

# On Transparency

2024-07-25

Transparency is not a virtue. Sharing too much of who you are with other people is a symptom of disintegration – I am not unless I am seen to be.

The hunger to be seen and praised, seen and envied, or seen and desired, is a perversion of the true need to be known and loved.<sup>1</sup>

Freedom of self-revelation is an essential element of your dignity as a person. You ought to be free to choose what you share of yourself and with whom you share it. This freedom imposes a moral obligation on each person to actively guard the secrets of every other person – neither demanding transparency from others, nor exposing their secrets to others.

## **Shame is not a moral foundation**

There is no “secular” moral foundation. Because “secular” by its nature provides no moral foundation in any area.

Freedom from self-incrimination (5th Amendment). Freedom from unwarranted search and seizure (4th Amendment). Rules against gossip. Privileged communication between spouses, priests in confessional, doctor-patient, attorney-client. Often discussed as though they are grounded in protection from shame, or protection from coercion through fear of shame. Misunderstanding. True moral foundation is integrity of personhood. My secrets, my revelation of myself. My choice of how I present myself to others.

## **Nakedness**

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>“The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall actually survive that examination, shall find approval, shall please God. To please God... to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness... to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain.” C.S. Lewis, *Weight of Glory*.

<sup>2</sup>Genesis 2:25, NET

Adam's physical nakedness mirrored his psychological and spiritual nakedness. He was fully exposed, fully transparent. Yet unashamed. His lack of shame is not primarily symbolic of his fall from moral perfection, but rather is an expression of his not yet fully developed personhood. Sin, by itself, is not sufficient for the existence of shame. Young children<sup>3</sup> are sinners yet they are unashamed of their nakedness. Their inner self, their secret depths, have not yet been formed fully enough to be recognized and then concealed. They, like Adam, lack a *self* that can be ashamed. Further, concealing one's self once it has developed is not inherently an expression of shame. If Adam's sowing of fig leaves was a consequence of his sin, then we should expect the inverse to be displayed by the saints in glory, since they will, then, be free of sin. Behold I saw the saints, and they were naked and they were not ashamed. Rather, we see the inverse. We do not long to be unclothed but further clothed.<sup>4</sup>

We cover our nakedness, we conceal our selves, because we are maturing souls, not because we are ashamed. Adam ate of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and, through that newfound knowledge, grew out of his childish immaturity.<sup>5</sup> "Who told you that you were naked?", not "who told you to be ashamed of your nakedness?". Adam's sin was not that he grew in knowledge. Jesus grew in wisdom without sinning. Adam grew in maturity, his "eyes were opened", and then he discovered that he was naked. The covering of our nakedness, the concealing of our soul, develops in step with the deepening of our soul. We create and discover ourselves as we mature, and thereby grow a self that can be hidden or shared.

Sin breeds fear. Adam was not afraid because he was naked. He was afraid because the same lies<sup>6</sup> that tempted him to eat of the fruit, the lies that he held out as true to all the world when he took the bite, still poisoned<sup>7</sup> his soul. Fear breeds sin. Adam, in his fear, lies to God: I was afraid because I was naked. You created me this way: naked, vulnerable, weak. That I am naked is a problem, it makes me afraid, and it's Your fault. I once was blind, but now I see. You made me naked so that You could hurt me, so that nothing could protect me from Your all-seeing eye.

The integrity of your secrets, your personhood, your self, is sacrosanct. God did not expose Adam and Eve with His all-seeing eye. He gave them coverings and allowed them to share with Him what they chose. He permitted them to cover themselves with their lies<sup>8</sup> God covers our nakedness. And behold I saw them clothed in white robes.

He remembers your sin no more. Secrecy from yourself as grace.

<sup>3</sup>before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good", Isaiah 7:16.

<sup>4</sup>2 Corinthians 5:4, NKJV

<sup>5</sup>Contrast again with the child of Isaiah 7:16.

<sup>6</sup>That God is not good. That God is against him, holding out on him, keeping him down. That God is afraid of Adam growing. That God is not Just and so wouldn't really allow death into the world. That God is not powerful and so couldn't allow death into the world.

<sup>7</sup>God is not merciful and so will not forgive. God is not Just and so His wrath will be unsparing. God is blind and cannot see. God is foolish and cannot see through deception.

<sup>8</sup>The woman You gave to be with me. The serpent deceived me.

Isaiah 3:17 - uncover their nakedness. Judgment and exposure of secrets.

God fashioned clothes for Adam because seeing is not passive. Seeing changes the one who sees and that which is seen.<sup>9</sup>

To know yourself, to discover and shape the your depths, and then choose to share some parts of yourself with some others is a sacred gift and among the highest of your work as a person.

Practical – cannot capture who you are in labels. Not putting that weight on others. Hiding things from yourself – do not let right hand know what left hand is doing. Preserving yourself – seeing is not passive - you change when seen and change what you see. You see the other as an other that sees you. To talk about another is to dehumanize them - to abstract from their reality, to turn them into a generality rather than a particular person. Same offense as labeling. Secret name. Power of a name.

This includes, but is broader than, a right to privacy. The concept of a right to privacy carries with it an implied source of shame. If you're not doing anything wrong, what do you have to hide.<sup>10</sup> Adam and Eve did not sow fig leaves solely out of shame. If shame for their sin was the only reason, then the saints in glory, having been fully freed from the shame of sin, would again be naked. [N]ot because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed.<sup>11</sup>

Connect with forgiveness/reconciliation (covering the sins of others, guarding their secrets even from yourself), Matt 18 procedure (working issues out without unnecessarily involving other people), love forgets wrongs, God is in secret, confession of sin to others.

You learn how and when and with whom to share parts of this developing self.

If I love a person, I will love that which most makes him a person: the secrecy, the hiddenness, the solitude of his own individual being, which God alone can penetrate and understand.<sup>12</sup>

The deep desire of our hearts is not to be seen and loved. But rather to be clothed and loved. Not to be only loved if we expose ourselves, if we reduce our depths to an abstraction you can understand and accept. To be chosen, to be covenanted, by one who is able to understand our depths but who covers us, who allows us to hide and learn and grow and change without threat of leaving us.

Transparency requires an Other (or an I) with which to be transparent. The Other must cooperate/participate. Therefore, you cannot be transparent with just any person.

Who we are is worked out in relationship. Part of who I am is who I am for others – as they see me, as I

<sup>9</sup>The absurdities of the affect of observation in quantum physics come to mind.

<sup>10</sup>In discussions of privacy as a secular legal right, perhaps this appeal to shameful acts merits response, but we are here concerned with a moral claim grounded in person-hood, rather than a legal claim grounded in a secular governmental structure.

<sup>11</sup>2 Corinthians 5:4, NKJV

<sup>12</sup>Merton, No Man Is An Island, p. 245

seek to be seen, and as they are seen and seek to be seen by me. No man is an island unto himself. Part of who I become is who I become for others, who they want me to become, who they become, and who they become for me. To expose an other, to uncover their nakedness, to present an image of an other to myself or anyone else is to take from them their power to decide who they are and who they want to become. Canaan was cursed not because of the image that struck his eye, but because he chose to hold that image out as his father, both to himself and to his brothers.

To be loved – to be deeply known and still accepted. To be understood, but not consumed. To know and accept in return. We do need to be seen, be known, be accepted. To be loved and not merely observed. To know and be known.

Conflict between being known and preserving the secrecy of our souls. Accepted and allowed to be clothed. Even God permits us to hide.

Adam knew Eve. Intimacy. Vulnerability - able to be hurt.

Why we often find it so difficult to be transparent with our parents – they already have seen too much of us, to reveal more is to *be* less.

Do not uncover the nakedness of another.

Even honorable things - see professional sports, twitch, Twitter babes, Facebook. Radical/Excessive transparency is a symptom of disintegration. I am not unless I am seen to be.

## **Exemplified**

Exemplified by God, Jesus, Paul (vs Saul). God controls His self-revelation – the Father reveals Himself only to the Son and the Son reveals Him only to those whom He chooses.

Clothes, hiding in the garden, clothing yourself with your works.

## **In justice**

Reflected in our practice of and intuitions of Justice. Gossip, tattling, breaking confidence, libel. Attorney-client, priest-confessor, doctor-patient, spousal privileges – less than a handful of states recognize a parent-child privilege. Obverse of right to privacy. Torture, privacy, spying,

## Authenticity

Impossible to express the depths of you in any moment much less the ever-growing you. How much and what you share of yourself is necessarily always a choice.

secret place where the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing.

Putting on church face, turning it off to answer the phone.

Self-honesty

A huge part of growth from childhood to manhood is a growing self-knowledge which allows for a more honest self-revelation.

Required for personal growth – 1) to discern who you are, you need freedom to explore alternative identities, 2) to change who you are you need freedom to drop your past and aspire to new things.

## Transparency in Leadership

Transparency in leadership. Can't model what is unseen/unshown.

## Guarding Others

Allowing others to control their self-revelation is essential to respecting them as people. Guarding others. Honor others not only by not talking about them, but by not holding them to what others say about them. Accept as true about another only what they say about themselves. tell no one (transfiguration, messiah, healings). Jesus taught in parables. Abraham having Sarah be non-transparent about marriage, or lack of transparency re the sacrifice of Isaac. Jesus on mount of transfiguration. Joshua on mount Sinai.

## Every Idle Word

Secrets of man exposed by God at Judgment. Exposing them before is standing in the place of God.

My name is George. I'm unemployed and I live with my parents.<sup>13</sup>

O Lord, you examine me and know. You know when I sit down and when I get up; even from far away you understand my motives. You carefully observe me when I travel or when I lie down to rest; you are aware of everything I do. ... Where can I go to escape your spirit? Where

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<sup>13</sup>George Costanza, Seinfeld

can I flee to escape your presence? ... You knew me thoroughly; my bones were not hidden from you, when I was made in secret<sup>14</sup>

[N]ow I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known.<sup>15</sup>

[H]e cannot find himself in himself alone ... he must find himself in and through others.<sup>16</sup>

I cannot be candid with other men unless I understand myself and unless I am prepared do to everything possible in order to understand them.<sup>17</sup>

Great crowds followed him, and he healed them all. But he sternly warned them not to make him known.<sup>18</sup>

[N]o one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.<sup>19</sup>

The heart knows it's own bitterness, and a stranger does not share it's joy.<sup>20</sup>

When you argue a case with your neighbor, do not reveal the secret of another person.<sup>21</sup>

God will judge the secrets of men.<sup>22</sup>

Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and people will not see his shame.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Psalm 139:1-15, NET

<sup>15</sup>1 Corinthians 13:12, NASB

<sup>16</sup>Merton, No Man Is An Island, p. xv

<sup>17</sup>Merton, No Man Is An Island, p. 194

<sup>18</sup>Matthew 12:15-16, NET

<sup>19</sup>Matthew 11:27, NASB

<sup>20</sup>Proverbs 14:10

<sup>21</sup>Proverbs 25:9, NET

<sup>22</sup>Romans 2:16

<sup>23</sup>Revelation 16:15