

16<sup>th</sup> July 2020

## Mirror

**“To hold, as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature.”**

*William Shakespeare, Hamlet*

Charles Mellin was an early-17<sup>th</sup> century Baroque painter from Nancy in French Lorraine who spent his artistic career in Italy. His work, especially murals and frescos, adorn many churches in Rome. But hanging in one of the galleries of the *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin* is a painting by Mellin which intrigues me. It shows the single figure of a rather prosperous-looking gentleman, well dressed, and clearly well-fed. For, standing side-on, and with no attempt to disguise his girth, he more than amply fills the canvas. For this well-to-do merchant type is, quite simply, obese!

Now, I'm not being "fattist" here, and if the word "obese" is offensive, please accept my apologies. But this man clearly makes a virtue of his appearance. If not, why would he invite an artist to capture him for posterity in such a pose? And the man's name? We're not told, for the title of the painting is simply *Bildnis eines Mannes*, "Portrait of a Gentleman". Maybe the sitter didn't want anyone to know who he was. Or perhaps he was so well known that his name wasn't needed. We'll never know.

But Mellin's painting was more than just an exhibit in a gallery. It was suddenly a mirror of my life. Over the previous ten years or so I'd accumulated a lot of extra weight. I'd become a little barrel. I was fat! The nurses in the hospice called me a "little weeble" (a "weebles-wobble-but-they-don't-fall-down", kind of weeble). I'd tried to laugh it off. But it hurt, so I knew I'd have to do something about it. And here I was, looking into a mirror, and seeing a fat man, standing side on, shouting, "This is you!"

We all need mirrors to help us look at ourselves honestly: a kind word from a friend; a moment of self-awareness; a thought from a sermon; an insight from a book, a movie, a TV programme, or even a painting in a gallery. The deal is, do we like what we see in such a mirror, or does the mirror tell us that something has to change?

### **A prayer for today**

*Loving God, I stand before the mirror of your love.*

*I see what I see, I know what I know, and I hear those fateful words:*

*"My child, something has to change".*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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