

## Monastic Scribe XXXIV: September 2, 2022

### Why Religion?

In a recent blog I summed up Richard Rohr's teaching on the two halves of life (or of faith). Responses indicate that some have experienced the second half of life, some are in the difficult transition to it which entails doubt, uncertainty and usually some suffering. And, I suspect, some people are comfortable staying in the first half of life. Let me reflect a little more on faith development from another way of describing it.

The first half of one's faith life is learning the ropes of the faith tradition to which you are introduced. Being baptized, for instance, gives one's life a sense of meaning, belonging and purpose. It usually means learning common beliefs of that tradition, taking on some common practices such as attendance at Mass, the acceptance of some moral standards, and looking to the religious tradition and its leaders for guidance. Brian McLaren, in his fine book, "Faith After Doubt" teaches that this first half includes Simplicity and then Complexity as one begins to question and relate what has been learned in a bigger world. This is as much religion that many Christians achieve. That's all they know. It is a TRANSACTIONAL type of spirituality, i.e. I do some things for God, e.g. prayers, practices, and expect God to do certain things for me.

But there is a second half of faith life that comprises, in McLaren's terms, Perplexity and finally Harmony. It is beyond transactional and is now TRANSFORMATIONAL. Reciting beliefs and doing practices are not enough. Faith must be expressed in love, in following Jesus and in embracing his mindset. It entails coming to a real knowledge of oneself, self-awareness and self-acceptance, especially the shadow side of oneself. How one thinks, speaks, acts get beyond the dualisms of the first half (who is in and who is out, who is good and who is bad, who is right and who is wrong, i.e. black and white thinking). Life becomes more gray. There is less certainty and less security. As one come closer to the heart of God, one must suffer doubt, darkness, interior life and struggle. One becomes more open, honest, vulnerable. Saints such as Mother Teresa exemplify all this.

But there comes greater peace and freedom. One is now truly oneself, made in the image of God, becoming more human by becoming more divine. This is too much for some people and they revert to the first half and a simpler belief system. But this deeper faith brings us to a real experience of God and not just an intellectual belief in God. We come to a mystical relationship with God and all others and all creation.

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We are truly ONE with God and all reality.

McLaren has his suggestions for coming into the final stage of Harmony. It all seems to come down to relationship. Oneness requires relationship. He notes five areas of this relationship. First, we relate to a Mentor who could be our parent, a friend, a spiritual director. We need some guidance. (And we can be mentors for others). Secondly, most importantly, we need to relate to the world of nature and find ourselves one with all creation. This created world beheld in wonder and awe shows us the Creator. Thirdly, we learn to encounter the divine, the transcendent, universal love in ourselves, in the depths of our own being. This is the work of contemplation. This allows us to accept ourselves as we are. Finally, a deep faith expressed in love requires that we have a healthy faith community. Relationships mean you cannot go it alone.

This may sound too much for many of us. But we are seeking it whether we know it or not. The forsaking of religion in our times leads many to seek this deeper life in many other ways, political, economic, sensual. People without a faith tradition are sitting ducks for fascist and authoritarian teachers. McLaren tells of a man who was a defector from a white supremacy group. He was asked why he had adhered to such a group. His answer was that it gave him meaning, belonging and purpose. Yes, he found a form of religion.

It seems to me that most people really need some religion to find this meaning, belonging and purpose. Maybe there are some strong individuals who do find a unique spirituality that guides and upholds them. But it is hard to buck the influences of our secularized culture, the power of consumerism and materialistic values, the manipulation of the corporate world, without some strong faith system.

I am well aware that many religious traditions no longer speak to a lot of people. We have to search to find healthy and deep religious communities. Or we have to help develop them ourselves, with others of course.

Am I making some sense to you? I am sure it can be said better. You can give me some reaction by writing me at: [joycet@glastonburyabbey.org](mailto:joycet@glastonburyabbey.org)

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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.