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Word count: 40,572

The Appeal of God

In the Pursuit of Happiness

Eugène Aucoin

Nominated for the *Best New Canadian Manuscript of 2020*

The Word Awards, Sponsored by The Word Guild

(Note to the Page Turner Judges: I have improved it in many ways since then)

This is one of the best books I have ever read, and I have read many in my lifetime. I enjoyed it immensely. Like a wonderful feast, I did not want it to end. Aucoin converges many inspiring ideas into a single, powerful conclusion. Anyone seeking the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth will find it somewhere in the narrative of this book. I have found every book from this author to be like that.

Judge Guy A. Richard, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New Brunswick, and Vice-Chair of the Canadian Judicial Council. (Retired)

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Part 1: The Most Travelled Road	8
Chapter 1: Life, Liberty, and Happiness	8
Repeating the Same Mistakes.....	8
The Infinite Value in You	9
The Wax Museum	10
A Three-Stage Rocket.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
What Is Freedom?.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Passion Rechanneled.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Freedom from Indecision	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 2: “Can’t Get no Satisfaction.”	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Not the Real Thing	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Boiled Frog.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Straw Basket.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Conclusion to Part 1	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Part 2: The Least Travelled Road.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 3: The Key to Happiness – The Eight Beatitudes	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Eight steps	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The “Payoff”	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Conclusion to Part 2	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Part 3: The State of the World	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 4: “Our house is on fire.”	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Big Picture.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Living Beyond our Means.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Environment.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Overpopulation, War, Injustice, Runaway Technology.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
An Uneasy Dinner Chat.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Fixing the Wrong Problems	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Tree of Knowledge	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Conclusion to Part 3	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Part 4: Be Still and Know... (Ps 46:10).....Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 5: Descending from your Head to your Heart.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Snow and Mosquitoes.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Time out... ..	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Being in the Moment	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Thoughts to Dispose the Mind	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Detachment	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Conclusion to Part 4: “Be Still and Know...”	Error! Bookmark not defined.

Part 5: The Beauty of God.....Error! Bookmark not defined.

Chapter 6: The Many Faces of God’s Beauty.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Seven True Wonders of the World	Error! Bookmark not defined.
All Beauty is God’s beauty	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 7: Nature.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
In Nature, Everything is Beauty	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 8: Art	Error! Bookmark not defined.
In Touch with the Divine	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 9: The Beauty within Science and Discovery	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Search for Truth.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
The Language of God	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Chapter 10: The Beauty of Human Relations	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Everything is Relational.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Your True Nature.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Conclusion to Part 5: The Beauty of God.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.

General Conclusion.....Error! Bookmark not defined.

Introduction

You and I are strangers, and yet we know each other very well. My relation to you is that, in our search for happiness, we are both drawn toward something boundless, much greater than our ego. Maybe you can't really put your finger on it, or even name it, but you can sense that nothing else will do because it's been calling to you from a place within you where the best version of yourself can be found.

I want to reveal yourself to you, introduce you to yourself, if you will allow my audacity. You're much more than you may realize. What you carry within you is worthy of God's admiration. The spiritual richness you have sought for so long is buried deep within you; it's a richness that captivates God so much that he has set in motion the gears of the whole universe to create it. Yet no matter how intelligent you are, your reasoning ability was never designed to help you get very far in your search for that light within you. You've been asking too much of your reasoning intellect because that's not its job.

You have glimpsed, on God's lavish table, the only thing that can ever satisfy your hunger for lasting plenitude and contentment, the kind you had been searching for all your life, and then you fled from it. In doing so, however, you have *awakened to its absence*. Now you're fighting the temptation to resign from pursuing it and to settle for a mediocre imitation, because you know your own self-betrayal would disappoint you. But God is betting that the innocent child in you will have the last word.

That's all I know about you. And maybe it's better this way because, if I knew your whole history and situation in life, we'd more likely be talking about surface issues instead of what's most essential.

We are all self-exiled from who we truly are, from our innermost identity, to varying degrees. We dismantle ourselves early after childhood, and then spend the rest of our lives trying to put

ourselves back together. In that disharmony, we put up defences, some people more than others, against what's actually the whole purpose of our existence. In those outskirts of our lives where we spend most of our time, we compensate for our confusion with successful façades that we'd like the whole world to synchronize with. We need to find our way back home.

We all seek lasting fulfillment and meaning in our lives, but life gets in the way. So we cut corners... and the marketplace is always glad to help us do so. The result is that there's so much competition today to provide consumers with whatever passes for happiness that many have become confused and disillusioned. Millions, unable to find contentment this way, hope to at least reduce their dissatisfaction with life and bring their "happiness gage" out of red, negative territory and crank it all the way up to zero. But we've all learned that even expensive attempts to do so never really work for long.

If having more "stuff" were the answer to happiness, then why would the most prosperous countries in the world be using the most anti-depressants? Countries like Canada, Australia and Iceland consistently rank among the top users in the world.¹ In the United States, their use has soared 65 percent in 15 years, even before the COVID-19 pandemic arrived.² Why has the prosperity resulted in such unhappiness?

Getting what we want is usually easier than knowing what we want. What we really want is happiness itself, and we often try to get it by surrounding ourselves with stuff.

Given our costly efforts to find relief from that recurring sense of dissatisfaction, it may seem strange to say this, but our problem is that we don't aim high enough. In each our own pursuit of happiness, we don't look hard enough for what truly provides it, so we settle for an absence of discontent. We don't know what we want, but we sure know what we don't want.

If your ever-changing plans to find peace and real happiness have mostly failed despite your best efforts and self-affirmations all these years, if the doors you've knocked on for it during your

¹OECD Health Statistics data 2018, released by the OECD in June 2018, updated on 8 November 2018. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_antidepressant_consumption (Accessed Jan. 13, 2020).

² HealthDay News, Aug. 2017. <https://consumer.healthday.com/mental-health-information-25/antidepressants-news-723/u-s-antidepressant-use-jumps-65-percent-in-15-years-725586.html> (Accessed Jan. 13, 2020).

whole life have only opened out to the barren desert, then it may be time to radically re-think what happiness really is.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the world more profoundly than anything else had in more than a century. Rarely in history has an event shaken the lives of everyone so deeply in every corner of the planet. We were confined to our homes, unsure about our future, our livelihood, our education, even our lives and those of our loved ones whom we even feared to hug. Our lives and dreams were turned upside down and may well continue to be for some time in the aftermath. But although loss and suffering were rampant during the pandemic, such adversities can sometimes reshape values and transform lives for the better.

For the many reasons that we will see, I believe there has never been a more critical time to understand and trust God's way for all of us, both individually and together. This book will help build your confidence in your own future by renewing, in your heart, your confidence in God, transforming your future along the way by transforming you. You will see that, beyond the circumstances and stresses of your life, everything you need in order to acquire lasting peace and happiness is buried deep within you.

Our self-made anxieties are all symptoms of a single problem: our disbelief in God's word that we'll only fix our problems by fixing ourselves first. Our past efforts have usually been only complicated attempts to deal with the symptoms. And as you'll see, God's advice for your own happiness is, by the same token, the only true solution to the problems of the world today.

Having helped nurture human potential and resolve many people-related issues such as interpersonal conflicts during my career, and spoken about these things around the world, I've gradually come to realize that many people's desperate search for personal satisfaction and happiness is really a desire for God. Since my retirement, my volunteer work with dying patients has confirmed this fact for me. So I wrote this book with the single goal that it will help you discover, or rediscover, true happiness in your life through a fresh and revitalizing look at God's advice for you. The book's trademark is the depth into which it goes to help your heart progressively *feel* the renewed joy of believing and trusting God's way. I pray it will help you see the world in a different, brighter way by touching something deep and true within you in a manner that makes sense to both your mind *and* your heart, thus reconciling the two.

To achieve its goal, the book is structured as follows:

Part 1, *The Most Travelled Road*, explains why we have been looking mostly in the wrong places for fullness of life, freedom, and happiness.

Part 2, *The Least Travelled Road*, provides a fresh new way to understand God's advice for your own lasting peace and beatitude, based on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Part 3, *The State of the World*, explains why so many people's failure to heed God's advice for their contentment and satisfaction is what is ultimately behind today's many crises in the world.

Part 4, *Be Still and Know*, proposes a descent from your mind into your heart to help you better feel God's presence and understand his message for your wellness.

Part 5, *The Beauty of God*, will further awaken your heart to God's presence by appreciating the multiple reflections of his great beauty all around you.

In short, this book highlights, in a new way, God's unmatched advice for your peace and happiness, and offers ways to awaken your soul to his presence and message.

If you are searching for positivity, religious meaning or fresh outlooks to revitalize your faith and your life, if you are feeling tired of the world or that you are only drifting through it, then I pray you will find here and there, in this book, a page you can meditate on which will lift a corner of the veil blocking your view of God's never-ending dawn, as well as some little treasures you can keep.

Come walk with me.

Part 1: The Most Travelled Road

There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, "Your will be done," and those to whom God says, "All right, then, have it your way."

C. S. Lewis

Chapter 1: Life, Liberty, and Happiness

Repeating the Same Mistakes

God has been telling us that our only way to lasting contentment and happiness, both individually and socially, is his³ way. And his way, the high road, is the only one most people haven't really tried yet. The fact that they have tried everything else indicates that their failure to find happiness is related to the single fact that, even though they may believe *in* God, they don't believe God.

We keep making the same mistakes. It's remindful of a story about two hunters who chartered a small plane to get to a remote forest. After a few days, the pilot returns to pick them up, sees the two moose they've shot, and tells them his plane can only carry the two hunters and one moose. "But last year's pilot allowed us to bring back two moose in a similar plane," protested the hunters. "Well, in that case," the reluctant pilot finally concedes, "I suppose it should be OK." The small aircraft takes off but, failing to pick up enough altitude, crashes on a hill. The men

³ Although I refer to God only in the masculine gender throughout the book for reasons of practical readability, God, of course, has no form, thus no gender.

stumble out, shaken, and look around. “Where do you think we are?”, one hunter asks his friend. Scratching his head, the other assesses the surroundings and replies: “We seem to be about two kilometers west of where we crashed last year.”

Why do we think repeating our old mistakes again and again will eventually yield different results? As the saying goes, “If we keep doing what we’ve been doing, we’ll keep getting what we’ve been getting.”

The objective of this whole first part, *The Most Travelled Road to Happiness*, is to closely explore, within today’s realities, God’s advice for you personally as it was offered by Jesus.

To start at the very beginning, however, we need to ask some very basic questions: What are we? Are we supreme beings, or is there a higher divinity worthy of our piety and worship? What constitutes happiness, joy, beauty, and what does it say about God? Why do these questions matter? They matter because every thinker throughout the history of the world has pondered deeply upon them, chin on fist. They are part of our most profound thoughts and reflections. Today, with the collective knowledge of the world at our disposal, we are much better equipped to reflect upon some of them.

The Infinite Value in You

I said earlier that our problem in our search for peace and happiness is that we don’t aim high enough. That’s because you and I are wired for so much more than what’s immediately under our noses. Strangely, what we all truly want, the only thing that can satisfy us, is normally beyond our conscious knowledge. That’s because God has created the human heart so immeasurable that nothing can satisfy it short of what it cannot define: *God himself*. He offers you the only true and satisfying life there is.

Your dignity, the value of your own spirit, is so great in God’s mind that Jesus knelt before it in the washing of the feet of his disciples, including Judas’ who he knew was about to betray him. Here is the Son of God, kneeling before man as before a sanctuary whose enclosure cannot be

broken into, but where others, God included, can only be invited in! I wonder if, to this day, we have yet seized the full meaning of Jesus' gesture.

God has been saying in various ways that our only way to happiness and out of the doldrums is up. This means that achieving our highest potential, our fulfillment, will require the shedding of our old *self*, attaching ourselves to Another who is within us but is yet more than us. It's your ticket to higher ground. But you can't do it alone.

This is where God comes in, as this book will show.

The Wax Museum

If you sense that there is much more to your freedom than just having the right to do what you want, then you and I are on the same page. In his popular song *Me and Bobby McGee*, Kris Kristofferson sings: "Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose. Nothin' ain't worth nothin' but it's free." But what exactly is this freedom that has *nothin' left to lose*?

Jesus was condemned to death for teaching what provides true life, freedom, and happiness. Today, our right to those things resonates loudly within us, but what do those three words mean?

God's definition of life, freedom and happiness is generally not the same as ours. So let's look at his version. He's telling you that there is more *life* and *freedom* for you in serving truth and your neighbour, even if you were wrapped in barbed wire and chained to the wall of a dark dungeon, than in all the combined charters of rights and freedoms in the world. The big "payoff", when you allow God to do his work within you, is the beatitude of being liberated from the tyranny of your own ego. I hope to convince you in this book that there is no greater coercion upon you than the one imposed by yourself, and that the only happiness worth pursuing is the one offered to you by God.