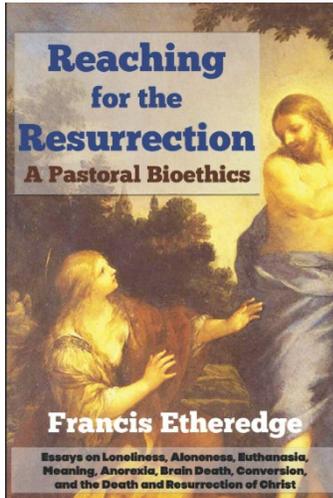


## *Life Lived Fully*



[Reaching for the Resurrection, A Pastoral Bioethics: Essays on Loneliness, Aloneness, Euthanasia, Meaning, Anorexia, Brain Death, Conversion, and the Death and Resurrection of Christ](#) by Francis Etheredge (St. Louis, MO: [En Route Books and Media](#), 2022) 145 pp.

Reviewed by Christine Sunderland

Francis Etheredge begins by considering his title: “We are reaching for the resurrection because, in all humility, we are in front of human freedom and the mystery of God’s dialogue with us in His word and in our prayers... the dialogue that leads to life, whether life lived fully here (cf. Jn 10:10) or the fullness of eternal life” (14). And so we enter the conversation as well,

listening and learning.

Human freedom allows suffering, and yet God is with us in that freedom and in those sufferings. So we reach for Christ in His sufferings, for they not only inform our sufferings, giving them meaning and purpose, but transform them, allowing transcendence. By realizing that even our death informs our life, we reach with “outstretched gratitude” to meet the Lord of Life. Celebrating life, we look forward to seeing those who have gone before, and “accompanied by our guardian angel we come into the presence of the all enflaming God” (22).

Most of us have been touched by suffering. Francis Etheredge helps us reason our way through the woods of who and what we are as human beings, created by a loving God. The author knows suffering too, in the past without meaning and purpose, at one time suicidal. God reached for him and touched him through a picture of Christ’s Holy Face (the shroud of Turin) and later through Christ’s crucifix. In time, he began to see how faith and reason, religion and science, were complementary to one another, indeed, elucidated one another. His conversion to Christianity was a resurrection to new life, and he entered the mystery of God’s dialogue with us, in His word and our prayers. He invites us to do the same, to enter the mystery of life and of suffering.

For while freedom allows sin, and sin causes suffering, there is hope: “God created everything out of nothing so He can make a new beginning for the sinner” (36). God enters our humanity, our very flesh, because he is Creator of all, for “as He is true God and true man He is... *the living intersection of all relationships*: both with God and with the whole of creation” (65) (italics mine).

And so we see that both physical and mental illness is often caused by a lack of meaning and purpose. Yet when we reach for Christ, we can live life fully with meaningful purpose. We embrace life, all human life created by Him and loved by Him, from life in the womb to

life in Eternity. Physical death becomes part of the great arc of life, another kind of living in another time and space, what we are meant to become.

I came of age in the mid 'sixties in the San Francisco Bay Area, when the cult of self, drugs, and sex entered mainstream culture, a culture divided by Vietnam War protests and UC Berkeley riots. So-called science and well-intended feminism gave us the birth control pill which led to the celebration of promiscuity and the disintegration of the family. As women, we were told to be thin, indeed social-pressured to be thin, which led to anorexia, the anti-life starving of women and girls. We were objectified, told to have multiple partners with meaningless hookups. We were mere flesh to be used and to use others. Feminism gave men a gift some cherish today, easy sex and legal abortion and no responsibility. We were told motherhood was for simpletons and careers for the bright ones with purpose. This cult of lies spanned decades to the present day, erasing God, mocking authority, celebrating deviancy, and raising generations of loners who express despair by shooting innocents in churches, temples, schools, theaters, and parades. Our cities have become scenes of riots and burnings.

As I write this, the demonic belly of this amoral cult of death seems obvious, as if I could trace the path of destruction leading to today's anarchy. But many Christians, myself included, didn't see the red flags along the way. Etheredge notes that Pope St. Paul VI warned us in 1968 in *Humanae Vitae*, addressing birth control and its mortal and moral significance to our culture. Looking back, how right he was, and looking back, many of us wish they had been Catholics and avoided the health risks attendant upon hormones and invasive surgery. We watched the culture slip away through books, movies, music, the fine arts, all reflecting and encouraging the cult of self and nihilistic materialism, and pronouncing the death of meaning, goodness, truth, and beauty. How can we return to a culture of life amidst the scientific advances that threaten life?

In this volume of bioethics for today, Etheredge calls for scientists to reclaim their consciences, for "the law in us by nature commands whatever conserves human life and opposes death" (149). He asks, "where is the judgment of others about his [the scientist's] conduct?" (52). He warns that "society imperils itself as it departs from the heart of morality: that good is to be pursued and evil avoided... so the law in us by nature commands whatever conserves human life and opposes death" (187).

He questions what doctors call "brain death," even when a heartbeat is present. We must consider the good of the *whole* person: physical, mental, spiritual. And what is the scientific definition of life? Life begins, Etheredge affirms, at the moment of fertilization, and this moment of conception entails the unfolding of the whole human person, and all that this means. For we must protect that life, if we are listening to our consciences, our natural moral law.

Insightfully, the author writes that we are a people of relationship. In fact, we were conceived in relationship to our parents and to God who has ensouled us: "Thus, the human loss, whether through miscarriage or abortion, is a suffering in an existing

relationship; and, therefore, death entails relationship, just as life does” (64). And we recall that Christ is the *living intersection of all relationships*.

Conversion is another resurrection, for we are called to live life fully. Our penitence requires a change of heart, for if our suffering is to be purposeful and meaningful, it must be joined to the Cross to be resurrected with Christ. And a change of heart must be “expressed in a change in behaviour” (70). We must sin no more.

Francis Etheredge recounts how he learned to reach for the resurrection, to change, and this account as well as his professional credentials gives authenticity to these beautifully written meditations on the mystery of freedom and God’s dialogue with us in His word and our prayers. Even so, he warns that “it is not automatic that the door of Christ’s suffering opens so that we begin to discover the significance of our own suffering too; indeed, it has taken many years of listening to His word and understanding that it both uncovers who we are and who He is” (78).

The seven chapters and epilogue weave similar themes together to create a work that is good, true, and beautiful, a seamless robe of many colors. This is the way with truth. It is reaffirmed again and again in varying accounts of human life. And the truth of Christ’s incarnation and resurrection, and what that means for us in this dialogue of love, answer profound questions we ignore to our peril.

*Highly recommended for book discussion groups, schools, and parishes.*



Francis Etheredge, Catholic husband, father of 11, 3 of whom are in heaven, is author of 13 books on [Amazon](#). He holds a BA Div, an MA in Catholic Theology, a PGC in Biblical Studies, a PGC in Higher Education, and an MA in Marriage and Family. Visit him at [LinkedIn](#) and [En Route Books and Media](#).

Christine Sunderland is author of seven award-winning literary novels about faith, family, freedom, and the sanctity of human life. Her most recent novel is [Angel Mountain](#) (Wipf and Stock, 2020), set east of UC Berkeley about a Jewish holocaust survivor who becomes a Christian hermit living in the sandstone caves of Mount Diablo and preaching from the mountainside.

