

On Humility and Pride

C.S. Lewis commented that he believes Pride to be the greatest of all sins. While I do not wish to offend any Churches' dogma concerning what the greatest sin is, at the same time I believe he makes a valid point. In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, it is Pride that causes the rift between God and Satan: "Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven." C.S. Lewis pointed out that Pride is the ultimate source for all evil. If Pride can be defined as placing the self before God, then I find it hard to disagree with this. The only possible exception I can come up with would be Despair. But even so, this can still be tied to Pride: "I am so horrible even God won't love me." See the emphasis on "I am" instead of "God?" I tend to look at Despair as a specialized form of Pride. For those familiar with the way monarchies run, I find the relationship between Pride and Despair similar to that of a King and a Duke: the Duke is officially subordinate to the King, yet often times the practical power a Duke has equals or even exceeds the King's.

But if Pride is defined as placing self before God, then Humility must be to place God before self. I doubt there will be any question on that. But I do think what it means to place God before self is often misunderstood. For some reason, we seem to think that Humility means Modesty (especially the false kind). Well, to a certain extent I must agree, as both are forms of denying oneself. But Modesty tends to imply "holding back" while Humility is really about "letting go." Now, don't get me wrong. "Holding back" may indeed be a virtue at times, but I think such cases fall under the dominion of Prudence, not Humility. When applying for a construction job, one is probably better off wearing blue jeans and a flannel shirt than one's Sunday Best. But Prudence also tells us that there are times when doing less than one's best is wrong.

In the parable of The Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:1-14), we see one guest who didn't dress in a wedding garment. It is easy to overlook the possibility that this man may very well have dressed nicer than other guests; all we know for certain is that he did not dress appropriately. We also see a compassionate king (he called him "friend") even asking if there was a problem. It is only when this guest gives no answer that he is cast out of the party; bound hand and foot in disgrace.

One can accomplish truly monumental achievements and still be Humble. I've included the video of *How Great Thou Art* by Vince Gill and Carrie Underwood. It is my favorite version of my favorite religious song. I'm also going to discuss three other songs as well for a comparison. Now, I can't read minds. I know that theatrics are very much a part of this profession. I also know that I am not to judge others souls. But I can judge how one acts in a spirit of love, and I can use such acts as teaching examples.

Let's start off with Carrie Underwood. I can't help but notice a massive change in her throughout the song. Carrie seems nervous at the beginning, rarely looking at the crowd and even pulling away from it. During Vince's guitar solo, she turns to it as if she could get spiritual strength from it. And when she goes back to sing, she is no longer shy. She at last connects with the audience: her eyes are mostly open now and she leans into the crowd. And yet this overwhelming performance is far from perfect. She chops off some of the words. When she gets to the end of the last verse and does the last refrain, she doesn't seem sure she can do it on her own. Yet there is a power and emotion in this that few music performances can match. And when the song is over, Carrie actually looks surprised that she was able to pull off such a memorable finish. And the crowd as well. While several do appear to have the frozen smiles one would expect in polite company, so many of them actually look moved, especially as Carrie opened up. Naomi Judd in particular. To me, this was Humility in its appropriate

glory. It looks so much to me like Carrie let go of herself so she could be God's vessel for a powerful performance.

Compare this to the second video, Dolly Parton's *He's Alive*, another one of my favorites. In this video, we see Dolly doing a performance that is just as powerful and moving, yet we still see a noticeable difference. One difference is that she did this performance flawlessly. But rather than *be* the memorable difference, I think it is *result* of the memorable difference. Here, Dolly is completely in charge. Nothing happened without her awareness or approval beforehand. This, however, is far from being a sin of Pride. She, like so many other country singers, has championed and promoted Christianity throughout her career. She is using her God given talents to praise God, and there is no indication in the performance that she is placing her career before the song. Her love of God drove her to ensure the performance went off flawlessly. I would call this performance "professional" rather than "Prideful."

Now let's move to the third song I wish to use as an example. It is *The Prayer* as performed by Andrea Bocelli and Celine Dion. Here the performers, like Dolly, are completely in charge. But look how Celine acts like this is just another performance. It mattered not what the song was about, it was her chance to shine again. But even this is not yet Pride, it is really Vanity. While she appears to enjoy her celebrity status very much, she still gives the song the dignity it deserves. She has not crossed the line of being there completely for herself.

I will not mention a specific performer for Pride, but they are not hard to miss. It seems like every "A-List" performer who is invited to sing the National Anthem for a professional sport feels the need to simply butcher the song to demonstrate their vocal range and technique. There are those who might argue that these performers are really "respecting" the song by "including their full capacity" into it. In response to this nonsense, I ask why don't they do so with the songs that make them money? The dignity of the National Anthem is patriotism to the nation, not to promote a singer's talents. The songs they write to sing professionally can be given any dignity they desire, and the same can be said for songs they chose by other composers if they do the original professional cover. Yet one never sees this behavior to such an extreme in such songs. When they sing "their" music, their talents support the song, not the other way around. The reason for this should be clear: this is not really a demonstration of talent, it is a warm up exercise. No one is so devoted to a super-star singer that they will buy an entire collection of songs that consist of such antics. Yet, at the ball park, these singers take on the role of a god or goddess so as to take in the worship the fans offer. This is not only the epitome of Pride, but encourages idolatry as well.

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The Prayer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qt_OkgSOrkU

He's Alive: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1DQfthEHVc4>

How Great Thou Art: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnvg0Otupul>