

Quotes from Brennan Manning

1 On Scripture

I am deeply distressed by what I can only call in our Christian culture the idolatry of the Scriptures. For many Christians, the Bible is not a pointer to God but God himself. In a word – bibliolatry. God cannot be confined to a leather-bound book. I develop a nasty rash around people who speak as if mere scrutiny of its pages will reveal precisely how God thinks and precisely what God wants.

The four Gospels are the key to knowing Jesus. But conversely, Jesus is the key to knowing the meaning of the gospel – and of the Bible as a whole. Instead of remaining content with the bare letter, we should pass on to the more profound mysteries that are available only through intimate and heartfelt knowledge of Jesus. (*The Signature of Jesus*, Manning, 1996, p. 174-175).

2 On the Gospel

2.1 God's wrath is not averted by Christ's shed blood

... Likewise, the god whose moods alternate between graciousness and fierce anger, the god who is tender when we are good and relentlessly punishing when we are bad, the god who exacts the last drop of blood from his Son so that his just anger, evoked by sin, may be appeased, is not the God revealed by and in Jesus Christ. And if he is not the God of Jesus, he does not exist. (*Above All*, Smith and Manning, 2003, p. 58-59)

2.2 Forgiveness comes before repentance

Thus the sequence of forgiveness and then repentance, rather than repentance and then forgiveness, is crucial for the understanding of the gospel of grace. (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Manning, 1990, p. 73)

2.3 God is not the judge

Have you learned to think of the Father as the judge, the spy, the disciplinarian, the punisher? If you think that way, you are wrong. (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Manning, 1990, p. 75)

2.4 Universalism

Fyodor Dostoyevsky caught the shock and scandal of the gospel of grace when he wrote: "At the last Judgement Christ will say to us, 'Come you also! Come, drunkards! Come, weaklings! Come, children of shame!' And he will say to us: 'Vile beings, you who are in the image of the beast and bear his mark, but come all the same, you as well.' ... " (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Manning, 1990, p. 17)

... As far as the eye can see, the landscape is dotted with people. And they are all singing, "King of kings and Lord of lords." ... They begin a rhythmic chant: "Lord

Jesus Christ, God-hero. ... The roar swells ... I look at the Man. ... "Peace be to you," he says. His words are more of a command than a greeting. "I know all about each one of you." ... The role call begins ... I see Sandi Patti step forward, ... Madonna ... Saddam Hussein ... Hitler and Gandhi ... Idi Amin and Billy Graham ... the prophet Amos and Hugh Hefner ... On and on it goes. All the famous, powerful people who have ever lived and the millions of unsung, uncelebrated ones ... everyone who has ever lived. ...

The content of this dream is more real than the book you are holding in your hand. (*The Signature of Jesus*, Manning, 1996, p. 223-227).

3 On Mysticism

3.1 Contemplative prayer requires cessation of thought

"Grabbing ahold" of God is the goal of contemplative prayer. That is why the first step in faith is to stop thinking about God at the time of prayer.

(*The Signature of Jesus*, Manning, 1996, p. 198)

1. Take a few minutes to relax your body ...
2. Choose a single sacred word or phrase ... without moving your lips, repeat the sacred word inwardly, slowly, and often.
3. When distractions come ... simply return to listening to your sacred word.
4. After a 20 minute period of prayer, conclude with the Lord's Prayer, a favorite psalm, ...

(*The Signature of Jesus*, Manning, 1996, p. 203-204; compare with *Open Mind, Open Heart*, Keating, p. 49, 139-141, a book Manning recommends)

Interviewer: You write about living in the present moment. How can we live this way more effectively?

Manning: First, I would recommend Brother Lawrence's classic book, *The Practice of the Presence of God*. *Silence on Fire* by William O'Shannon is helpful as well, as is Thomas Keating's *Open Mind, Open Heart*.

[July 1997 interview with *Discipleship Journal*].

Having chosen a sacred word, we do not change it during the prayer period, for that would be to start thinking again. ... When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word. "'Thoughts' is an umbrella term for every perception including sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, reflections, and commentaries. (*Open Mind, Open Heart*, Keating, p. 49, 139-141)

3.2 Contemplative prayer requires the use of repetitive words or phrases

Choose a single sacred word or phrase ... without moving your lips, repeat the sacred word inwardly, slowly, and often. (*The Signature of Jesus*, Manning, 1996, p. 203-204)

Next, try this simple exercise in faith: gently close your eyes and assume any position that is comfortable so long as you keep your spine straight ... Imagine Jesus glancing

at you either the way he glanced at the apostle John in the Upper Room ... For ten minutes, pray over and over the first strophe of Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing." (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Manning, 1990, p. 206)

"She came to me in great distress saying she did not know how to practice mental prayer, meditation, centering prayer and that she could not contemplate but only say vocal prayers. ... I saw that in simply saying the Lord's Prayer over and over, she was experiencing pure contemplation." (*The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Manning, 1990, p. 82, quoting the mystic Teresa of Avila)

3.3 Contemplative prayer is essential and more important than Scripture

Most of the Christians I meet, myself included, were raised in a devotional spirituality that encouraged external works of piety such as attending church, Bible reading, Scripture memorization, prayer groups, retreats, spiritual reading, and quiet times of confession, adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and intercession. These devotions aimed at developing and nurturing our relationship with God. They led to a biblical *metanoia*, the personal conversion we needed to undergo in order to become true disciples of Jesus. But, as Shannon notes, it was a metanoia of behavior – forsaking the self-indulgent lifestyle of fornication, sexual irresponsibility, feuds and wrangling, jealousy, greed, bad temper, quarrels, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and similar things, and the sturdy effort to acquire the virtues and attitudes compatible with the mind of Christ. Devotional spirituality led to a new way of doing but not necessarily of seeing. It focused more on behavior than on consciousness; more on doing God's will and performing the devotional acts that please him than on experiencing God as God truly is. "A crude way of putting it would be to say that I spent so much time doing the things that would please God that I had no time left just to be with God." [9] Acknowledging the critical importance of a spirituality of devotions and its many valuable insights, contemplative spirituality tends to emphasize the need for a change in consciousness, a new way of seeing God, others, self, and the world. It is not enough that we behave better, we must come to see reality differently. (*The Signature of Jesus*, Manning, 1996, p. 201-202, and quoting [9] *Silence on Fire* by Shannon)

Contemplative prayer is simply experiencing what we already possess. ... During a conference on contemplative prayer, the question was put to Thomas Merton, "How can we best help people to attain union with God? His answer was very clear: We must tell them that they are already united with God. "Contemplative prayer is nothing other than 'coming into consciousness' of what is already there." (*The Signature of Jesus*, Manning, 1996, p. 197)

In my personal life the greater part of each year is devoted to writing, thinking, and speaking about God, Jesus, faith, contemplative prayer, the gospel lifestyle, and so forth. It is a curious phenomenon that such noble Christian enterprises distance me from God. (I assume that this is true for all Christian writers, preachers, and teachers, as well as songwriters, musicians, and singers.) Constantly holding forth *about* God does not of itself lead to being *with* God. Writing *about* God somehow takes me away from directly responding to God in the present moment. Preaching *about* Jesus somehow clouds my presence to the Reality I am proclaiming. In both

situations, what is missing is any sense of felt intimacy with God through faith. ... The Word I preach must become incarnate in my own experience. It is the journey from Haran to Canaan, the pilgrimage from theory into reality, from unawareness to awareness, from trivial concerns to unified consciousness with Jesus. As Christ is formed in us, we come to know him more deeply. "Maybe it sounds arrogant to say we come to know Christ as we persevere in contemplative prayer. But the truth is not less than this. ..."

(*The Signature of Jesus*, Manning, 1996, p. 199-200)

Perhaps the gut issue is not how much theology we have studied or how much Scripture we have memorized. All that really matters is this: *Have you experienced the furious longing of God or not?* This very question provoked the brilliant Karl Rahner to prophesy: "In the days ahead, you will either be a mystic (one who has experienced God for real) or nothing at all."

(*The Furious Longing of God*, Manning, 2009, p. 129, emphasis in the original.)

"The only cure for the angst of modern man is mysticism." – Thomas Merton

(*The Furious Longing of God*, Manning, 2009, p. 63)

3.4 On the darkness of contemplative spirituality

While the first conversion was characterized by joy ... and a profound sense of God's presence, the second is marked by a dryness, barrenness, desolation, and a profound sense of God's *absence*. The dark night is an indispensable stage of spiritual growth both for the individual Christian and the church. Merton writes: "There is an absolute need for the solitary, bare, dark, beyond-thought, beyond-feeling type of prayer ..." (*The Signature of Jesus*, Manning, 1996, p. 132, emphasis in the original.)

Reeling in midair, arching through space, I intuited that I was not only airborne but being carried to a place I had never been before – the heart of Jesus Christ. When he called my name, it was not Richard, my baptismal name, or Brennan, but another word that I shall not disclose, a word that is my real name in the mind of God, a name spoken with indescribable tenderness and written on the white stone (Revelation 2:17). In my first-ever experience of being loved for nothing I had done or could do, I moved back and forth between mild ecstasy, silent wonder, and hushed trembling. The aura might be best described as "bright darkness." The moment lingered on in a timeless now, until without warning I felt a hand grip my heart. It was abrupt and startling. (*Above All*, Smith and Manning, 2003, p. 96-97)

... the *kataphatic* way is the way of light: we talk about God by affirming of God all the perfections we see in creatures. We have experiences of goodness and justice and compassion and we say: God is like this. ... But the *kataphatic* way can only tell us *about* God. ... That is why there has always been another way of "talking" about God: the way of silence and darkness. This is known as the *apophatic* way. ... To quote Echart again, the Rhineland mystic ... "Seek God so as never to find him." ... Merton never underestimated the the value of the kataphatic approach to God. ... Yet he believed that this way to God could never be ultimate. ... It is worth nothing that ... Merton speaks of "the apophatic light," even though

the apophatic way is the way of darkness. The mystical tradition abounds in such seemingly paradoxical expressions as: “the dazzling darkness,” “the dark light,” and so on. (*Silence on Fire*, Shannon, 2000, p. 105, emphasis in original; a book Manning recommends for further reading)

3.5 Manning’s clear and persistent advocacy of mysticism

The following table lists the number of times each term appears in each of Manning’s non-fiction books (excluding those that are out of print).

Year of 1st ed.	Book	frequency of terms		
		contemplative	Merton	mystic, *ism
1979	Souvenirs of Solitude	1	2	2
1981	A Glimpse of Jesus	1	4	5
1986	The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus	12	3	14
1988	Signature of Jesus	15	10	7
1990	Ragamuffin Gospel	-	2	5
1994	Abba’s Child	11	17	3
1998	Reflections for Ragamuffins	2	4	9
2001	Ruthless Trust	6	9	15
2002	The Wisdom of Tenderness	2	2	2
2003	Posers, Fakers, and Wannabees	4	15	1
2003	Above All	1 (back cover)	-	-
2003	The Rabbi’s Heartbeat	2	6	-
2006	The Importance of Being Foolish	2	4	1
2009	The Furious Longing of God	1	1	4
2010	Patched Together (autobiography)	-	-	-

Bibliography

1. *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, Manning, 1990, Multnomah.
2. *Reflections for Ragamuffins*, Manning, 1998, HarperOne.
3. *Ruthless Trust*, Manning, 2002, HarperCollins.
4. *Abba’s Child*, Manning, 2002, NavPress.
5. *The Wisdom of Tenderness*, Manning 2002, HarperOne.
6. *The Rabbi’s Heartbeat*, Manning, 2003, NavPress.
7. *Posers, Fakers, and Wannabees*, Manning and James Hancock, 2003, NavPress.
8. *Above All*, Michael W. Smith and Manning, 2003, Thomas Nelson.
9. *Signature of Jesus*, Manning, 2004, Multnomah.
10. *A Glimpse of Jesus*, Manning, 2004, HarperOne.
11. *The Relentless Tenderness of Jesus*, Manning, 2004, Revell.
12. *The Importance of Being Foolish*, Manning, 2006, HarperOne.
13. *Souvenirs of Solitude*, Manning and Arthur Morey, 2009, NavPress.
14. *The Furious Longing of God*, Manning, 2009, David C. Cook.
15. *Patched Together*, Manning, 2010, David C. Cook.

Other sources cited are listed below. These include an interview with Manning, and two books that Manning recommends for further reading in that interview.

1. *Living as God's Beloved: An interview with Brennan Manning and how we can experience God's love*, Discipleship Journal, July/August 1997, NavPress.
<http://www.navpress.com/magazines/archives/article.aspx?id=11697>.
2. *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*, Thomas Keating, 1994, Continuum.
3. *Silence on Fire*, William O'Shannon, 2000, Crossroad.