

COMMENTARY > A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

## Washing away what doesn't belong

A Christian Science perspective: When we make it a priority to let God's infinite goodness inspire our thoughts and actions, we more easily see and overcome impure traits.

Mark Swinney

DECEMBER 27, 2017 — At this time of year, it can be nice to step back and take stock of how we may have improved ourselves a bit over the past year. As life moves forward each day, we're all learning from our experiences. This forward growth includes steps to overcome things like pride, anger, deceit, envy, or other forms of selfishness. An honest desire to do this elevates our priorities, motives, actions, and thoughts.

Of course, washing such qualities from our thoughts and lives is often easier said than done. I've found it helpful to consider the way a miner, when panning for gold, scoops up from a riverbed a pan full of sand and dirt. Then, after agitating the water and swirling the dirt away, all that is left in the bottom of the pan is the bright, precious metal. Doing this is significantly easier than picking out all the dirt by hand, as the action of the moving water separates things in the pan much more quickly.

In a similar way, acknowledging the presence and action of God's goodness is a powerful way to help expose and wash away selfishness and self-righteousness, egotism and self-justification, effectively purifying our motives and actions. For every one of us, God's goodness and love are always flowing freely, because we are the spiritual reflection of divine Love.

When we make it a priority to let God's infinite goodness inspire our thoughts and actions, we see that because we are Love's reflection, impure qualities of all sorts are truly no part of us. Christ Jesus showed us what we are as God's children and how knowing this transforms our character. For instance, to a group of people who were puffed up with self-importance, and also to a woman who had fallen into adultery,

Jesus spoke of the purifying Christ – the active presence of God’s goodness – referring to it poetically as “living water.” He said, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.... [O]ut of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37, 38; John 4:10).

God’s presence is always purifying, and it reveals the true view of ourselves. As Jesus put it so beautifully, God’s love is “a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). With humble joy, we can open our thought to this “living water” and willingly allow it to expose things that need to be changed in our character and to change them, washing away whatever doesn’t belong to God’s creation.

In the miner’s pan, when all the worthless dirt gets washed away, it is forgotten. It can’t be retrieved. Through the powerful, purifying action of God’s presence, we can do more than temporarily repress traits we’re wrestling with. They can be permanently washed away, through spiritual growth that reveals more of our true nature – reflecting the bright gold of God’s goodness and love.

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# How to enforce gender equality? Iceland tests the waters.

*Does reform come from the bottom up or top down? Often, it's both. Iceland is in the forefront of using the second option – a new law – to upend a particularly entrenched problem with accountability.*

– Amelia

**Read** When it comes to gender equality, Iceland is about as equal as it gets. Yet even in a country where prostitutes' clients are prosecuted, not the women themselves, some biases are hard to budge. Take the pay gap. It's not huge by world standards – an average of just over 7 percent. But it rankles, and no amount of voluntary pledges from employers or "sit-down strikes" by women have narrowed it. So the government has taken a radical new step: A law went into effect this month that forces Iceland's biggest companies to earn a certification by proving to inspectors that they pay equal salaries for equal work. If they don't, they will face hefty fines. The fight for gender parity always takes political will and a strong women's movement, says a founder of Iceland's first women's political party. But in the end, she argues, the decisive factor is often top-down enforcement by the state. "[G]ender equality doesn't happen of its own accord," adds the head of the equality unit at Iceland's Ministry of Welfare. "If politicians decide to wait until the people are ready, or until nobody is going to oppose some legislative changes, nothing will happen."

REYKJAVIK, ICELAND

Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir recalls the autumn afternoon when she, along with nearly every woman in Iceland, didn't show up. To their jobs, to clean their homes, to care for their babies. It was a protest against low wages and undervalued work. It was 1975.

That is widely seen as the start of Icelandic women's formidable march towards gender equality. Ninety percent of Iceland's female population joined in, shutting

down entire industries. Newspapers shrank that day, and some flights were canceled.

“Women showed their solidarity, that they are many, that they can be a real change factor,” says Ms. Gísladóttir, who was studying history at university at the time and went on to help found the first women’s political party in Iceland’s modern history. Later she became mayor of Reykjavik, and then Iceland’s foreign minister.

Yet ironically, despite all the gains women have made since that fall day, the main injustice they were protesting then – unequal pay for equal work – has continued to dog this Nordic nation. Now, more than 40 years later, Iceland has taken a radical new approach: punishing companies that pay women less than men.

A new law requiring companies to earn official certification that they offer equal pay went into effect on January 1 for the country’s largest employers. The first of its kind in the world, the law puts Iceland once again at the forefront of the global women’s rights movement.

And as the #MeToo movement continues to fight from the bottom up against sexual harassment, gender violence, and the sexism that underpins them, for many here the new law in Iceland underlines the vital role that top-down accountability plays in effecting lasting change.

“I think our experience shows us how important legal measures are, because gender equality doesn’t happen of its own accord, it simply doesn’t,” says Rósa Guðrún Erlingsdóttir, head of the equality unit at Iceland’s Ministry of Welfare. “If politicians decide to wait until the people are ready, or until nobody is going to oppose some legislative changes, nothing will happen.”

## Still no gender paradise

By many measures, Iceland is already the best place to be a woman. The World Economic Forum has ranked it the most gender equal nation in the world for nine consecutive years for women’s workforce participation, educational attainment, health, and political empowerment.

The notion of the “strong Icelandic woman” dates back centuries, some even say to paganism when goddesses and priestesses commanded religious respect. It persisted culturally as men went to sea and left women with full authority at home.

Launching one of the earliest suffragist movements, Icelandic women won the right to vote in 1915. But the modern women’s rights movement crystallized on the 1975 march. Five years later Iceland was the first country to directly elect a female president, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir. Two years after that, women founded the Women’s List, a feminist political party that paved the way to political empowerment.



Iceland's 2008 banking crisis – for which women bore practically no responsibility because all the top bankers were men – marked the start of a renewed push toward political parity, says Brynhildur Heiðar-og Ómarsdóttir, the executive manager of the Icelandic Women's Rights Association.

In 2009, Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir became Iceland's first female prime minister. Feminist-friendly legislation quickly followed. The purchase of sex was criminalized, penalizing prostitutes' clients, not the women themselves. The next year Iceland mandated that women should fill 40 percent of seats on company boards. Strip clubs were banned in 2010. In the 2016 election, women won nearly half the seats in parliament, one of the highest percentages in the world.

This has not made Iceland into a gender paradise. The #MeToo campaign has arrived here with a fury, since sexual harassment and violence against women remain problems as stubborn as the pay gap. On October 24th 2016, Icelandic women made international headlines when they organized a variation of the 1975 march, leaving their jobs at exactly 2:38 p.m., after which time they said women worked for free for the rest of the day, compared to men's wages.

"We've now been at the top of the World Economic Forum list for the gender gap for nine years running," says Ms. Ómarsdóttir. "That fact doesn't say anything about how good things are in Iceland, but how bad things are in the rest of the world."

## Pay the women or pay a fine

Now Iceland is raising the stakes on the pay front. The Equal Pay Standard certification is mandatory for public and private companies with 25 or more employees, an estimated 2,000 entities. The law, which went into effect for the biggest employers in Iceland on January 1st, will be monitored by the government's Center for Gender Equality, and if a company fails to comply it will face hefty daily fines.

When the certification was conceived in talks among unions, employers and the government about ten years ago, it was designed as a voluntary measure. And Hannes Sigurðsson, deputy director general at the Confederation of Icelandic Employers, says it should have stayed that way. The new legal obligation is a drastic and costly step that will not necessarily narrow the pay gap, he says.

Yet Marianna Traustadóttir, who specializes in gender issues at the Icelandic Confederation of Labor and who was also involved in the original negotiations, says she was frustrated by how slowly companies adopted the voluntary certification. The average adjusted pay gap between men and women has been stuck at around 7.6 percent for many years.

We have been fighting the gender pay gap for decades, we have tried everything," Ms. Traustadóttir says. She says the most important principle behind the new law is to ensure equal pay for work of equal value. "The companies and institutions,

when they reclassify their whole job...system, have to ask, are the women working in the canteen serving food, and the driver, doing work of equal value?"

Þórunn Auðunsdóttir, a human resources manager at Össur, a manufacturer of prosthetics, says her company agreed to voluntary certification last year. While the process was time consuming, she says, the firm was found to be in compliance with certification standards.

"We always have gender glasses on," she says. "We always try for equality in each department; people like it like that, it's more fun for everyone."

But Mr. Sigurðsson says that the law is controversial among his 2,000 business members, even if they do not dare to speak up.

"No one wants to stand up and say, 'I'm against this measure that has this good intention,'" he says. "But I know that in their hearts, most business leaders are not in favor of such a measure."

Nonetheless, the law is essential, insists Gísladóttir, who is now the human rights and democracy boss at the Vienna-based Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Achieving gender parity takes political will, funding and a strong women's movement like #MeToo, she says. But legal enforcement is key.

"I have seen through my work that somehow legislation (on women's rights) is not taken as seriously as other legislation, that somehow it is not seen as binding," she says. "So enforcing it is really important."



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*"First the blade, then the ear,  
then the full grain in the ear."*

## States make progress in cutting opioid drug abuse

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calculates that 91 Americans die each day from opioid drug overdoses. As 2018 dawns it now seems likely that average life expectancy in the United States in 2017 could drop for the third year in a row.

Opioid overdoses will likely be a big factor. Drug overdoses accounted for more than 63,000 deaths in 2016, with more than 42,000 of them opioids, such as fentanyl, often prescribed by physicians to relieve pain. Opioid deaths have doubled since 2010.

But in some New England states there are hopeful signs that suggest a corner may be turning as 2018 rings in. Little by little, states and communities across the country are finding out what helps and taking action.

In Massachusetts and Rhode Island partial year estimates for 2017 show drops of 10 percent and 9 percent respectively in overdose deaths. Vermont and New Hampshire may see slight decreases as well.

Massachusetts was the first of what are now many states that limit the number of opioid pills doctors can prescribe per prescription. And more people who overdose are surviving as first responders widely use naloxone, an overdose-reversing drug.

Michigan has seen heroin and prescription opioid overdose deaths double over the past five years. In response a package of

diction. The program also offers alternatives to drugs, such as physical therapy, exercise, and meditation. The program has seen opioid use by patients drop significantly.

Americans take opioids at four times the rate that Britons do and six times more often than people in France or Portugal. One reason: Writing a prescription provides a quicker and simpler form of treatment than non-drug therapies. "Most insurance, especially for poor people, won't pay for anything but a pill," says Judith Feinberg, professor in the Department of Behavioral Medicine & Psychiatry at the West Virginia University School of Medicine.

"Say you have a patient that [has] lower back pain," she said in a BBC interview. "Really the best thing is physical therapy, but no one will pay for that. So doctors get very ready to pull out the prescription pad...."



## The wider meaning of #MeToo

The #MeToo movement is sending out ripples of change far beyond its original goal of making public and condemning sexual harassment of women in the workplace.

The spotlight now is turning to the need for equal rights and opportunities in employment, including equal pay. Even talk of reviving the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the US Constitution has emerged.

Last month "E! News" television host Catt Sadler quit her job after learning that cohost Jason Kennedy was earning about twice her salary, despite the two having similar qualifications and experience. Ms. Sadler said she was inspired to take her stand after hearing the experiences women shared through the #MeToo movement.

According to Pew Research figures, in 2016 women on average earned 83 cents for every dollar earned by men. (The gap has narrowed: The figure was 64 cents for women in 1980.)

In a recent essay in Foreign Affairs magazine, Rachel Vogelstein outlines the economic cost worldwide of laws that restrict women's right to work.

In 155 countries women face restrictions on working, such as "limitations on property ownership, spousal consent requirements

for employment, and laws that prevent them from signing contracts or accessing credit," she writes.

While much has been made of the move to allow women in Saudi Arabia to drive, she notes, the same Saudi regime still stops women from opening bank accounts, starting some kinds of businesses, applying for a passport, or traveling outside the country without permission from a male relative, "restrictions that are arguably more significant in limiting their full economic participation than the driving ban," she says.

### Women's rights and the Constitution

In a 2016 poll, 4 out of 5 Americans thought that the Constitution included an amendment that guaranteed equal rights for women. But the effort to enact such a provision stalled four decades ago.

The #MeToo movement may bring the need for an ERA back into the public conversation, historian Leigh Ann Wheeler wrote recently. "An ERA could establish a constitutional foundation for challenging discrimination that threatens women's health, safety and very lives," she says.

In the 21st century, nations can't afford the cost of barring women from full and equal participation in the workforce. ■



AN OVERDOSE RESPONSE, MALDEN, MASS. BRIAN SNYDER/REUTERS

new laws now includes a seven-day limit on opioid prescriptions and establishes an online database to ensure those addicted don't jump from doctor to doctor to get quick refills.

### Alternatives to drugs

In Colorado, Kaiser Permanente offers a \$100 eight-week course to help patients recognize the dangers of opioid use. Participants learn that higher doses and longer periods of use increase the possibility of ad-



# Coarse words and new thinking

Words matter because they express thoughts. As is often pointed out, coarse or profane language usually represents an outburst of emotion, not careful reason. It's a mode of thought not conducive to calm and effective problem-solving.

The president of the United States recently used coarse language while discussing important legislation regarding immigrants with members of Congress.

That incident was unfortunate and beneath the dignity of that high office. But more than the need to maintain propriety or adhere to social norms was at stake.

The best lesson here may come in the form of self-examination. It's a good time for everyone to ask themselves if they are nurturing unfair or inaccurate images of people from any racial, ethnic, or religious group.

In this instance the offensive term (there remains disagreement on the exact word or phrase used) expressed a derogatory and dismissive view of the people of Haiti and African countries.

Sometimes, attitudes change with new information. A recent analysis of immigrants to Canada, for example, shows that those from Africa, the Caribbean, and Central America – regions that President Trump said he would like to see fewer immigrants from – are more likely to be employed and receive less government assistance than those from so-called Norway countries (Northern Europe, including Scandinavia).

These “less desirable” immigrants are also on average better educated than native Canadians (27 percent with a college degree in contrast with 18 percent of native Canadians), concludes Arvind Magesan, an associate professor of economics at the University of Calgary, who based his research on 2011 census data (the latest available).

In the US adult immigrants from Africa were more likely than native-born Americans to be college educated (41.7 percent to 28.1 percent), according to an analysis based on 2009 data by the Migration Policy Institute. In addition, “16.7 percent of [immigrant] Africans reported having a higher degree than a bachelor's, compared to 10.2 percent of the native born and 11.0 percent of immigrants [in general],” the report concludes.



In an informal survey of this past Sunday's sermons at churches around the US, The Washington Post found religious leaders reminding their congregations of this opportunity to correct their thinking.

"There were some controversial words spoken this week about the value of people. Talk of others who are not deserving. Let me be clear: These words are not of Christ," the Rev. Chris Danielson told St. Andrew United Methodist Church in West Lafayette, Ind., according to notes made by a parishioner.

In the Bible the disciple Nathanael asks skeptically "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" when he first hears about Jesus. "Can anything good come out of these [African] nations?" Mr. Danielson asked his congregation. "You better believe it, and boy do they have gifts to give."

If words such as these are now heard more frequently, the furor over the use of foul language in the Oval Office may yet yield a blessing.

- By **The Monitor's Editorial Board**

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COMMENTARY > A CHRISTIAN SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

## The true nature of man

A Christian Science perspective: The man of God's creating is spiritual.

Deborah Huebsch

JANUARY 8, 2018 — One day a male friend came into my office, shut the door, grabbed me, and kissed me. I was startled, repulsed, and pushed him away. He was married and so was I – but not to each other. At first I was horrified and afraid, but quickly, in that moment, I turned to prayer, which has been my go-to in times of trouble.

I was surprised when a wave of compassion suddenly came over me. I looked at this man (who was clearly flustered and embarrassed) and thought, “He’s a good man, a God-created man.” In no way was I disregarding his behavior, but my prayer was showing me something different about him in that moment than I had seen in his actions. We had a brief conversation, and when he left, he apologized. I saw him several times over the next few years and our relationship was friendly and without a hint of his earlier behavior.

While this moment of spiritual clarity might seem unexpected, I had been learning from my study of Christian Science about a view of manhood that is distinctly different from what I’d just experienced. The man of God’s creating is spiritual, expressing all the qualities of his creator. The mortal concept of manhood, motivated by power, lust, and control, is not the real man, which is the general term for all men and women, as God’s creation. The mortal concept of man is actually a mistaken view, governed by the destructive desires inherent in mortality. These desires don’t come from God, who created all as spiritual, pure, loving, and good.

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I began to understand this concept of man's true spiritual nature through studying a book called "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," by Christian Science discoverer Mary Baker Eddy. It states: "Jesus beheld in Science the perfect man who appeared to him where sinning mortal man appears to mortals. In this perfect man the Saviour saw God's own likeness, and this correct view of man healed the sick" (pp. 476-477).

When we recognize the true nature of the man of God's creating, the mortal view of man is seen to be a lie. And often, offensive outward behavior fades and remarkable changes become apparent. That day in my office I witnessed such a change. Seeing this individual spiritually, as God's child, wholly good, I noticed an abrupt shift in his demeanor and actions. While my experience is mild in comparison to what we're hearing about in the news, the spiritual fact of man's goodness and immortality remains available and powerful in all situations.

Each of us can have this kind of change in thought. In our prayers, we can endeavor to do as Jesus did – see God's perfect man, right here, right now. This view appreciates and values true manhood and true womanhood. And rather than excusing any degrading actions, it can lift everyone above all impulses that would keep them from expressing their immortal selfhood. These changes of thought begin with each of us, but can support humanity in seeing all men and women as we truly all are.

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