

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY (continued)

In my last blog, I wrote some (maybe scattered) remarks about religion and spirituality. From the responses I have received it seems that many people are confused. Two people focused on Christian Nationalism. Another said that he was truly a None but I see him regularly at church, which is a contradiction. Therefore, I offer these thoughts. Apply them as you see yourself.

1. Some religious people complain about rules and laws but have not taken time to grow up in the faith and learn what their tradition really teaches. They learn of their religion through the secular newspapers and social media but never read books or periodicals that explore what their faith is really about.

2. All people are probably provincial in the way they feel all the world should be the same as their country or culture. Individualism and personal human rights prevent breaking the barriers of such a culture. In many ways Americans have become superficial in their understandings of religion as well as civics and politics.

3. It is evident that many people, brought up in some religious tradition, are hurting. They have been abused physically, emotionally or even spirituality by religious figures. They may be fed up with religion and yet still crave for some of the spiritual help it provided. Healing is obviously needed before deciding to reject to rejoin that tradition.

4. The post-Reformation, industrial and scientific developments have brought a people of conformity and passivity. Now they are rebelling. They don't know the real relationship of science and religion. They don't appreciate evolution as the continuing creation of God. They don't get involved in an active way in their religious traditions. They have associated their religion with its leaders, priests, rabbis, imams, and have not been drawn to the real center of their tradition.

Do you identify with any of these perspectives? Maybe yes. Maybe no. So let's turn to a more positive guide to being a more spiritual, faith-filled person.

RELIGION is the way a people and a tradition live their ways of understanding how God and humans interact. There is a way to express this in doctrines, rituals of worship, and legal guidelines. Our society is without a center without the values

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and direction that religion has always offered to civilizations. We are a people adrift and must deal with meaning, identify, hope all on our own. Children and young people particularly need guidance in understanding their place in life. They need to start their human journey with some context (Order), then often naturally rebel to find deeper meaning (Disorder) before finally working out a way to live it. (Reorder). Nothing wrong with all of this. Doubt and confusion are naturally part of the religious path. We must go through some disorder to grow up.

What happens after Disorder? Hopefully some form of adult responsibility. Maybe these people give up a formal religious attachment (though often maintaining an interior worldview that comes from their religious training). If they remain they find a way to respond to the norms by some spiritual path. I think many people who no longer go to church are still very religious but don't need the formal adherence to all its dictates.

SPIRITUALITY is the interior way we maturely live out our relation to God, the world and other people. Mature spirituality is not a self-centered feel good serenity. That may come but it will be in the midst of reality, suffering and love. Spirituality usually includes some of the following characteristics: regular prayer; meditation; a growing awareness and identity with all humanity and with the created world. The story the mystics particularly show us is a developing sense of unity with all that is. Dualistic thinking melts away.

As a spiritual life usually pushes us into a more simplistic life style and a loss of what has sustained and delighted us, we tend to need some religious base. Our images of God, for instance, do not hold up any more. We must face mystery. This is a paradox, isn't it? We come to understand less as we accept the mystery of God which excludes all anthropological images (male or female) and yet this is where true faith comes into play. Here is where we really trust the mystery of the divine. We may really have outgrown religion and many of its practices but we still need the support of the wisdom of our ancestors. Spiritual growth can be scary and this is why we usually need a guide, a mentor, an anamchara to accompany us.

These are some scattered thoughts on religion and spirituality. I do not pretend that they are at all comprehensive of everyone's experience. What do you think? You can write me at joycet@glastonburyabbey.org

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Religion and Spirituality will be our topic when we start a new season of my monthly zoom programs on faith, doubt, and loss of certainty. The first virtual session will take place on Tuesday, October 15th. Sign up and join the free and unguarded conversation on issues of faith. You may be Catholic, any other religious tradition, or even atheist. It doesn't matter. We are all human beings searching for meaning, for identity, for a place to be truthful about our struggles and confusions. You can sign up to get the link to this program at www.glastonburyabbey.org Some readings will be sent you when you sign up. Please do join us.

Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.