

5:1). Within a healthy and stable home, children love their parents. They want to be like them, do what they do, and speak the words they hear. Love begets imitation. And that imitation takes practice. Again, St. Paul says, "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil 4:9).

So let us learn the arts by imitation, by apprenticeship. Writing well comes from reading and imitating good writing (see Strunk & White). So also with singing and drawing, playing basketball and re-routing the plumbing of your home—whatever your art, imitate those who have come before. The art of Christian living comes by imitating good, not evil (3 Jn 11), following the examples of the saints according to our vocations. And creativity in this life—the joy of knowing the boundaries and playing with their form and structure—comes by limiting ourselves to the norms of the art.

We are not God. He creates out of nothing. We create out of what has come before. There is much joy in this. But it takes knowing the limits, following the examples, and imitating with love and flattery those who have gone before. ✨

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AD FONTES
September, 2024



SEEKING CREATIVITY THROUGH CONSTRAINT

BY REV. DR. GEOFFREY R. BOYLE

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WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHERE FREEDOM MEANS LIFE without constraint. It is terrifying. It does not work. The laissez-faire parenting advice from a couple generations ago has contributed to our prolonged adolescence and an epidemic of thirty-year-old men living in their parents' basements. Sparing the rod truly spoils the child (Prov 13:24). Life without constraint offers only the appearance of freedom, but actually binds man to vanity and guides him into nihilistic despair. We do not want that.

The same goes for creativity. If you strive to be creative, then you must seek constraint. The empty white page on your laptop rarely serves as a blank canvas for playful creativity. It overwhelms and haunts us. The page only receives words and the canvas only bears its work of art by way of ordered thoughts from a disciplined mind, bound to the rules of the art. Boundaries mark the safe space within. They are the fence around the playground—inside the children run about freely, at one moment the monkey bars, at another the slide; outside is endless and threatening. Limits grant the freedom to play.

If you want to be free, creative, without fear, and full of joy, creating masterpieces of art both on the page and the canvas, then respect

the constraints of the art. I do not know how many sonnets John Donne wrote according to the proper form before he started to bend and break it. Georges Rouault's expressionistic painting of the Crucifixion followed years of meticulously copying the works of others. You do not get Def Leppard without AC/DC (or pick your favorite band of choice). And when it comes to writing a Ph.D. dissertation, do not fall for the myth that you must create an idea that no one has yet thought of. The reality is that your dissertation just demonstrates that you know the field and can push it ever so slightly. Creativity follows discipline, knowing the rules or boundaries inside and out, and imitating those who have gone before.

It sounds counterintuitive. But scales come before sonatas. And the best preachers have sat at the feet of great preachers for a long time. We learn best by watching and listening, copying and reproducing. We affectionately call the Lutheran Confessions the *norma normata* (*norm that is normed*) because the Scriptures are the *norma normans* (*norming norm*). As the Word of God 'norms' all doctrine and practice, the Confessions are 'normed' by that Word and seek to say nothing other than it. They imitate the language and logic for their own day and time. All of our teaching at the Seminary follows the same pattern: imitating those who imitate those who imitate the Confessions, which imitate the Scriptures. And for us, for our theological art, that is where creativity lies—bound by the Word and the teaching of the Church.

The Scriptures tell us to imitate. Yes, it is a form of flattery, but flattery rightly ordered! St. Paul is no narcissist. He would rather himself "be accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of [his] brothers, [his] kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom 9:3). Nevertheless, he invites us to imitate him:

"I urge you, then, be imitators of me" (1 Cor 4:16).

"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1).

Imitate the Apostles, the Church, and the faithful leaders set before you:

"And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia" (1 Thess 1:6-7).

"For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews" (1 Thess 2:14).

"For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate" (2 Thess 3:7-9).



Der zweite Schöpfungstag.

Und GOTT sprach: es werde eine feste zwischen den Wassern, und die sei ein Unterscheid zwischen den Wassern.
1 Mose. Cap. 1. v. 6.

God creating the firmament. Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld's (1794-1872).

"And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises" (Heb 6:11-12).

"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Heb 13:7).

This is what it means to train up a child in the way he shall go (Prov 22:6). Training involves much more than theory. It demands practice, repetition, imitation. The art of living as a Christian comes not just through the forgiveness of sins. It begins there, to be sure. But the forgiveness of sins opens us up to a new life. As the hymn sings, "We thank You, Christ; new life is ours, New light, new hope, new strength, new pow'rs. This grace our ev'ry way attend, Until we reach our journey's end" (LSB 562:6).

The Christian learns the art of living by imitating the life of Christ. St. Paul says, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children" (Eph