**“Arm” Yourself with Love**

by Jon Paul Sydnor

*1 Corinthians 13.8-13: Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part, but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love.*

If the three chief virtues in the Christian tradition are faith, hope, and love, then why are so many Christians full of fear, anger, and hatred? So full, in fact, that they feel the need to arm themselves everywhere all the time?

At least part of the answer lies in the media. Media induces emotion. What we read, watch, and listen to expresses who we are, but it can also *change* who we are. Twenty years ago, there were fewer media options, our media consumption overlapped, and it was harder to disappear into a collective rabbit hole. But today, anyone with a slight preference for crime stories (for example) can immerse themselves until they’re soaked, until they absorb the stories themselves, until they see the threat of crime everywhere all the time, and feel the need for protection. Media is in-formation; it forms us in its image. And if we choose ugly media, then . . .

Do you have a minor suspicion of immigrants? Well then, you can place yourself in an information cascade describing every crime committed by an immigrant every day of the year--even though, on average, immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than native born citizens. Do you naturally feel more comfortable with traditional nuclear families? Well then, you can deluge your brain with horrible stories demonizing America’s LGBTQ+ community and their threat to the family--even though the legalization of gay marriage hasn’t actually hurt heterosexual marriage at all. (I mean, I live with my wife in Massachusetts, which legalized gay marriage in 2004, and our heterosexual marriage is still going strong.) In other words, if a Christian wants to forego faith, hope, and love, then they can assault their brain with fear, anger, and hatred, until they’re a fearful, angry, and hateful person. And never realize that they’ve committed apostasy.

Culture catechizes. And even more so, *subculture* catechizes. It indoctrinates us, tells us what is normal and what is deviant, tells us what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false. But Christians are supposed to look to Christ for this instruction. For this reason, we have to be careful with our media, pay attention to what we’re consuming, and always hold our media to the standards of faith, hope, and love. Perhaps in this subculture we will discover the shared humanity of our neighbors, rather than their imagined threat. Perhaps in this subculture we will discover truth and no longer feel a need for armed protection.

