

## Lecture Spiritual Life - Maturing

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## I. ON MATURITY

- I am a Christian. Already?
- The soul reveals its secrets only to those who want them...
- Maturity is only to care about the things that are worth caring about.
- For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple and wrong!" H. L. Mencken
- Faith is not a crutch, because faith is rarely proven to be therapeutic in most people's lives. Christian faith is anything but comfortable. If comfort is our god, we will be sorely disappointed with the Christian experience.
- I have learned a great lesson about myself: I thrive when I strive, when I am pressing on toward something. And the minute I start arriving is the minute I start dying. **All steps forward and maturity in Christian spirituality are starting points, not goals.** (Dusty ones, 92)

### A. Progressive Growth/2 Halves of Life

- Good quote: "People only believe in religion because they are afraid of death. "This was a typical statement from my mother: lucid, opinionated, explicitly impatient of opposing views. Her dominance of the family, and her certainties about the world made things usefully clear in childhood, restrictive in adolescence, and grindingly repetitive in adulthood." (Julian Barnes, nothing to be frightened of, 9 – 10)

### The TWO Halves of Life

- Basically, the first half of life is writing the text, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> half is writing the commentary on that text
  - Simplicity
  - Complexity
  - Second Simplicity

#### 1. Good Simplicity

- Yes, No. You can, you cannot; Don't jump off this building, run the Red Light... Romans 10:9 "If we declare with.... You will be saved"; God Love's You! etc.
  - It is far easier to begin life in the conservative worldview and respect for traditions. It gives you an initial sense of place and is more effective in the long run, even if it gives you a goad to kick against.
    - Whenever people have to demonize those who follow a different spiritual path, it is a sign that there is something wrong with THEIR path. (Heaven Begins within you, Gruen, 57)

#### 2. Insufficient Simplicity

- Functional Atheism: Saying pious words about God's presence in our lives but believing the opposite – nothing good will ever come unless I make it happen.
- Fear = Loss of Control: "Life is insecure, but we do not have to be trapped in the fear of it. The source of fear, shame and anger is insecurity about ourselves. We must let go. We must let go of the resistance to experiencing life as it is, not as I fear it is, or hope it to be. Surrendering the ego of control is a ticket to the transcendent!

- *There is a generation who want to circle the wagons around their imagined secure and superior group; who seem preoccupied with clothing, titles, parks, and external religion and have very little use for the world beyond their own control or explanation! Law, ritual and priestly authority have become a compulsive substitute for an actual divine encounter.*
- **Pride:** Early-stage religion is a preparation, creating a proper stable into which Christ can be born. Unfortunately, we are far too concerned with our stable being the best that we never get to the point of God being born in our soul. (Page 14 Two Halves of life- Rohr)
  - If you remain too long in the first stage of life, you become a well disguised narcissist or an adult infant who are often thought to be successful “good old boys” by the mainstream Christian culture.
  - In the West, the Church has a “first half of life” culture, largely concerned with being right and successful. Thomas Merton said we could spend our whole life climbing the ladder of success, only to find out that it was leaning against the wrong wall.
  - **The three selves:**
    - 1) the intellectual self wants to hover above the mess of life
      - Living in the head, the place furthest away from the ground, is a Christianity void of a true experience of God.
    - 2) the super spiritual self is puffed up in pride thinking it knows God, thinking it can tell God what to do
    - 3) the ethical self wants to live by some abstract moral code it can never accomplish. Moralism disguises the corrosive egotistical motives, but egotism always seeps through

### 3. Complexity

- Paradox - **I. Cor. 1:18-25**

<sup>18</sup>For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup>For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup>Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

- Paradoxically, a journey down is in fact a journey up. The path to humility (*humus* nourishes plants – what a blessed etymology) is the path of humiliation (the mud on my face can actually make new things grow) were we must be brought low, rendered powerless, stripped of pretense and defense and left feeling fragile and empty and useless – a place from which we can build from the ground up. And since God is the “ground of all being”, it is the place of being built up by God!
  - **Humility!**

- Discovering the shadows in ourselves can help us become aware that we are projecting those on to other people. The enemy is within. Stop looking for 1000 ways to make somebody “out there” into the enemy
  - The genius of the biblical revelation is that it refuses to deny the dark side of things but forgives failures and integrates falling to achieve wholeness... Jesus is never upset the sinners, but only with those who think they are not. Jesus was fully at home in the tragic sense of life. His ability to find a higher order in disorder is one of the essential elements of the heart of the Gospel.
- Contemplation promotes non-dualistic thinking. Non-dualistic thinking presumes that you have first mastered dualistic clarity, but also found it insufficient for the really big issues like love, suffering, death, God, and any notion in it. In short, we need both. (Richard Rohr 150)
  - In the first half of life, you cannot work with the imperfect, nor can you accept the tragic sense of life, which finally means that you cannot love anything or anyone at any depth. (150)
- When we cannot admit that we do not measure up to the ideal, we project our failure onto others. We become hardened against them. There is a danger to identify too much with our ideals and ignore our weaknesses, for it can lead to inner division. (Heaven Begins within you, Gruen, 17)
  - The Desert fathers teach us a **spirituality from below**. They show us that we have to begin with ourselves and our passions.
    - The way to God always passes through self-knowledge (the path to God and passes through self-encounter, and looking upon everything that is in us and offering it to God) – our own weakness, powerlessness and shadow side! “If you want to know God, learn to know yourself! The goal is sincerity and authenticity” (Heaven Begins within you, Gruen, 20)
    - **Self-knowledge always leads to spontaneous compassion!**
    - „Therefore there is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace and my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. **If I find Him, I will find myself and if I find my true self, I will find Him.** (Contemplation, Merton, 28)
- Christian leaders run a church like running a show as **circus directors**. They have become unfamiliar with, and even afraid of, the deep and significant movements of the spirit. This can only be avoided if we find the courage to enter into our own existence and become familiar with the complexities of our own **inner lives**. Ministers must first have the courage to be explorers of the territory within themselves and to articulate their discoveries as a service to the inward generation! The minister’s job is not to reveal God to the people, but to help people recognise the work of God in themselves! (Wounded healer, 42 – 44) EXCELLENT!
- **Mystery**
  - True life with Christ eventually demands that we reject simplistic answers, learning to embrace mystery – something our culture rejects and resists. Mystery surrounds every deep experience of the human heart, for the deeper we go into the heart’s darkness, or its light, the closer we get to the ultimate mystery of God. But we want to turn mysteries into puzzles, to be explained or problems to be solved because maintaining the illusion that we can “straighten things out” makes us feel powerful.
- God draws straight with crooked lines. In our mind, it seems more pleasant to embrace universals; never broken, always applicable rules and patterns that allow us to predict and control things. This is good for science, but lousy for religion. (Rohr 57)
  - **The universal concretization of abstract particularities is – WORSHIP!**

- The wisdom of MYSTERY: Wisdom happily lives with mystery, doubt, and ‘unknowing,’ and in such living, ironically resolves that very mystery...

#### 4. Back to Simplicity

- Called again - A “2<sup>nd</sup> naïveté” which is a return to the joy of our first naïveté, but now totally new, inclusive, HUMBLE and mature.
  - The irony is that we must go through the necessary complexity in order to return to a 2<sup>nd</sup> simplicity (Example I. Cor. 8: 4-13)
  - The closer people come to God, the humbler they get. They can feel how far removed they are from God’s holiness. Humility is the response to the experience of God! (Heaven Begins within you, Gruen, 23)
    - *“You can know theology and be arrogant, but you cannot know God and be arrogant. Westerners want to expand the mind, but God wants to enlarge the heart where the mind, emotions, and will all converge.” – Dr. Neil T Anderson*
- [The first half of life naïveté includes a kind of excitement and happiness that is hard to let go of, unless you know there is an even deeper and tested kind of happiness out ahead of you. But you do not know that yet in your early years. Which is why those in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of life must tell you about it.
  - The great irony is that you must go to a necessary complexity (another word for suffering) to return to any 2<sup>nd</sup> simplicity. There is no nonstop flight from 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> naïveté. (116) (Ricoer)]
- **Tombstones** - A young man once asked a saint “How can I obtain salvation?” The old man responded: “Go to the tombstones and pour scorn on the dead and throw stones at their graves.” They did not say anything. “Now go and praise them” they still did not say anything. Neither abuse nor praise made a difference. They remain silent. “That is how you must be if you wish to find salvation. Be a corpse. Heed neither the injustice of man, nor their praise and you will be redeemed.” (Heaven Begins within you, Gruen, 106)
  - At a monastery a path led through the cemetery. There was an open grave. Oh, did one of the monks die? No, that grave is for the next one... We practice our death by giving up our will to live on our own terms. Only in that renunciation are we able to practice resurrection! (Peterson, the pastor, 290)
- During this Season jump into the deep end of the pool, unafraid, letting go of control, fear, willing to wrestle with God, to sit in the uncomfortable place of HUMILITY, PARADOX, and MYSTERY, in order to embrace a larger understanding of God.
- So that at the end of our lives we can say:

*And so, it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. <sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. <sup>4</sup> My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, <sup>5</sup> so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power. (1 Cor. 2)*

*Liebe Brüder und Schwestern! Als ich zu euch kam und euch Gottes Botschaft brachte, versuchte ich nicht, euch mit geschliffener Rhetorik und scharfsinnigen Argumenten zu beeindrucken. **Ich wollte bewusst von nichts anderem sprechen als von Jesus Christu - den Gekreuzigten.** Außerdem fühlte ich mich schwach; ich war ängstlich und sehr unsicher, als ich*

zu euch sprach. Was meine Verkündigung kennzeichnete, waren nicht Beredungskunst und kluge Worte; es war das **machtvolle Wirken von Gottes Geist**. (1 Kor. 2)

AMEN

## B. OPTIONAL

- **HUMILITY:** Humility allows us to keep learning, it helps us not get stuck in a rut, it helps us to realize we are not immortal and indispensable. It radically redefines our definition of maturity. **Maturity is not having it all – it is having nothing left to prove, but a lot still to learn!** Humble people are growing people. Humble people are learning people. Humble people have a stable identity, accurate view of self, openness to information, orientation to others, and an egalitarian attitude. (Mindful Christians, 218; 220) EXCELLENT!
  - “Whatever I had been trying to protect had been taken from me....It was like spiritual exfoliation by humiliation. (Nadia Bolz-Weber, 102)
  
- Shadow work is humiliating work, but properly so. If you do not “eat” humiliations with regularity and make friends with the judges, the courtroom, and the officers who come into your life, you will surely remain in the first half of life forever. We never get to the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of life without major shadowboxing... We all identify with our persona so strongly when we were young that we become masters of denial and learn to eliminate or deny anything that does not support it. (Richard Rohr 131) The closer you get to the light the more shadow you see! That is why truly holy people are truly humble people. (132)
  - **Greatness is an illusion**, a made-up destination, our own psychological Atlantis. The majority of life is not extraordinary, it is indeed quite average. Mass media and technology are messing up people’s expectations of themselves. It exposes us to unrealistic standards we fail to live up to. The more you think you are special and different than everyone else, the more will everything seem to threaten you. **It is better for you to think of yourself as not so special and quite ordinary.** That is okay. The vast majority of life will be boring and not noteworthy – and that is okay!
    - What if all these boring parts matter to God? What if days past in ways that feel small and insignificant to us are weighty with meaning and part of the abundant life that God has for us? (Liturgy of the ordinary, warren, 22)
    - **Dissatisfaction and unease are inherent parts of human nature.** When a person has no problems, the mind automatically finds a way to invent some. We are wired to become dissatisfied with whatever we have, and satisfied by only what we do not have. To be happy we need something to solve. **Negative emotions are a call to action! The question is what are we willing to struggle for, what pain are we willing to suffer! The nature of our problems determines the quality of our lives. The better our problems THE BETTER OUR LIFE!**
    - When we learn something new, **we do not go from wrong to right, but from wrong to somewhat less wrong.** Then we go from somewhat less wrong to slightly less wrong than that. We are always in the process of approaching truth and perfection without ever actually reaching it.
  
- Solitude is not separation – the Saints love their sanctity not because it separates them from the rest of us and places them above us, but because, on the contrary, it brings them closer to us and in a sense places them below us... The saints are what they are, not because their sanctity makes them admirable to others, **but because the gift of sainthood makes it possible for them to admire everybody else.** A man becomes a saint not by conviction that he is better than sinners but by the **realization that he is one of them,** and that all together **need the mercy of God!** IN HUMILITY IS THE GREATEST FREEDOM. As long as you have to defend the imaginary self that you think is important, you lose your peace of heart. As soon as you compare that shadow with the shadow of other people, you lose all joy, because you have begun to trade in unrealities, and **there is no joy in things that do not exist.** (Contemplation, Merton, 45)
  - A man who is not stripped and poor and naked within his own soul will unconsciously tend to do the works he has to do for his own sake rather than for the glory of God. He will be virtuous not because he loves God’s will but because he wants to admire his own virtues. But every moment of the day will bring him some frustration that will make him bitter and impatient and in his impatience he will be discovered. He has planned to do spectacular things. He cannot conceive himself without a halo. **And when the events of his daily life keep reminding him of his own insignificance and mediocrity,** he is ashamed, and his **pride refuses to swallow a truth at which no sane man should be surprised.** Even the **professionally pious,** and sometimes the pious most of all, can waste their time in competition with one another, in which nothing is found but misery... Having given up the desire to compete with other men, they

suddenly wake up and find that the joy of God is everywhere, and they are able to rejoice in the virtues and goodness of others more than ever they could have done in their own. They no longer dare to compare themselves with others – they have finally reached the point where they take their own insignificance for granted:

- To say that I am made in the image of God is to say that **love is the reason for my existence**, for God is love. **Love is my true identity**. Selflessness is my true self. Love is my true character. **Love is my name**. (Contemplation, Merton, 46 – 47)
- If we want to seek some way of being holy, we must 1<sup>st</sup> of all renounce our own way and own wisdom. We must empty ourselves as He did. We must deny ourselves and in some sense make ourselves “nothing” in order that we may live not so much in ourselves as in Him. We must live by a power and a light that seem not to be there. We must live by the strengths of an apparent emptiness that is always truly empty and yet never fails to support us at every moment. (Contemplation, Merton, 49)

### C. The Need to Go Deep

- If we were religious, did we move beyond church going into some sense of mystery and holiness of life, including the individual lives of all of us? If we wrote off religion as superstitious and irrelevant, was it because we had the wit to see that that is often exactly what religion is, or was it because for one reason or another we were reluctant **to look where religion points us**, which is beneath the surface of ourselves into the deep places where angels do battle with demons and souls are saved and lost? (Buechner, secrets, 294)
- Communion, the mysterious proclamation of Christ’s love, is incredible. At the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine, we are confronted with a God big enough to save us from our sins and tiny enough to get stuck between your teeth. (Swoboda, 170)
- **Be kind and gentle** with yourself – love yourself. Engage with life from a place of worthiness. No matter what gets done and how much is left undone, I am enough.
  - The GIFT OF IMPERFECTION is: courage (cor – the Latin word for heart; “To speak one’s mind by telling all of one’s heart”), compassion (the Latin word for “suffering with”; it is not a relationship between the healer and wounded, but the relationship between equals) and true connection (the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard and valued) with others. (Brené Brown, 12)
  - Only when we know our own darkness well can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognise our shared humanity... The heart of compassion is acceptance. The better we are at accepting ourselves and others, the more compassionate we become. (Brené Brown, 16 – 17)
  - Difference between belonging and fitting in: Fitting in is about assessing the situation and becoming what we need to be to be accepted. Belonging does not require us to *change* who we are it requires us to *be* who we are. True belonging only happens when we present our authentic [for this we need vulnerability], imperfect self to the World; our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance. (Brené Brown, 25 – 26)
  - Shame is the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging... Shame loses its power when it is spoken out loud. Difference between shame and guilt: shame says I am bad, guilt says I did something bad. The effect of guilt is often positive, where is the effect of shame is destructive. (Brené Brown, 39 – 41)
  - In this world, choosing authenticity and worthiness is an absolute active resistance. Choosing to live and love with our whole hearts is an act of defiance. You are going to confuse, piss off and terrify lots of people – including yourself. (Brené, 126)