

Appearances

In the mid-seventies, I lived for a while in the picturesque hamlet of St. Ives. In those days it was a magnet for artists, who were drawn by the ethereal quality of the light and air... and of course, the sea: sometimes almost iridescent blue, and yet clear as crystal as it washed across the golden sands. St. Ives also seemed to exert a powerful influence over carefree young ladies from northern towns, who would descend on it in regimental strength at the first sign of summer. I'd like to tell you that I moved there for the painting, but it was more night-life than still-life which interested me.

When I'd been there about a year, I received a letter from the police back in Essex. I opened it eagerly, naturally assuming they were missing me and were keen to organise a reunion, or perhaps some other kind of social event. I was mildly disappointed to find it was more in the order of a business circular: there had been a triple murder in Colchester the previous month, and they were asking me to report to my local police station so they could "eliminate me from their enquiries".

I took some consolation from this. After all - up until now - they'd always been keen to *include* me in their enquiries, and now they wanted to eliminate me from them. I recognised the signature as that of a policeman who would have been only too happy to eliminate me *full stop*, so I thought I'd better comply.

In the small police station there was a sergeant who glanced up as I entered, and then continued filling in a form. After some minutes, I thought I would try to attract his attention. "Excuse me", I said, "but I'd like to make a statement about a murder". His pen fell from his hand. "What?" "Murder", I replied, "Well, three to be precise." He looked gratifyingly rattled. "You want to make a statement about a *triple homicide*... who are the victims?" I couldn't remember their names from the letter, so I just shrugged. "Well, where are the bodies?" I didn't know that either, but I rather thought someone must have moved them off the street by then, so I said, "Oh, I guess they're in the morgue by now."

The sergeant was becoming increasingly agitated, and I recall thinking that perhaps he should find less stressful employment. His next question was shouted: "Well exactly how did these people die - and *where*?" I didn't care for his tone. I asked him, "*Do I look like a pathologist?*" I dumped the letter on his desk (along with a receipt which placed me in Cornwall on the day of the incident) and walked out.

I never lied to the sergeant, but still managed to create an entirely false impression. Telling *some* truth, manipulating the facts or "putting a spin on things" is now common practice - the outright, bare-faced lie is rather passé, these days. But people don't just use truth to deceive because they want (say) our vote or our custom - they do it to retain our respect, to save face...or even to maintain their own self-image. Many relationships start because people fall in love with the false images projected by each other, only to end when more of the truth emerges.

One of the many liberating things about being in Christ's family, is the quality of acceptance that it brings. We don't have to "keep up appearances" or put a spin on things - we don't have to edit the truth. Genuine, successful relationship is always based on rigorous honesty - the truth, the whole truth...and nothing but the truth.