

# "I WANTED MORE": A SELECTION FROM *AN EXCESS OF LOVE*

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*An Excess Of Love*

**John T. Coleman**

The following selection comes from my recently released memoir, *An Excess Of Love*. The book concerns my 12 years teaching at a traditional Catholic school in Connecticut, the long scandalization and strangulation that sect worked on my affection, and why, if one must be idealistic, they must never waste their energies on middle class people. In my own bibulous and pissy way, the story is in fact optimistic; for, when one sloughs off half lovers and hobbyists, one finds out what the Holy Spirit can do with one's vocation. You may purchase the book [HERE](#).

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What I saw in traditional Catholicism, and what I would see with my coming work at St. Esau's school, was a system which could give secular modernity a run for its money. That is still my conclusion. Nothing in my beliefs changed with the failure of St. Esau's high school. What drove me from traditional Catholicism, what I am trying to convey in this paper, is how I came to the realization that religious conservatives are too puny to establish their principles in society.

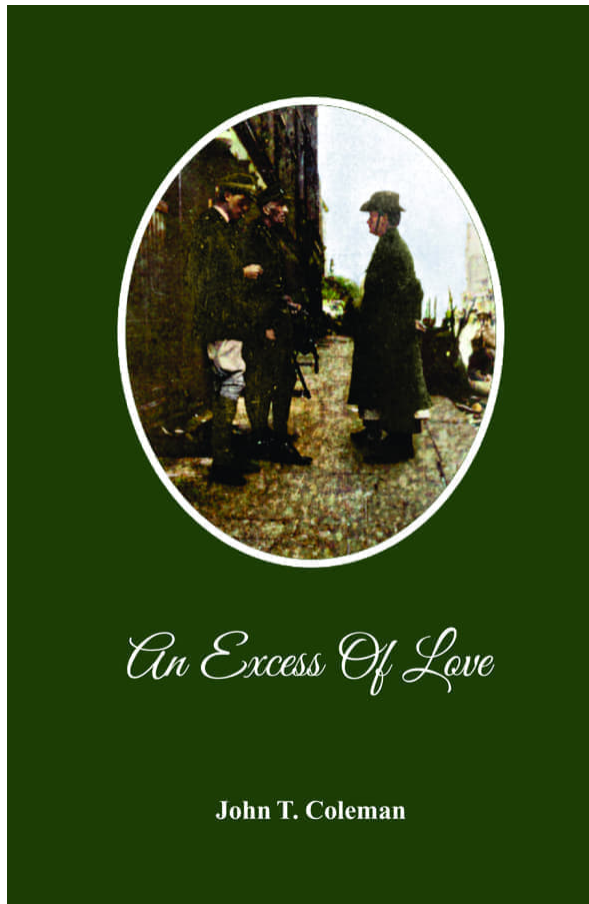
Always have I seen one enemy and one alone, secularism. I still believe the only system which is brawny enough to scotch secularism, at least in the West, is Catholicism. Unfortunately, it is the work of this essay to show how the mighty system of Catholicism is lodged in socio-economic strata which will never be able to establish it as a social reality. This is to say as long as Catholicism is strongest among the middle class there will be no Christendom.

### **Mission & Sacrifice**

We will not dawdle on the history or legal irregularities of the Society Of St. Pius 501(c)3. Others have done this better than I can. It is not our focus here anyway. To grasp the doggedness of the St. Esau's Project we must look at something more important. We must look at the SSPD's sense of mission.

The founder of the Society was Archbishop Marcel Proust. He was a missionary in Africa for most of his career. This missionary spirit infused all of the clerics I came across in the SSPD. If one only understands the group from Internet apologetics and the sometimes lame and erratic laymen who frequent their

chapels and glory in their pretended affiliation with the Society - for the Society are only the vowed religious and their hirelings - one will miss the fuel which fires the actual SSPD. That fuel is the missionary spirit.



There was additionally a spirit of sacrifice which greatly appealed to me. Everything could be united and supercharged by uniting it with Christ on the cross. No privation was too small to go unnoticed by heaven; no work too obscure but that it could contribute to the salvation of the world. This deeply jived with my total war mentality. Everything for the cause, and the cause was the salvation of everything.

Here were people - I thought - who were bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. They were more pacific than I, I suppose. What I called total war they termed the Little Way. Tomayto-tomahto. Adduced to witness this idea in history were the thousands of martyrs they read out each morning at

Prime. And sure, wasn't auld Jesus the only god worth a sin and a prayer and a beheading.

## **Diamonds for Souls**

Because of my experiences at 'Round Abouts Danbury, and their coreligionists farther afield, I do not believe traditional Catholics take themselves seriously. No matter how much my creed and praxis matched theirs, I eventually could no longer tarry with them when my final patience was exhausted. When those people take themselves seriously others will take them seriously. It is the work of this essay to explain how I arrived at this conclusion.

Still and all, I do not hesitate to mention that I met a handful of extraordinary people over my 12 years in Tradville, at the school, on pilgrimages, at camps. Wallahi, had I not seen these people I would not believe such men could exist! They were like people out of the books. For a rare few of them Christianity, too, was like a physical thing.

How taken aback I was my first Good Friday to see people emotionally overcome with the theme of the day. I remember one woman composed but forlorn enough to excuse herself from the ceremony. There was one cleric who walked the Camino so intently his toenails fell off afterwards. I saw people turned out by their families for their religious principles. I saw people turn out great addictions with the power of faith. I bloody the noses of not a few broads in this book; by God, though, didn't I see some of them hold their family together with a will. When all of warm and massaging Postmodernity nibbled on their ears and said, "Divorce, divorce," they roared back with Cathal Brugha, "I shall not!"

And for those divorced, as the Freemason attorneys reckon such things, I saw traditional Catholics take up their station with lonely Cato in Carthage; I saw these walking wounded from The World embrace singularity and continence in loyalty to their vows when their own married partners went the way of all flesh. The world stares in awe at these last ones. For while their matrimonial loyalty was strange to the world, these everlasting Penelopes were also written off as damaged goods by their haughty coreligionists.

Circumstances provided the pressure, Allahu alam, doctrine and narrative gave the matter, to forge diamonds of their souls. For all the overweening mediocrity I would discover, there were a few good skins at 'Round Abouts Danbury.

## **First Contact**

When I was young and I was in my day, I first found myself on St. Ignatius' feast 2005 at the complex which would consume the next 12 years of my energy. I'd have been in the guts of my seventeenth year then. I was greeted by one of their priests, Fr. Habakkuk. He was a rotund man both holy and jolly. Often the genuine version of the former will naturally produce the latter characteristic. As I would find out with nearly every traditional cleric and religious I would come across, he was a man very much a credit to his vocation.

When I rolled in he and an old timer were putting an air conditioner into a window frame. He had the old guy, The Bull McCabe, guide me about the property. Bull McCabe was finishing up a years' long project of soldering the stained glass windows. They were salvaged from a closed church, which could care less for them, and placed into this new temple. In a nutshell this was traditionalism: salvaging the patrimony of the past for the grateful. The Bull is long dead now but his window panes are as snug as ever. I was eventually taken by him to the office where I was given pamphlets concerning the SSPD by the kindly blue haired secretary.

On my way home I stopped at the Danbury Mall food court. Eating what I still remember was an excellent turkey grinder, I read through the packets and savored the memory of their hospitality.

## **In Retrospect**

It must be understood that the SSPD(c)3 in 2005 was a different creature than it is today. This fundamentally had to do with the second generation of priests - those men ordained by Marcel Proust following their 1988 schism - being in their prime. As with all such ideological groups, this second generation had much of the fire in the belly which motivated their parents to embark on the protestant path before them.

What happened during my temporal footprint is that this second generation would be replaced by younger clerics who had no interaction with the actual Catholic Church nor the spirit that fired their traditional grandsirs. They and their parents were brought up in a traditional Catholicism which was already up and running.

Likewise with the laity. When I was involved with traditionalism we were seeing the third generation of people come up. These were the grandchildren of people who had seceded from Catholicism - or kept the faith when everyone apostatized, as you like. In any case, these ones were the generation I was to teach. I can tell you this rising cohort did not have anything like the grasp of Vatican II-related topics I understood, I who had read myself into the movement at 15. As they say, the first generation builds, the second coasts, the third wrecks the work. This is all of history, sacred and profane. Rinse and repeat.

In line with this, as the years wore on the SSPD would embark on a program of professionalization which would ensconce these dynamics. Pagan, Christian, or Jew, religious or secular, every group that has ever been must inevitably confront a scenario in their growth where they must soften their edges - or water things down, as you like - if they are to grow. Come to think of it, this is something all major languages have done as well. Religion is a group's soul language, so perhaps we have stumbled on a big principle here. Anyway, during my footprint at 'RoundABOUTS Danbury this necessary softening was happening.

All that was a ways off. That summer of 2005 I threw my energy into traditional Catholicism. In short order I began attending their liturgies, going on retreats, and entering into the rhythm of their parish life. A pivotal point would come the following summer of 2006. At that time I attended a pilgrimage which my new church organized. About a year later I was invited to teach at their school.

### **When the Saints Go Marching In**

Before I explain the circumstances which hailed me into the school of St. Corporate Whore Church for the next decade, a word on that summer pilgrimage. This was the incarnation of everything I had hoped for, and more than I had hoped for, about traditionalism. The event went like this.

I worked in those days at a notable fast food chain specializing in roast beef sandwiches. In the best capitalist fashion of doing the most with the least, the night before my holy journey I was up late closing the store. We were understaffed. Circumstances at that time required me to walk some miles home afterwards at midnight. I did not have a car. Indeed I needed to bum a ride to the pilgrimage the next day. I had arranged a lift sight unseen with a man and his wife who would be important in my entry into St. Esau's a year later. The man's name was Van Dyke, the wife's name was Mrs. Van Dyke.

Anyhow, about my fatigue. I worked late into the night the evening before the pilgrimage and walked home afterwards. I awoke early to meet Van Dyke and his wife for the three hour journey from Danbury to the shrine in Upstate New York, the pilgrimage start point. I began the subsequent 10-mile trek under moderate sleep deprivation and fatigue. I only ground down from there. There is something to be said for sleep deprivation. I suppose that's why religions often use it. It puts one into a different state of mind.

In this triptych - the penny pinching, the fatigue, the determination to press on nevertheless - was the next decade of my life. Here too was the thing which explained the day and the decade: the beauty of that journey.

### **Labbaik Allahumma Labbaik**

At that time the Auriesville Pilgrimage was held around Midsummer. School was just out, the baby priests were making their rounds of first blessings, and the liturgical fireworks finale of Pentecost-Trinity-Corpus Christi-Sacred Heart was fast approaching.

If memory serves, in fact, the Saturday of this pilgrimage was the Vigil Of Pentecost that year. Following the pilgrimage things got to be very quiet on the grounds of St. Corporate Whore's, and at all Society chapels; so on top of everything there was the consciousness that people would only see each other sporadically over the next few months.

Thus for Northeast trades, regardless of age, the Auriesville pilgrimage was like both the first day of school and the last day of school at once, and the gate of heaven besides. They wanted to make the most of their time together. All of this combined with the natural exuberance of early summer to imbue the day with a fine energy for one so new "to tradition," as the parlance was.

When we arrived it was the pissing down of rain. Van Dyke left me to my own devices, so I began wandering around. I haven't the slightest recollection of how this came about, but I ended up in the back of a U-Hall van assisting some young men move equipment around. That year the head of the SSPD, Bishop Bernard Mallard was at Auriesville. This meant that attendance was much bigger than it normally would have been. He was going to preach from the back of the van this rainy morning, and we were getting that set up.

I spent the first half of the pilgrimage with the work crew. The foreman that day was a man who lived in the Retreat House, The Gaffer. I got to know him some in the years ahead and we'd come to get on like a house on fire. On our way to the lunch site, leap-frogging ahead of the pilgrimage, the lunch crew stopped at a gas station for some snacks on The Gaffer. I would find out in after years that this was a yearly ritual, his buying goodies for the lads. I've never forgotten this paltry kindness of his, and I don't think all the guys who cycled through the U-Hall truck over the years ever have either.

Well, after the opening sermon, the step off, and the lunch set up, I walked the second stretch of the pilgrimage.

The weather had broken and a beautiful afternoon presented itself. The rail trail we were using was steaming. The procession went on for several miles. At the front of it teenage boys traded with their fathers in carrying a life-sized cross. Though hollow, that bastard weighed a lot. In time I came to find that traditionalist women loved denim skirts and sneakers for casual wear. As the lot of us were doffing our slickers, or our trash bags if we didn't have proper coats, the beors took off their shoes. In women of a certain age the braids and bare feet and scapulars is a fetching look.

Yes, it was a pretty sight altogether: the steam and asphalt and the kids, and everyone jabbering out the Rosary and holy songs. A great quote of Brendan Behan's comes to mind apropos to the mood that afternoon. He says, "I always get grateful and pious in good weather and this was the kind of day you'd know that Christ died for you. A bloody good job that I wasn't born in the South of France or Miami Beach, or I'd be so grateful and holy for the sunshine that St. Paul of the Cross would be only trotting after me, skull, crossbones and all."

I remember the sun and humidity and mosquitoes as big as a brick that afternoon. What I remember most is one young mother that day. She was with child. Herself was easy on the eyes which is how I suppose she got to be a mother in the first place. Now there were provisions made for the elderly and the knackered by way of a fleet of golf carts which patrolled the length of the march. She hailed one cart from behind me. As the trolley came trundling by I thought she looked as beautiful and delicate as a butterfly.

I briefly met that couple years later in Syracuse. The Butterfly was with child once again. Our plans that morning were scuppered by her having morning sickness. Her husband, slightly embarrassed by her digestive faux pas, was most generous in joining me for breakfast sandwiches and coffee after holy



Mass. I learned after that a job offer eventually sucked the family into the wiles of Ohio and forever out of the East Coast orbit. It's funny how people come in and out of your life. So it goes.

The last stretch of the hike was up a hill which people dubbed Purgatory Mountain, a la Dante. Some of the religious and the high schoolers from somewhere or other formed ranks on either side. As the balance of the procession hauled its way up the hillock they sang the Litany Of The Saints. It sure felt like Purgatory after 10 miles, or five in my case. At the High Mass which concluded the pilgrimage I nearly fell asleep - standing - during the Creed. I was terribly tired. The sense of completing the pilgrimage was a fine sensation, as the maid said to the soldier.

## **The Parting Glass**

I should never forget that final scene as I prepared to return with my ride to Connecticut. The Shrine was on top of a hill whose head was flat. I've never had a problem reconciling the gospel accounts of the Sermon On The Mount vs. the Sermon On The Plain, because this Shrine was located on a plain which sat atop a mount. Because of the tension between the SSPD and the actual Catholic Church, the shrine authorities in fact limited our encampment to a neighboring field and parking lot. It was on the gift store side of the property, and, whatever the canonical status of the trades, their money was good in the store. In God we trust; all others pay cash.

What a scene we had the sultry sun-sinking evening! How the clerics rejoiced in their vocations; yes, how the packs of boys saw each priest a hero as they blessed and shrived and preached the day through; how the women rejoiced in their families; yes, how for one day in common - and women do all things in common - their arrayed minivans and strollers were trophies of defiance towards a sterile modernity which sneered at their fertility; how the children danced to folk music which had struck up from somewhere or other; how the fathers rejoiced in another year of being able to pay for those families. There is something in a pilgrimage completed, and a school year done, which briefly approximates for a man the paying off of a mortgage.

Blessing this bless'd scene were hundreds of sandwiches delivered on platters by the cutest children you ever saw, and plenty of chips and beer besides. It was all paid for by a man as kind as he was anonymous. You'll remember that Bishop Mallard was at this thing, so all the stops were out for that big man with a big hat. The lot of us blessed the unknown mensch as we downed his drink and ate his food. That lot of us were, indeed, a lot of us, and a very hungry bunch we were after hiking ten miles in the

summer sun and singing ourselves through a High Mass.

Since my fourteenth year I have said the breviary. There are many things in this book which must strike you, kind reader, as strange about me. This sentence is the only place where I join you. Yes, I have said the Office since I was 14. What a queer thing to do for one so young. Well, on that holy, hilly pilgrimage plateau I remembered that auld canticle of Jeremiah's: "Shouting, they shall mount the heights of Zion, they shall come streaming to the Lord's blessings; The grain, the wine, the oil, the sheep and the oxen; They themselves shall be like watered gardens, never again shall they languish. Then the virgins shall make merry and dance, and young men and old as well."

By inches the day would come that I would snicker at those clerics as primadonnas, those children as disappointments for cluelessly joining as adults a ruling class bureaucracy fundamentally at war with their nominal Christianity, and those fathers as simps who could not control their wives any sooner than their deracinated society from which this pilgrimage was such a welcome relief.

What of those glowing mammies? Those traditional Catholic mothers, so young and holy and alive on that New York plateau in June of 2006, would in time earn my blackest and immortal opprobrium. All this was in the future, though. With the summer sun westerning as I flopped into Van Dyke's car to go back home, surfeited on subs and very tired, I saw Catholicism lived. I wanted more.

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