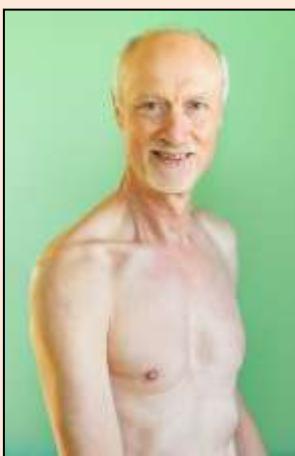


Interview



Paul, do you feel embarrassed to be a naturist?

I've been quite at home in my own skin all my life. As a child I'd play without clothes free in my garden whenever I could. But a couple of years ago, I signed up for the naked 5K run at the Naturist Foundation in Kent and loved it. I don't like the term 'Naturist'; it's like I'm not 'normal'.

Does being naked change your view of the world?

I see the natural world as a living expression of God's creativity of which I am a part, so I feel more at home with myself and more connected with the creation when I'm unmasked, particularly when I'm running or wild swimming.

Does this help you to feel closer to God?

With God it's more personal. I prefer to think of God as 'Father'. It's more about a relationship in which I'm intimately known and loved regardless of how I'm dressed, how I'm feeling or how I'm behaving. It's like asking, do you stop loving your kids when they behave badly?

Do you have to be good to be Christian?

My wife will tell you that I'm no angel. I think God is more interested in us coming to him as we are, warts and all than trying to offer a clinically perfect life. It's more about being honest with ourselves, with each other and with God about our failing, then finding that we're forgiven and 'invited to the party', as Jesus puts it. This is what makes Christianity unique and so amazing.

Are your family naturists?

No. My wife is more comfortable dressed. My two adult sons put my naked habit down to "dad's premature senility"! We were never prudish as a family, but I suspect that there were subliminal messages from my own parents' negative body consciousness.

Does this affect your relationship with your wife?

I often remind myself that my first obligation is to love my wife, not to change her – so I don't try. In return, she accepts that we're different and graciously tolerates her husband's naturism.

Is there an impediment to freedom in being naked?

The media often links nudity with sex so it's not surprising that naturism can be misunderstood. Like many women, my wife feels that naked bodies stay within the marriage. But for me, being naked is when I feel most at home with myself. It's something we're working through.

Why do many folks see social nudity as wrong?

We tend to see the world through our own cultural lens – Christians included, but I'm pleased to see a general trend towards a more positive image of the body in all its variety of shapes and colours. It's liberating.

Clothe Yourself

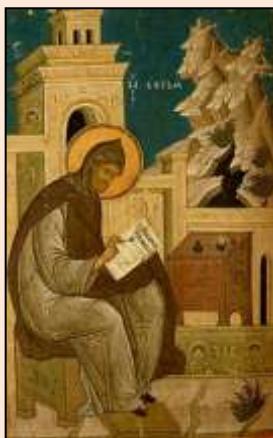
In his letter to the Romans, St Paul tells them to "clothe yourselves with Christ..." (ch13v14). Writing about clothes in a naturist publication – have I lost my mind? Perhaps, but stay with me!

Of course, he was talking metaphorically, but it is a verse that I ponder on every so often. Some people talk about 'being born again' as a one-off event: I firmly believe that we need to choose to be born-again each and every day, and with each and every decision: to actively choose to be clothed with Christ.

I have a very visual brain – it likes to work in pictures – so I picture myself standing at my chest-of-drawers deciding what to put on every morning, and, whatever else I choose to put on, choosing to also put on Christ.

Choosing to put on Christ every day is a definite act. I don't really think it happens by accident, no matter how long you've been a Christian, and so the mental act every morning to put on Christ is like wearing a uniform, one which marks out the wearer as a follower of Christ.

One of the prayers that helps me – and one that I keep on top of my chest-of-drawers and therefore to say every morning – is an ancient one from St Ephrem of Syria:



O Lord and Master of my Life! Take from me the spirit of sloth, faint-heartedness, lust of power and idle talk. But give rather the spirit of chastity, patience, and love to Thy servant. Yea, Lord and King! Grant me to see my own errors and to not judge another, for Thou art blessed unto ages of ages. Amen.

There are various translations of it, but this is the one I like most. I've found that saying it helps me to set the focus for my day each morning, and helps the day to remain focused on Christ.

St Ephrem was born in AD 306 and died in AD 373, so you can imagine that this prayer has been used by countless numbers of people over the almost 1800 years since he wrote it. I'm sure that many have found strength in its words, and that their lives have been enriched by using it to 'clothe themselves with Christ', no matter what physical clothing they did or didn't put on their bodies.

His 'feast day' in the Orthodox Church is on the 28th January when he is remembered alongside several other venerable saints, but in the West we keep the 9th of June – the date he died.

Perhaps a good way to remember this great man of God would be to say this prayer for the week leading up to or after the 9th of June – to choose to Clothe yourself with Christ whatever else you choose to clothe your body with. You might just find that it sets you up for the day and strengthens you to be a follower of Christ.

John