/>.

Sonograms work by beaming high-frequency sound waves (insonify) into the mother's body and receiving and decoding the sound the echoes back. The sonogram result is that hearing creates vision. We hear the picture. When we miss the point, we hear the message, but we don't comprehend or we don't assign meaning to what we're hearing. When a young wife says "Honey, I missed my period," this is not an invitation to help find it. The missed period is a sign of pregnancy, and the wife is announcing the exciting news that the family will now be bigger.

Prayer: Jesus, may the sound of you create a picture in me. Sharpen my ability to pay attention to the indwelling Spirit and to provide the SPIRE, whole-incarnation perception of the picture you present.

Narraphor

Leonard I. Sweet - Narraphor

The winter count is what American Indians of the northern Great Plains used to keep track of their history. Their calendar went not from January to December but from winter to winter. They called an entire year a "winter," an annual cycle that covered the first snowfall to the following year's first snowfall. Near the end of a winter, tribal elders met and assigned meaning to the most important events in the life of the community. They talked until they agreed on one narraphor - one story and one image - that would summarize the entire winter and trigger memories of all that happened. The winter was then named after this event and image.²²⁹

²²⁹ Sweet, *Viral: How Social Networking Is Poised to Ignite Revival*, 100.

Every word represents the Word. Jesus' identity cries out from His very language, from the narratives and metaphors ("narraphors") of His discourse in the Gospels.²³⁰

Sweet's description of the American Indian communal exploration and naming of the year based on the narraphor that happened to them is a wonderful example and challenge to us. Do we together discuss the happenings of our lives, and ascribe names to events? Maybe even more than American Indians. The characters in the show "Seinfeld" aptly named common events in their lives creatively. Double dippers, yadda yadda yadda, Festivus, are all recognized Seinfeld-isms in our culture. Can we think of new Christian narraphors that spawn new cultural words?

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign – Narraphor

Can you spot a metaphor in your life? What event, sign, or activity represents a hope you have for your life? Can this hope metaphor find a place in the story of Jesus around you? Producers pitching a movie make shorthand metaphors. When pitching a movie they want to create, they pull from two known movies, for example, *Sleepless in Seattle* meets *Psycho*. The metaphor dials the idea in by comparing two known movies. What two events in your life would form a narraphor, so that you can express hope or have people know you?

Prayer: Jesus, teach me to find the metaphors in my life story, and mature in me the capacity to find the narraphor opening around me, in me, and through me. Make my

²³⁰ Sweet and Viola, *Jesus: A Theography*, 80. See also Leonard I. Sweet, *The Greatest Story Never Told: Revive Us Again* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), 82.

life a narraphor canvas. Lend me your brushes, paint, easel, palate, and talent so that we can make art together. Amen.

Terroir

Leonard I. Sweet - Terroir

Do Little Large: Small is All. The Particular is of Universal Significance. Can you taste your church's terroir? There's a fountain flowing deep and wide." We will travel together simultaneously deep (local) and wide (global) in looking at the importance of four key metaphors for the future.²³¹

'We can only inhabit our own story.' This was my favorite line. Sweet paralleled this idea to the way a wine has a terroir - which is a unique flavor that can be traced back to the soil and location in which the grapes were grown. No two wines terroir is the same. He said churches also have a sort of terroir. There is a unique flavor every church has that is a result of its particular location and time.²³²

Sweet is the king of building two distinct ideas, tying them together with a metaphor, and delivering them to people who are tempted to over-simplify for lack of a better option. Everyone loves good wine, and the temptation is to praise the grapes without knowing that the soil is a definitive factor. When we complement the vintner, we might consider "what all died to make this wonderful dirt?" as complement. When we compliment amazing humble faith, do we stop to complement the terroir church that the faith grew in? Sweet reminds us to check for the second ring, the opposite other, or the complementary other. Remember the grape and the soil.

²³¹ "Conference Resource Day with Leonard Sweet."

²³² "July 2019 Newsletter," Pennsburg United Church of Christ, accessed July, 2019, <http://pennsburgucc.org/mt-content/uploads/2019/07/july-2019-newsletter.pdf>.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Terroir

Terroir cannot materialize without death. Terroir is the death of previous years, of leaves and pruned vines, of fecal matter, and whatever else died and rotted and returned to the soil. The message of the gospel is that death does not win. We believe Jesus died and resurrected and ascended to the throne with the Father. We also believe that we too will die and yet live eternally. Woodie Allen's funny observation "I'm not afraid of death; I just don't want to be there when it happens" is true for most of us.

It's good to consider eternal outcomes, but death haunts us daily. Death of relationship, death of the capacity to trust, death of hopes and dreams, death of others. We face a wide array of death daily. Jesus not only resurrects us eternally, but Jesus also resurrects our smaller, more daily deaths. When our hope has died, Jesus is in the resurrection business. When we surrender a hopelessly broken relationship, Jesus resurrects what is dead. Our role is offer, humbly and honestly, our brokenness to Jesus and to trust him and others with what we cannot fix. It is the redemption of the death in and around us that forms the terroir of our lives.

Prayer: Jesus, let the roots of my life draw deeply from the water and rich terroir of you. Make my life, infused with you, fertile for others whose lives need the water of life and good terroir. Amen.

Story

Leonard I. Sweet – Story

Sweet tells a story about a chaplain who works his “Bible to shreds about every five years.” During pastoral study, he makes notes in his Bible and fills up the margins. After five years, he makes a gift of the Bible to one of his sons.

Sometimes I find a poem I want to share with him and stuff it in the pages. Or sometimes a quote will come to mind, or a special wish for him, and I jot that down, too. Then, when my Bible is so threadbare and worn from working through it and preaching from it and taking it with me everywhere I go, I present it to him on his birthday as a special gift from his father.²³³

Do we see the spiritual tools around us as gifts to bequeath? Sweet says that any object in his house whose story he has forgotten is eliminated. All of scripture points to Jesus, but do our nick-nacks also point to Jesus? Sweet’s do. Story-less objects don’t hold the value that storied objects hold.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Story

My friend and cohort colleague Dr. Michael Beck holds a Tattoo Church, and I reflected on his Facebook post: “Jesus is not a tattoo cover-up artist. He leaves the sleeve of previous loves, previous saviors, previous idols, to testify to the long beautiful road to him. The best sleeves are a visual semiotic rendering of Rascal Flat’s *Bless the Broken Road*. Jesus wastes nothing, not tears, not regret, not pain, not shame, and he rescues us, and then transfigures us and our entire story.” Listen to the lyrics, and instead of a human

²³³ Sweet, *A Cup of Coffee at the Soul Cafe*, 180.

lover, sing it to Jesus for a wonderful theology of redemption: “May church be *telling a tattoo story*, tracing our lives by the ink, and the scars, visible and invisible. I could tell my story by the ‘tattoos I should have gotten.’”²³⁴ Dr. David McDonald reflects on the healed wounds and scar tissue that hold and signify stories in our lives: “There is a difference between a wound and a scar. You can do nothing with a wound but nurse it or aggravate it. But a scar provides additional protection for a sensitive area; scar tissue becomes among the strongest on your body.”²³⁵

Our stories are powerful and bleed Jesus. As Brennan Manning said, “On the last day, Jesus will look us over not for medals, diplomas, or honors, but for scars.”²³⁶

Prayer: Jesus, I trust you that together we write the ending of the story I’m living. Thanks for the setting, time and place, the characters, and the plot we’re writing. Give me the trust and the strength to align my agency with your larger story. Amen.

Trialectic

Leonard I. Sweet - Trialectic

Christianity is about a design for living as authentic human beings: a trialectical process of missionalizing, relationalizing, and incarnationalizing your life and community. To learn the MRI trialectics is to learn the language in which God created life and all things in it, creatures great and small, bright and beautiful. MRI is the design by which

²³⁴ Rascal Flatts, “Bless the Broken Road (Live),” accessed August 15, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-vZlrBYLSU>. See Michael Beck, Facebook, August 2022.

²³⁵ David McDonald, *Then. Now. Next. A Biblical Vision of the Church, the Kingdom, and the Future*. (Jackson, MI: Westwinds Community Church, 2017), loc. 481.

²³⁶ Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust: The Ragamuffin's Path to God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 48.

humans and their communities best construct narrative identities and senses of self. Missional is the mind of God. Mission is where God's head is at. Relationship is where God's heart is. Incarnation is what God's hands are up to. A so-beautiful world requires a Trinitarian logic of thinking, loving, and doing.²³⁷

The third way of Jesus is a trialectic. The way of Jesus has a mission, has a community, and is embodied in humanity. Jesus-spirituality is not magical. It is miraculous. Jesus honors the individual yet forms the individual with deep relational needs. The overlap signifies the church. Jesus says he is God, but says he can do nothing except what the Father is doing.²³⁸ Jesus sends us on a mission, while reminding us that we can do nothing without his help. All we do is based on faith, and so faith is the trialectic.²³⁹ Sweet will always look for a double-ring, or two spheres that will overlap and form a trialectic.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Trialectic

P. J. Corfield, in her book *Time and Shape of History* says that a trialectical is first a *simultaneous pluralism*, as in the way light is both wave energy and matter. Corfield outlines micro change, macro change, and continuity as three ever-variant forces.^{240,241}

²³⁷ Leonard I. Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2009), 28.

²³⁸ John 5:30, NIV.

²³⁹ Philippians 3:8-9, NIV.

²⁴⁰ P. J. Corfield, *Time and the Shape of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 122.

²⁴¹ Corfield reference from Leonard I. Sweet's *So Beautiful*, 25.

Corfield says: “[Trialectic] incorporates the principle of plurality but within a shape that is not so complex as to defy all interpretation in terms of its components.”²⁴²

Can you find a trialectic in your life? The father of the demon-possessed boy said, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” Jesus meets the father in the trialectic between belief and unbelief. What seemingly irresolvable opposites might actually be two sides of the same coin? What if the worst instincts you have and the best hope you can imagine have a common area? Over-simplification can convince us that sexuality is dangerous, but what if sexual desire and living a holy life are a single two-sided coin? Can holiness and desire live in tension?

Prayer: As the world offers tricky false dichotomies, lend me your wisdom and perception to discover the *third way of Jesus*. For honest questions and truth seekers, give me narraphor, metaphor, and story instead of platitudes, propositions, and arguments. What I ask for others through me, I also ask for myself. May I seek story over argument, and may I surrender my need to be right to a Jesus driven overwhelming curiosity and desire for healthy connection. Amen.

Jesus

Leonard I. Sweet – Jesus

“‘If I be lifted up,’ Jesus said, ‘I will draw all to myself.’ Jesus is the attraction. Jesus is the draw, despite all our time spent at drawing boards drawing up this appeal and

²⁴² Corfield, 122.

drafting that attraction.”²⁴³ I once had an anonymous flight sitting beside Leonard Sweet. More than twenty years ago, I did not know him. I talked the whole flight, which for Sweet was a nightmare. I opened up about Jesus, not knowing I was talking to one of the top Christian scholars and leaders in the country. To be around Sweet is to wake up the Jesus in you, because the Jesus in him is already awake. Sweet never makes it about himself. Sweet always points to Jesus.

Sweet has said that the single greatest criticism he gets among his peers is this: “there comes Sweet, talking about Jesus again.” He is not-so-secretly proud of this criticism. I measured this Jesus orientation. Using twenty-one books he’s written between 1982 and 2019 (selected books available to me, obviously not all of Sweet’s books). I counted the occurrences of the words *Lord*, *Jesus*, and *Christ*, and divided the total by the number of pages in the book. Like mileage, I measured *Jesus per page*.²⁴⁴ Over 21 books, Sweet averages 2.2 Jesus’ per page. Over the years the rate per page has increased. I stopped in 2019 because Sweet broke the software. The developers couldn’t imagine a word occurring more than 1000 times per book, and around 2019, the *Jesus per page* sky rocketed and broke the counter. There comes Sweet talking about Jesus again.

Personal Spiritual Direction Sign - Jesus

The term transfiguration is most well-known from the Gospel accounts of Jesus taking Peter, John, and James up the mountain to pray. The disciples saw his glory on the

²⁴³ Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church*, 18.

²⁴⁴ I subtracted the number of *Jesus Christs*, as the single iteration would be counted once as *Jesus* and once as *Christ*, upward skewing the count.

Mount of Transfiguration until a cloud appeared and enveloped them. Israel experienced previous clouds that lead them through the desert, in the tabernacle of Moses, and in Solomon's Temple, all signifying the glory of divine presence.²⁴⁵

Prayer: Jesus, reveal what you have for us today. We will wait in meditation.

Amen.

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 Summary

Chapters 4 and 5 have explored the sign of the coin and the signs embedded on the coin. The obverse side symbols are mostly ancient Christian symbols that have historical meaning. Sweet and I selected them based on the icon's historical meaning, as well as meaning Sweet has assigned over a large body of published work. Finally, both the icons on the icons on the obverse side and word symbols on the front are assigned, meaning as if the coin were being presented to an individual. Challenge coins are a means of affirming the recipient, but also when pre-loaded with meaning for a disciple, are a tangible tool that is a constant guide in the cooperative maturing by which God transfigures our being. Each element has significance to one or more segments of our SPIRE incarnation. The coin is designed to encourage integration and commensurate growth in all the segments.

²⁴⁵ Sweet and Viola, *Jesus: A Theography*, 6.

CHAPTER 6: MODERN MINISTRY AND SEMIOTICS

Sweet reminds his students that the universal is best seen through the particular or specific. The Challenge Coin that this dissertation has explored is a specific coin designed for Leonard I. Sweet. This chapter may reference the Leonard I. Sweet coin as a particular example, but keep in mind that these concepts are universal and are available for others to capture on another custom coin, or even another mode of sign aggregation.

How can this Challenge Coin, which has meaning as an affirmation but also is comprised of signs that have historical and temporal meaning, be used to become fully invested and developing as humans and resist faith that is limited to cerebral ascent alone? How can a Challenge Coin as a tangible semiotic help orient personal agency with the transfiguring, integrating, resurrecting power of the love of the Father, the power of the Spirit, and the way of Jesus? ²⁴⁶ How can we hot-wire our distracted, dissipated, and disconnected humanity and what are practical aspects of our surrender to the promise of Jesus of life and life more abundantly?

Presentation of the Challenge Coin in the United States Navy is loaded with shared meaning for people who understand the Navy that the civilian world is unlikely to understand. To maximize meaning, the presentation of the coin to a Jesus-follower should be modified and enhanced. The presentation of the coin must involve an explanation of the present and the intention of the giver and may include an impromptu description of the significance of the coin and the meaning of the embedded signs. The presentation

²⁴⁶Sweet and Viola, *Jesus: A Theography*, 2.

could invoke a longer story-telling process that confers the intended meaning for the recipient.²⁴⁷

The giver's method of engaging the symbols depends on the reason for the giving, the existing relationship between the giver and receiver, as well as the constraints of time and place. For this dissertation, I will select case studies in which the payload that the meaning-giver imparts to the receiver is maximized. The case study will initially describe the situation, the receiver's potential benefit, the giver's intent, and a possible way that the presentation and ongoing use of the coin could accomplish the goal of hot-wiring our distracted, dissipated, and disconnected humanity toward Jesus' promise of life and life more abundantly.

As demonstrated in Chapters Four and Five, the coin as a whole is a symbol, and the coin serves as the framework to present many discrete symbols. Some symbols on the coin have historical Christian meaning, the have meaning provided by Leonard Sweet, they can be imbued with meaning for the specific recipient, and they can be used to trigger specific prayer patterns. The giver of the coin might use these layered metaphors as a means of SPIRE triage of the receiver. With the coin symbols as prompts, the giver might inquire of the story of the receiver, and consequently provide encouragement, vision, therapy, mentoring, healing, affirmation, or all of the above. The coin as a bearer of metaphor combines the historic Christian story with the shared and merging story the of the giver and receiver.

²⁴⁷ Personal conversations with Tony Palm Chief Petty Officer USN (retired).

Using the Challenge Coin in Grief Mitigation

Sixty-year-old Pastor George has been the pastor of a mid-sized church on a small island in Northern Ontario, Canada. Six months into a year-long, planned transition for the church to a new and younger pastoral team, Pastor George's wife died. George is far from the variety of pastoral supports that an urban pastor could count on, so George's church employed the services of a team of pastoral interventionists and counselors in the Eastern United States. The engagement included a three-week time away in a resort with a cohort of other pastors and a team of skilled helpers. As C.S. Lewis pointed out, when God engages a specific issue, like a dentist who works on the problem tooth as well as all the other teeth, Jesus accomplishes more than the presenting problem.²⁴⁸ George's stay started the process of grief and healing but also uncovered new areas of potential growth and maturity that George eagerly welcomed.

As is common in times of trauma, George developed deep trust with the staff, who carefully protected George's self-differentiation against unhealthy dependence. The team built trust while simultaneously setting George up for longer-term connection and growth with healthy people local to George's home.

Before returning to Northern Ontario, a trusted friend and team member, Grant, had presented a Challenge Coin to George. In conferring the coin, Grant had explained the personal nature of the coin design and had spent a few weeks exploring the historical symbols, as well as personal meaning Grant explained each symbol and why the team

²⁴⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity: The Case for Christianity, Christian Behavior, and Beyond Personality* (New York, N.Y.: Walker & Co., 1999), 201.

chose the symbol, and finally Grant wove George's story into each symbol, so that the meaning of the coin affirmed George's story and provided vision and hope for George's future.

The best orientation is to be *with* the pain, not ignoring it, not focusing on it, but to be with the pain as if it were sitting beside us. Being with the pain means that we can also be with Jesus and skilled, empathetic others. Focus is a key aspect to managing pain. Imagine the death of a loved-one. To ignore the death is denial. To focus on the death will produce an overwhelming sense of loss, because with death as the focus, we lose track of life-giving aspects of hope in our lives. Experienced pastors who help families through the death of a loved-one often invite the family and friends to tell stories of the loved-one's life. By focusing on the life of the loved on in the context of a funeral, we acknowledge death while focusing on life.

After returning home, during a weekly check-in, George mentioned that in the grief process he found he was waking up regularly at 3am and experiencing extreme emotional pain that resulted in him not being able to go back to sleep. Grant made sure that he was engaging the array of local and remote clinical professionals. At the end of the conversation, he sent a helpful and holistic process that George could engage with.

Grant offered George a partial explanation for George's inability to return to sleep in the framework of the expected grief process. During a normal day, George's intellect helped rationalize the grief. George's SPIRE segments all benefited from the ongoing rational framing of the pain. During the night, as George's body experienced normal changes in sleep rhythm, instead of slipping into a deeper sleep with lowered heart rate and respirations, George's body woke suddenly. When first awake, George's intellect

took ten minutes to come online and orient to the reality to which George awoke. In the ten minutes of being awake, without the benefit of the ongoing rational awareness that George employs to maintain balance in grief, the emotional trauma of grief became almost instantly overwhelming. The autonomic nervous system that regulated normal activity shifted from the relaxed parasympathetic state of low-energy, low-stress into the sympathetic state of heightened awareness. Quickly George's body ratcheted into a state of acute anxiety. The mechanism that helps humans to escape being eaten by bear kicked in, and it would be most of the day before George's body would self-regulate back to a comfortable parasympathetic rhythm of peace. Grant's suggestion was a practical way of avoiding sympathetic activation between the time of waking and either returning to sleep or engaging the entire SPIRE, including rational awareness.

Grant suggested that George preemptively prepare for unplanned waking. George prepared his iPhone with a playlist of music that was non-stimulating and peace-inducing. In general, this playlist did not have language that would stimulate, but either classical music or some form of pleasant instrumental music. I use an arrangement of "Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring," or music from soundtrack composer Helen Jane Long. George also prepared a tangible item, like a sculpture, which has peaceful meaning. George chose the Challenge Coin which resulted in a very positive but unexpected outcome. George also chose a scent, a diffuser, a correlated scented candle, and a flavored gummy of melatonin.²⁴⁹ Finally, he kept a photo of a peaceful moment and context nearby and a prepared brief prayer printed and laid it next to the photo.

²⁴⁹ Valerian or chamomile tea, or flavored CBD work as well.

The written description that followed seems complex. The written description was significantly more cumbersome than just doing the activity. This process is for intense grief. The activities are designed to hijack the senses with known and trusted stimuli for a short time. After trying once, users may simplify and eliminate aspects based on what they discover is effective.

Upon awaking, George turned on a night light, automatically activated the music of the playlist, touched and held the Challenge Coin, breathed deeply of the diffuser and candle scent, and meditated on the picture while repeating the brief prayer. Each segment of George's SPIRE experienced a flow of art and beauty, coordinated and skillfully prepared. By displacement, the art and beauty temporarily took the place of protective rationality. By engaging a displacing activity, George avoided the ratcheting effect of sympathetic stress, conversely maintaining a parasympathetic state, and, in a short time, returned to sleep.

The physiological sympathetic response requires many hours to dissipate, and in on-going grief, the previous night's receding effects could overlap with a subsequent event, and between sympathetic episodes never fully return to a parasympathetic state of relaxation. Multiple iterations of unregulated and uncontrollable stress when waking in the night produce a sense of helplessness and inevitability for the griever, which exacerbates the sympathetic events and disrupts healing.

On the nights that returning to sleep was not possible, the coin imparted meaning. The affirmation and connection that the coin represented, as well as the pre-loaded personal and historical meaning and suggested conversational prayer all worked together to produce a positive displacing activity in the undesired wakeful state.

The Challenge Coin as a Coming-of-Age Gift

An important opportunity to affirm and encourage connection and faith occurs when children transition to teens. Coming-of-age celebrations often involve gifts that encourage the young adult to continue to mature guided by a mentor.

A mentor or parent who presents a challenge coin is giving a gift that is attractive and valuable. The recipient is initially unlikely to comprehend the meaning of a symbol-laden coin like the one I made for Leonard Sweet. A wonderful use of the challenge coin can be initiated with the following conversation.

“I am proud of you! This coin has stories connected to the symbols that take a while to tell; would you consider letting me take you out to breakfast twice a month for the next year so we can share some stories and ideas? I’d also really enjoy your company.”

Challenge Coin Replacement of the Participation Trophy

Another potential use for the coin is as a replacement for trophies in minor league sports; could we replace the participation with a story-laden coin instead?

OTHER PROPOSED METHODS OF CHRISTIAN MATURITY

A common practice amongst American Christians is a weekly Bible study.

Gathered in a group, Christians read and discuss biblical passages, pray together, and drink coffee. If the Bible study becomes the primary means of maturing, the disciple is leaning most heavily on the intellect, and may neglect the other elements of their SPIRE.

Amongst charismatic Christians, intense worship experiences, including music integrated with prayer, accompanies a visceral sense of connecting with the Spirit of God. The charismatic expression of faith is beautiful and overwhelming emotionally engaged. Emotional worship is helpful and necessary, and helps ensure that a disciple's emotions are present and awake; charismatic worship services aren't sleepy. The physical, emotional, and relational aspects of SPIRE are in overdrive; however, this mode may neglect the intellectual aspect of a disciple's SPIRE. Primarily, emotional engagement without an intellectual backbone may eventually produce an uneven emotional roller-coaster in which worship time is up, but alone time produces an emotional low. A fully engaged SPIRE disciple experiences less uneven highs and lows.

While self-control is *fruit of the Spirit*, Christians who use self-control as a primary tool to mature may find the focus on self. Self-control does not produce relationship, and so an extreme focus on self-control may come at a cost to the generosity and other-focus that healthy relationship requires. In our maturing process, if the entire power that produces change is internally self-generated, we limit our maturity to the outer limits of human power. As one fruit of the Spirit, self-control is an outcome of the Spirit's power in our lives, and not a primary maturing mechanism.

To mature as a Christian is Spirit-powered alignment of a follower's agency with the Spirit. Maturing as a Christian is aligning our agency with the indwelling Spirit for a full-SPIRE transfiguration. Twenty years ago, I worked with heroin addicts in the county jail, and it was that experience that started my journey into the transfiguring power of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

The net effect of the coin is the integration of the recipient's SPIRE, and the coin used with the other prepared articles therefore integrates SPIRE and the five senses in a planned immersive context that is Jesus centered and infused.

The Challenge Coin proved useful in both a short wakeful period and a longer instance of waking and insomnia. The SPIRE attributes of the coin prove to be a good proactive measure to use while navigating steep grief.

Transfiguration and becoming a new being often happen more quickly at inflection points or moments of large-scale or catastrophic change. In the difficulty and hard inflection points, whether random or self-inflicted, practicing a method of re-centering us in the care of Jesus and orienting us in Jesus' larger story helps align our agency with the work that God is doing. Semiotic vision helps diminish the self-focused *why me, is God causing this, and is God punishing me* questions that are distracting and destabilizing. As Greg Paul in Toronto reminds us, we find a connection first in brokenness, and the scar tissue forms a roadmap of trust building events that end in healing and renewed life. Survivors become a living sign of Jesus' commitment to "bind up the brokenhearted."

The Challenge Coin, loaded with historical, borrowed, and custom-created meaning, can serve as a tangible semiotic to help orient personal agency with the transfiguring, integrating, resurrecting power of the love of the Father, the power of the Spirit, and the way of Jesus. By embedding the coin in a set of multi-sensory tools, the Challenge Coin can be a key element to minimize damage and provide meaning when the situation is beyond our rational ability to manage. We hot-wire our distracted, dissipated,

and disconnected humanity, and enhance our surrender to the promise of Jesus of life and life more abundantly. It's a Jesus-life-hack too comprehensive to fit in a TikTok.

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