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In the early 1990s, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne was the setting for a synodical controversy over the involuntary retirement of the Seminary's president, Robert Preus. Powerful men in Synod started to discuss closing "the Fort" and selling the property. Thankfully, those plans went nowhere and by the late '90s, CTSFW had recovered. It would remain what it is today—an essential part of the synodical system for training men for the pastoral ministry, and now also women for service as deaconesses.

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In American culture, there is no virtue that meets with more skepticism and suspicion than the good of patience. We live in a supremely impatient society. In such an activist culture, patience is disdained for its perceived passivity. The patient can be seen as impotent spectators, doomed to an inconsequential passing of time without achievement or fulfillment. To be patient is equated with doing nothing; and to do nothing is to achieve nothing; and to achieve nothing is to be nothing.

### 10 Let Not Your Hearts Be Troubled By Dr. Scott R. Murray

As people are recovering from the devastating effects of COVID-19, many feel that their trial is a sign of their weakness, sin, or unrighteousness. When trial and testing come upon us, we so easily presume that they are a sign of God's wrath, that He is punishing us with such burdens and sorrows. If we find the meaning of our trouble in our own hearts, we will never know what God wants to teach us by our trial.

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## For the Life of the World

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# Blessed Is the Man Who Waits

James G. Bushur



Photo: Erik M. Lunsford/The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

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*“Blessed is the man who waits.” Daniel 12:12*

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Historically, oppressed and victimized minorities are tempted toward two opposite extremes—zealotry or despair. The passion of zealotry often compels us to seek victory at all costs, a victory that idolizes the world and finds fulfillment in its power and pleasure. The zealous can be tempted to take power from their oppressors and wield it for themselves in retributive vengeance. Such zealotry often takes the form of activism, as anger arouses the will and gives birth to actions that serve the selfish desire for revenge. The Jewish rebellions against Rome in the 1st and 2nd centuries demonstrate the power of zealotry. Zeal tempts the strong to conquer their oppressors and take the power of the world for themselves.




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**The patient can be seen as impotent spectators, doomed to an inconsequential passing of time without achievement or fulfillment. To be patient is equated with doing nothing; and to do nothing is to achieve nothing; and to achieve nothing is to be nothing. Patience is the Christian form of life and it is supremely active. However, the aim of the patient way of life is not to eliminate or to evade suffering, but to bear it, to endure it, and finally to outlast it.**

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The passion of despair, on the other hand, compels us to repudiate this world and to surrender it to the oppressors. The passion of despair is resigned to perpetual defeat. Despairing minorities can be tempted to wash their hands of any responsibility for the world, withdraw from its petty conflicts, and orient their hope toward a transcendent utopia. Such despair often takes the form of pacifism, as sorrow dampens the spirit and gives birth to the moral paralysis of surrender and self-pity. Ancient gnostic sects followed this path, tempting the vulnerable to flee the world for a spiritual fulfillment in an alternate reality.

In the United States, the holy, Christian Church finds itself facing a fork in the road. Since the days of Emperor Theodosius I (379 AD) Christianity has enjoyed privileged status in western European culture. As the “establishment,” the Church has enjoyed a profound freedom to wield political, legal, intellectual, and even cultural power, according to its own mission and purpose. Yet, perhaps many recognize that the Church’s privileged status in the present age has come to an end. The tragic fragmentation of the Church since the Reformation and the rise of secularism in its countless forms have pushed the Church to the fringe of society. Politically, legally, intellectually, and culturally the voice of orthodox Christianity is diminishing.

Zealotry or despair—which path shall we follow? Shall we seek to regain power in this world and wield it against our opponents? Shall we surrender this world to those who oppose us, withdraw from conflicts that seem insurmountable, and seek fulfillment in a transcendent realm? Shall we idolize the world or shall we repudiate it? These paths appear to follow opposite trajectories, but in fact share a common goal. Both paths tempt us with the desire to avoid suffering and sorrow. The zealous would end their suffering by taking power from their oppressors and using it for the pleasure of revenge. The despairing

would end their suffering by fleeing the conflict and avoiding the sorrow of an inevitable defeat.

In America, the Church stands before this fork in the road; yet, our present situation is not the first time that zealotry and despair have tempted the Church. For the first three centuries of its existence, the Church faced wave after wave of hostility. Early Christians faced political exclusion from the ruling class, legal persecution by city magistrates, intellectual ridicule from the philosophical elite, and cultural contempt from pagan society. Since the beginning of the 2nd century, Roman rulers identified the Christian Church as a “superstition” and a dangerous “contagion” that needed to be quarantined for the good of society.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, as an oppressed and persecuted minority, the ancient Church experienced the inclinations toward zealotry and despair. Some were tempted to accept the call of Jewish zealots to take up the sword in rebellion against Roman rule. Others were tempted to follow certain gnostic teachers in repudiating the material world and disdaining the body as the source of suffering and sorrow. The ancient Church rejected both paths in favor of a third—the path of patience or, better, long-suffering. *The Epistle to Diognetus* (150 AD) claims patience or “long-suffering” as the central virtue of God’s character.<sup>2</sup> Tertullian (200 AD), a Christian catechist in Carthage, wrote the first treatise dedicated to patience as the “highest virtue.” Gregory Thaumaturgus (240 AD), the bishop of Pontus, adds patience to the four cardinal virtues of the pagan philosophers, describing it as “that virtue peculiarly ours.”<sup>3</sup> And Cyprian (250 AD), bishop of Carthage, during a deadly plague and one of the most intense persecutions of the Church under Emperor Decius, wrote a truly profound theological treatise designed to focus his flock in a single direction: *On the Good of Patience*.

Yet in American culture, there is no virtue that meets with more skepticism

and suspicion than the good of patience. We live in a supremely impatient society. “Seize the day!” “Life is short!” “Time and tide wait for no man!” Such ancient aphorisms have all been transformed into calls for action, boldness, and ambition. “A man is defined by his actions,” we are told, so “just do it.” The politics of our day feed this activism by agitating the electorate with crisis after crisis, each marketed in ways to effect immediate action. In such an activist culture, patience is disdained for its perceived passivity. The patient can be seen as impotent spectators, doomed to an inconsequential passing of time without achievement or fulfillment. To be patient is equated with doing nothing; and to do nothing is to achieve nothing; and to achieve nothing is to be nothing.


From the beginning of his treatise, Cyprian rejects the definition of patience as passivity or inactivity. “We do not speak great things, we live them.”<sup>4</sup> This striking aphorism rejects the kind of patience expounded by pagan philosophers. Patience is the Christian form of life and it is supremely active. However, the aim of the patient way of life is not to eliminate or to evade suffering, but to bear it, to endure it, and finally to outlast it. Cyprian rejects both zealotry and despair as forms of impatience. Both paths seek to avoid suffering, to evade sorrow, and to circumvent the anguish of this world. For Cyprian, such impatience is the essence of sin and the genetic trait generated out of the devil himself. “The devil suffered impatience that man was made in the image of God,” writes the bishop of Carthage. This impatience the devil then engendered in humanity. Impatient for truth, Adam settled for the devil’s lies. Impatient with God’s discipline, Cain murdered his brother. Impatient for food, Esau sold his birthright. Impatient for Moses’ descent from the mountain, Israel formed a golden calf.<sup>5</sup> All sin is impatience, a failure to persevere, and so always “falls short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23).

For Cyprian, patience is the supreme genetic trait of God’s own life. “From him patience begins... the origin and greatness of patience proceed from God as its author.”<sup>6</sup> And so, it becomes children to imitate their Father. Indeed, the patience of God is manifested in those generated from His Seed. It is seen in Abel “who initiated and consecrated the origin of martyrdom.”<sup>7</sup> It is seen in Abraham who bore the command to offer his son, in Isaac who suffered the binding, in Jacob who makes peace with his brother, in Joseph, Moses, David, and all the righteous. Yet, it is only in Christ that “a full and perfect patience” is finally “consummated.”<sup>8</sup> As the true Son, Jesus gives form to the perfect patience of the Father. Although righteous, He bears the sins of the world; though immortal, He suffers death; though guiltless, He is reckoned with sinners. Jesus even “bears Judas to the last with a long patience.” He did not “openly point him out, nor refuse the kiss of the traitor.”<sup>9</sup>

Some may object, claiming love as the supreme virtue of God’s nature. Yet, Cyprian points out that Paul calls love the greatest precisely because it “abides” (1 Cor. 13:13). “Charity is the bond of brotherhood... take from it patience...it does not endure. Take from it the substance of bearing and of enduring, and it continues with no roots nor strength.”<sup>10</sup> For Cyprian, patience actively and persistently struggles. Yet, patience does not seek fulfillment in the ruling of this world nor in the rejection of this world; it seeks fulfillment in the redemption of this world, in the repentance of sinners, in the resurrection, and in the manifestation of Christ in the glory of His Father. The resurrection and the life of the world to come gives Christians the freedom to be patient, the freedom to turn the cheek, to love the enemy, and “to bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

For Cyprian, patience is freedom because it has no boundaries—both its beginning and its end reside in God

and so, patience is the only path for Christians. Thus, Cyprian ends with a final exhortation. “Let us wait for him, beloved brethren... let us consider his patience in our persecutions and sufferings; let us give an obedience full of expectation for his advent.”<sup>11</sup> This exhortation points to the example of the martyrs who, as Cyprian points out, continue to endure the command of God to wait (Rev. 6:9-11).

Cyprian’s exhortation needs to be heard again in our day. Our fulfillment is not found in ruling or rejecting this world; it is found in the advent of Christ, the repentance of sinners, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come. May our patience be a sign of God’s enduring mercy and a testimony to the hope of the resurrection. On that day, the beatitude will be fulfilled: “Blessed is he who waits” (Dan. 12:12). 

- 1 See Pliny the Younger’s correspondence with the emperor Trajan.
- 2 See *Epistle to Diognetus* 8.7, 9.2.
- 3 Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Oration and Panegyric Addressed to Origen*, 12 (ANF, vol 6, p 33).
- 4 Cyprian, *On the Good of Patience*, 3 (ANF, vol 5, p 484).
- 5 Cyprian, *On the Good of Patience*, 19 (ANF, vol 5, p 489).
- 6 Cyprian, *On the Good of Patience*, 3 (ANF, vol 5, p 484).
- 7 Cyprian, *On the Good of Patience*, 10 (ANF, vol 5, p 486).
- 8 Cyprian, *On the Good of Patience*, 7 (ANF, vol 5, p 486).
- 9 Cyprian, *On the Good of Patience*, 6 (ANF, vol 5, pp 485-486).
- 10 Cyprian, *On the Good of Patience*, 15 (ANF, vol 5, p 488).
- 11 Cyprian, *On the Good of Patience*, 24 (ANF, vol 5, pp 490-491).

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