A School of Relationship

Scripture: Week 2

A School of Relationship

Thursday, March 3, 2016

We all fear and avoid intimacy, it seems. It is too powerful and demands that we also “have faces,” that is, self-confidence, identity, dignity, and a certain courage to accept our own unique face. Once we accept and love ourselves, we must be willing to share this daring intimacy with another. The brilliant title of C. S. Lewis’ book, Till We Have Faces suggests how central this is; the archetypal myth of Cupid and Psyche reveals the human and divine longing for face-to-face intimacy.

At first the individual is not ready for presence. We settle for tribal customs, laws, and occupations as our identity. Most individuals cannot contain or sustain trust and love by themselves or apart. So God starts by giving the whole group a sense of dignity and identity. YHWH creates “a chosen people”: “You will be my people and I will be your God,” God says to Israel (Jeremiah 32:38). Only the Whole can carry the weight of glory and the burden of sin, never the part. Western individualism is a large part of the ineffectiveness of most contemporary Christianity.

It seems the experiences of specialness and of sinfulness are both too heavy to be carried by an individual. One will disbelieve them or abuse them, either through self-hatred or by ego-inflation and conceit. It is almost impossible for a person to stand before the face of God in a perfect balance between extreme humility and perfect dignity. So God begins with a people “consecrated as God’s very own” (Deuteronomy 14:2). The group holds the Mystery which the individual cannot carry. This eventually becomes the very meaning of “church” or the Body of Christ. Membership in the sacred group should and can become the gateway to personal encounter and inner experience, though too often it is a substitute for it. Please trust me on this.

We could say, “In the beginning was the relationship” or the original blueprint for everything else that exists. John’s word for that was Logos (John 1:1). In other words, the first blueprint for reality was relationality. It is all of one piece. How we relate to God reveals how we eventually relate to just about everything else. And how we relate to the world of “the ten thousand things” is how we are actively relating to God, whether we know it or not (1 John 4:20). How we do anything is how we do everything!

Thus, we must read the whole Bible as a school of relationship. The word trinity, by the way, is never found in the Bible. In time, it became our way to explain how God gradually came to be seen as a communion of persons, a perfect giving and a perfect receiving, an inter-face, a mutual indwelling, or as Charles Williams beautifully called it, “co-inherence.” The Bible is slowly making humanity capable of living inside of such lovely co-inherence. As some mystics daringly put it, all creation is in the end drawn and seduced into the Great Co-inherence, and we are in effect “the Fourth Something” inside the Blessed Trinity. “I shall return to take you with me, so that where I am you also may be too,” Jesus clearly says (John 14:3). Salvation is giving us a face capable of receiving the dignity of the divine embrace, and then daring to think that we could love God back—and that God would enjoy this, or even care about it. I hope the top of your head just blew open!

Gateway to Silence:

“The physical structure of the universe is love.” —Teilhard de Chardin

Reference:
Adapted from Richard Rohr, Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality (Franciscan Media: 2008), 56-57.
The Soul’s Objective Union with God

Scripture: Week 2

The Soul’s Objective Union with God
Wednesday, March 2, 2016

“Let us create humanity in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves.” —Genesis 1:26

The Genesis story of the Judeo-Christian tradition is really quite extraordinary. It says that we were created in the very “image and likeness” of God, proceeding from free and overflowing love. This flow will be rediscovered and re-experienced by various imperfect people throughout the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. This sets us on a positive and hopeful foundation, which cannot be overstated. Yet we must also say that it never gained full traction in the life of many believers, either Jewish or Christian. Such utter gratuity was just too good to be true. Further, we could not control or manipulate this love; and anything humans cannot control, we do not engage with or enjoy. The Bible as a whole illustrates through various stories humanity’s objective unity with God, the total gratuity of that love, and unfortunately, our resistance to such an “impossibility.”

I find that many Christians still have no knowledge of the soul’s objective union with God (e.g., 1 John 3:2, 2 Peter 1:4), which all mystics rejoice in or they would not be mystics. Even ministers often fight me on this, quoting Augustine’s “original sin,” Calvin’s “total depravity,” or dear Luther’s “humans are like piles of manure, covered over by Christ.” I am sure they all meant well, but they also dug a pit so deep that many could never climb out or allow themselves to be lifted out. What a shame, literally! Such a negative starting point will not be very effective in creating loving or responsive people.

How do you ever undo such foundational damnation? Grace can only be trusted by an equally graceful human nature. Our work is merely to till the fertile soil, knowing that the Indwelling Spirit has already been planted within, and She is the One who “teaches you all things and reminds you of all things” (John 14:26). Many Christians have tried to pile a positive theology of salvation on top of a very negative anthropology of the human person, and it just does not work. Such traditions produce few mystics and universal lovers. The human self-image is too damaged and distorted from the beginning.

The word sin has so many unhelpful connotations that it’s very problematic today. For most of us “sin” does not connote what it really is: the illusion of separateness from God and from our original identity, our True Self. Most people think of sin as little naughty behaviors or any personal moral “stain” we suffer by reason of our bad thoughts, words, or deeds. Paul makes clear that sin is mostly a state, a corporate “principality” and “power,” an entrapment, or what many would now call an addiction. Jesus seems to primarily see it as a blindness that traps us in self-destructive behaviors and hard-heartedness. Thus he is always healing blind people and challenging people who see themselves as superior to others.

What we call sins are usually more symptoms of sin and not an inner negativity itself. What we call sins often have more to do with stupidity and ignorance than actual malice. Disconnected people will surely do stupid things and even become malicious, but they did not start there. They began in union, but disunion became their experienced lie and defense. This sounds terrible but it will help you get the point: most people are just stupid more than formally sinful. Anything that is cut off festers and fumes and attacks, while often hoping to regain acceptance. The primary meaning of sin is to live outside “the garden,” or in the smoldering garbage dump of Gehenna, below and outside the city walls of Jerusalem—the standing Biblical images of hell or separation from God’s reality (Genesis 3:23-24, Isaiah 66:24, Mark 9:47-48). Sin is primarily living outside of union; it is a state of separation, when the part poses as the Whole. It’s the loss of any inner experience of who you are in God.

You can’t accomplish or work up to union with God, because you’ve already got it. “Before the world began you were chosen, chosen in Christ to live through love in his presence” (Ephesians 1:4). You cannot ever become worthy by yourself; you can only reconnect to your Infinite Source. The biblical revelation is about awakening, not accomplishing. It is about realization, not performance. You cannot get there, you can only be there. That foundational Being-in-God is for some reason too hard to believe, too good to be true. Only the humble can receive it and surrender to it, because it affirms much more about God than it does about us. And we foolishly believe it should be “all about me”!

Gateway to Silence:
“The physical structure of the universe is love.” —Teilhard de Chardin

Reference:
Adapted from Richard Rohr, Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality (Franciscan Media: 2008), 27-30.
The Magic and Mystery of Intimacy

Scripture: Week 2

The Magic and Mystery of Intimacy
Tuesday, March 1, 2016

The Great Mystery unfolds even further. It seems that Israel’s God, YHWH, who is uncovering and exposing the Divine Self in the Bible, soon desires not just images or holy writings, but even persons with whom God can be in very concrete and intimate relationship—quite literally friends, partners, and companions. Jesus then became the representation of one walking on this earth who fully accepted and lived out of that divine friendship. In fact, he never seemed to doubt it. That must be at the core of our imitation of Jesus, and exactly how we become “partners in his great triumph” (2 Corinthians 2:14). Such healed people will naturally heal others, just by being “healed” from the great lie of separation.

God will not settle for mandated or fear-based contracts with servants, but rather desires willing and free relationships with “friends” (John 15:15). This is called a “new covenant” in both the Old and New Testaments (Jeremiah 31:31; Luke 22:20). Even today it still feels new, presumptuous, and unbelievable to most people.

In calling forth such freedom, consciousness, and love, God is actually empowering a certain kind of equality and dignity between God and humanity, as strange and impossible as that might sound. Yet love is only possible if there is some degree of likeness and equality between two parties. Jesus became that likeness, equality, and dignity, so we could begin to imagine it as possible for ourselves too.

One way to read the entire Bible is to note the gradual unveiling of our faces (2 Corinthians 3:18)—the gradual creating of personhood, from infants, to teenage love, to infatuation, to adult intimacy, to mature and peaceful union. We are tempted to avoid the deeper risk of intimacy every step of the way. But biblical spirituality has the potential of creating “persons” who can both receive and give out of love, a love that is always both risky and free. The English word “person” is related to the Latin per-sonare, or “sounding through.” The word may also be borrowed from the Etruscan word for mask. The deepest understanding of human personhood is that we are a sounding through from Another Source. If you are afraid of intimate interface, you will never allow this or know its softening power. You will stop the process before it even begins and never know how it works its transformation on the heart, mind, and body. If human eyes are too threatening for you, start with a stone, work up to plants and trees, animals will be easier, and probably only then are you ready for humans, and finally for the divine gaze.

I must be honest, however, and tell you that there are some people who start with the divine gaze and move down the “Great Chain of Being” to swallows, sunflowers, and stones. But in either case, the great chain that connects us all is always and only love. Connecting more and more of the links of the chain is the supreme work of all true spirituality. A single link is never the full chain.

Gateway to Silence:
“The physical structure of the universe is love.” —Teilhard de Chardin

Reference:
Adapted from Richard Rohr, Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality (Franciscan Media: 1999), 53-54.
In the beginning YHWH, the God of Israel, says, “Let us make humanity in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves” (Genesis 1:26). The use of the plural pronoun here seems to be an amazing, deep time intuition of what some would later call the Trinity—the revelation of the nature of God as community, as relationship itself, a Mystery of perfect giving and perfect receiving, both within God and outside of God. “Reality as communion” became the template and pattern for our entire universe, from atoms to galaxies. The first philosophical problem of “the one and the many” was already overcome in God; and we found ourselves to be both monotheists and Trinitarians at the same time. It is one participatory universe of many diverse things in love with one another.

Physicists, molecular biologists, astronomers, and other scientists are often more attuned to this universal pattern than many Christian believers. Paleontologist and Jesuit mystic, Teilhard de Chardin, said it well: “The physical structure of the universe is love.” [1] For a contemporary and creative presentation with the same message, read William Paul Young’s inspired novel, The Shack. Who would have thought that someone could make the doctrine of the Trinity a mystery novel and a page turner? It has now sold forty million copies worldwide.

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According to Genesis 1:26, God isn’t looking for servants, slaves, or contestants to jump correctly through some arbitrary hoops. God simply wants mirroring images of God to live on this earth and to make the divine visible. That is, of course, the way love works. It always overflows, reproduces, and multiplies itself. God is saying, as it were, “All I want are icons and mirrors out there who will communicate who I am, and what I’m about.” The experience of election, belovedness, and chosenness is the typical beginning of this re-imaging process. Then “We, with our unveiled faces gradually receive the brightness of the Lord, and we grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect” (2 Corinthians 3:18). You must first surrender to the image within yourself before you will then naturally pass it on—and then you become a very usable two-way mirror.

Henceforth, all your moral behavior is simply “the imitation of God.” First observe what God is doing all the time and everywhere, and then do the same thing (Ephesians 5:1). And what does God do? God does what God is: Love. The logic is then quite different than the retributive justice story line most of us were given. Henceforth, it is not “those who do it right go to heaven later,” but “those who receive and reflect me are in heaven now.” This is God’s unimaginable restorative justice. God does not love you if and when you change. God loves you so that you can change. That is the true story line of the Gospel.

Gateway to Silence:
“The physical structure of the universe is love.” —Teilhard de Chardin

References:

Adapted from Richard Rohr, Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality (Franciscan Media: 1999), 35-36.

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Newer Entries Older Entries

The First Bible

Scripture: Week 2

The First Bible

Sunday, February 28, 2016

The first act of divine revelation is creation itself. The first Bible is the Bible of nature. It was written at least 13.8 billion years ago, at the moment that we call the Big Bang, long before the Bible of words. “Ever since God created the world, God’s everlasting power and divinity—however invisible—are there for the mind to see in the things that God has made” (Romans 1:20). One really wonders how we missed that. Words gave us something to argue about, I guess. Nature can only be respected, enjoyed, and looked at with admiration and awe. Don’t dare put the second Bible in the hands of people who have not sat lovingly at the feet of the first Bible. They will invariably manipulate, mangle, and murder the written text.
In the biblical account God creates the world developmentally over seven days, almost as if there was an ancient intuition of what we would eventually call evolution. Clearly creation happened over time. The only strict theological assertion of the Genesis story is that God started it all. The exact how, when, and where is not the author's concern. Our creation story, perhaps written five hundred years before Christ, has no intention or ability to be a scientific account. It is a truly inspired account of the source, meaning, and original goodness of creation. Thus it is indeed “true.” Both Western rationalists and religious fundamentalists must stop confusing true with literal, chronological, or visible to the narrow spectrum of the human eye. Many assume the Bible is an exact snapshot—as if caught on camera—of God’s involvement on Earth. But if God needed such literalism, God would have waited for the twentieth century of the Common Era to start talking and revealing through “infallible” technology.

Notice in Genesis that on the third, fourth, and fifth days what God created is called “good” (1:9-25) and on the sixth day it is called “very good” (1:31); but on the first and second days Scripture does not say it was good. The first day is the separation of darkness from light, and the second day is the separation of the heavens above from the earth below (1:3-8). The Bible does not say that is good—because it isn’t! This sets the drama in motion; the remainder of the stumbling, struggling, yet sacred text tries to put darkness and light, heaven and earth back together as one.

Of course darkness and light, heaven and earth, have never really been separate, but “sin” thinks so (sin separates; God and soul unite). That’s the tragic flaw at the heart of everything, what Augustine unfortunately called “original sin” and I’d like to call “original shame”—or the illusion of separateness. Jesus then becomes the icon of cosmic reconciliation (Colossians 1:19-20, Revelation 21:1-3). He holds all that we divide and separate together as one (which is really the foundational mystery of “forgiveness”) and tells us that we can and must do the same work of reconciliation of opposites (2 Corinthians 5:17-20, Ephesians 2:14-22).

Science is now able to affirm what were for centuries the highly suspect intuitions of the mystics. We now take it for granted, and even provable, that everything in the universe is deeply connected and in foundational relationship, even and most especially light itself, which interestingly is the first act of creation (Genesis 1:3). The entire known universe is in orbit and in cycle with something else. There’s no such thing in the whole universe as autonomy. It doesn’t exist. That’s the illusion of the modern, individualistic West, which tries to imagine that the autonomous self is the basic building block and the true Seer. In fact, all holy ones seem to say that the independent self sees everything incorrectly. Parts can only see parts and thus divide things even further. Whole people see things in their wholeness and thus create wholeness (“holiness”) wherever they go and wherever they gaze. Holy people will find God in nature and everywhere else too. Heady people will only find God in books and words, and finally not even there.

**Gateway to Silence:**
“The physical structure of the universe is love.” —Teilhard de Chardin

**References:**
Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality* (Franciscan Media: 2008), 32-33;
and *New Great Themes of Scripture* (Franciscan Media: 1999), disc 3 CD.

Scripture: Week 1 Summary

**Scripture: Week 1**

**Summary: Sunday, February 21-Friday, February 26, 2016**

The biblical revelation is inviting us into a new experience and a new way of seeing, and evolved human consciousness seems to be more ready to accept the divine invitation. **(Sunday)**

If the Risen Jesus is the full and trustworthy unveiling of the nature of God, then we live in a safe and love-filled universe. **(Monday)**

Love is the source and goal, faith is the slow process of getting there, and hope is the willingness to move forward without resolution and closure. And these are indeed, “the three things that last” (1 Corinthians 13:13). **(Tuesday)**

The fact that Christians include the Hebrew Scriptures as part of our Bible should show us that Christianity was never intended to be an...
The Jewish and Christian religions have the power to correct themselves from inside, because of the self-critical thinking they kept as part of their sacred texts.

If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it.

Practice: Reading Scripture with the Mind of Christ

Looking at which Scripture passages Jesus emphasizes (remember, the Hebrew Bible was his only Bible!) shows he clearly understands how to connect the “three steps forward” dots that confirm the God he has met, knows, loves, and trusts. At the same time, Jesus ignores or openly contradicts the many “two steps backward” texts. He never quotes the book of Numbers, for example, which is rather ritualistic and legalistic. He never quotes Joshua or Judges, which are full of sanctified violence. Basically, Jesus doesn’t quote from his own Scriptures when they are punitive, imperialistic, classist, or exclusionary. In fact, he teaches the opposite.

Jesus does not mention the list of twenty-eight “thou shall nots” in Leviticus 18 through 20, but chooses instead to echo the rare positive quote of Leviticus 19:18: “You must love your neighbor as yourself.” The longest single passage he quotes is from Isaiah 61 (in Luke 4:18-19): “The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me. He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, and to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord.” But Jesus quotes selectively; he appears to have deliberately omitted the last line—“and the day of vengeance of our God” (Isaiah 61:2b)—because he does not believe in a God of vengeance at all.

Jesus knows how to connect the dots and find out where the text is truly heading, beyond the low-level consciousness of a particular moment, fear, or circumstance. He knows there is a bigger arc to the story: one that always reveals a God who is compassionate, nonviolent, and inclusive of outsiders. He knows how to “thin slice” the text, to find the overall pattern based on small windows of insight. He learned from Ezekiel, for example, that God’s justice is restorative and not retributive.

We can only safely read Scripture—it is a dangerous book—if we are somehow sharing in the divine gaze of love. A life of prayer helps you develop a third eye that can read between the lines and find the golden thread which is moving toward inclusivity, mercy, and justice. I am sure that is what Paul means when he teaches that we must “know spiritual things in a spiritual way” (1 Corinthians 2:13). Any “pre-existing condition” of a hardened heart, a predisposition to judgment, a fear of God, any need to win or prove yourself right will corrupt and distort the most inspired and inspiring of Scriptures—just as they pollute every human conversation and relationship. Hateful people will find hateful verses to confirm their obsession with death. Loving people will find loving verses to call them into an even greater love of life. And both kinds of verses are in the Bible!

Gateway to Silence:
Astonish me with your love.

Reference:
Adapted from Richard Rohr, Hierarchy of Truths: Jesus’ Use of Scripture (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2014), CD, MP3 download.

For further study:
Richard Rohr, Hierarchy of Truths: Jesus’ Use of Scripture (CD, MP3 download)

Transforming Our Pain

Scripture: Week 1

Transforming Our Pain
Friday, February 26, 2016

One of the enlightened themes that develops in the Judeo-Christian scriptures and reaches its fullness in the crucified Jesus is the
recognition of the transformative significance of human pain and suffering. We see this most especially in the four “Servant Songs” of Isaiah (chapters 42-53), in the biographies of Jonah, Jeremiah, and Job, in Simeon’s prophecy to Mary (Luke 2:34-35), and in Jesus’ common warning to his followers. Jesus builds on what his Jewish tradition already recognized—how to hold, make use of, and transform our suffering into a new kind of life instead of an old kind of death. It is the movement from an initial self-created order, to a risky allowing of necessary disorder, to the “third force” reordering that we call the resurrected life. It is a long slog, which we all try to avoid as long as possible.

The story of Job is both the summit and also the dead end of the Hebrew Scriptures. Humanity has never known what to do with unjust suffering—which is our universal experience on this earth—until Jesus gives his seismic shift of an answer. One could say that the story of Jesus is the same story as Job, who says, “I know that I have a Living Defender, and he will raise me up at last, will set me close to him, and from my flesh I shall look on God” (Job 19:25-26). This is Jesus’ exact faith affirmation on the cross when he first says, “Why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34), followed by, “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34), and “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). Jesus is the new Job, but with a way out and a way through.

Pain teaches a most counterintuitive thing: we must go down before we even know what up is. In terms of the ego, most religions teach in some way that all must “die before they die.” Suffering of some sort seems to be the only thing strong enough to both destabilize and reveal our arrogance, our separateness, and our lack of compassion. I define suffering very simply as “whenever you are not in control.” Suffering is the most effective way whereby humans learn to trust, allow, and give up control to Another Source. I wish there were a different answer, but Jesus reveals on the cross both the path and the price of full transformation into the divine.

When religion cannot find a meaning for human suffering, human beings far too often become cynical, bitter, negative, and blaming. Healthy religion, almost without realizing it, shows us what to do with our pain, with the absurd, the tragic, the nonsensical, the unjust. If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it. If we cannot find a way to make our wounds into sacred wounds, we invariably give up on life and humanity. I am afraid there are bitter and blaming people everywhere, both inside and outside of the church. As they go through life, the hurts, disappointments, betrayals, abandonments, and the burden of their own sinfulness and brokenness all pile up, and they do not know how to deal with all this negativity. This is what we need to be “saved” from.

If there isn’t some way to find some deeper meaning to our suffering, to find that God is somehow in it, and can even use it for good, we will normally close up and close down. The natural movement of the small self or ego is to protect itself so as not to be hurt again. As I shared last week, neuroscience now shows us that we attach to negativity “like Velcro” unless we intentionally develop another neural path like forgiveness or letting go.

Mature religion is about transforming history and individuals so that we don’t keep handing the pain on to the next generation. For Christians, we learn to identify our own wounds with the wounding of Jesus and the sufferings of the universal Body of Christ (see Philippians 3:10-11), which is Deep Meaning that always feeds the soul. We can then see our own suffering as a voluntary participation in the one Great Sadness of God (Colossians 1:24). Within this meaningful worldview, we can build something new, good, and forever original, while neither playing the victim nor making victims of others. We can be free conduits of grace into the world.

Gateway to Silence:
Astonish me with your love.

Reference:
Adapted from Richard Rohr, Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality (Franciscan Media: 2008), 24-25.

Image Credit: Photograph by mercucio2

Newer Entries Older Entries

Self-Critical Thinking

Scripture: Week 1

Self-Critical Thinking
Thursday, February 25, 2016

In the Judeo-Christian scriptures, we read about people who found God in the actual, in seemingly secular history, and in mundane daily life. This is the Jewish matrix by which we were gradually prepared for the personal incarnation. It widened, solidified, and paved the runway by which the Jesus Mystery could take off and be understood.
The Hebrew Scriptures, against all religious expectations, include what most of us would call the problem—the negative, the accidental, the sinful—as the precise arena for divine revelation. There are no perfectly moral people in ancient Scriptures; even Abraham drove his second wife into the desert with their child. The Jewish people, contrary to what might be expected, chose to present their arrogant and evil kings and their very critical prophets as part of their Holy Scriptures. They include stories and prophecies that do not tell the Jewish people how wonderful they are but, rather, how terrible they are! It is the birth of self-critical thinking and thus moves consciousness much higher. No other religion has been known for such capacity for self-criticism, down to our own time.

Jesus showed us that self-criticism of our own religion is necessary. But if we are honest, we rarely hear the Christian Church or its leaders being self-critical. Christianity has seldom been known for any capacity to criticize itself until the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s. Usually we just criticize others. I remember when I asked a professor about Jesus’ tirades against religion and the priestly class (in Matthew 23, for example), and the typical answer was, “Well, he was talking about the Jews.” Surely not us!

The ability to think critically about ourselves is the first necessary step out of the dualistic mind. It teaches us an initial patience with ambiguity and mystery, while also teaching us rational honesty. Such critical thinking is a characteristic of the Western mind which produced the scientific and industrial revolutions, as well as the Protestant Reformation. The Jewish and Christian religions have the power to correct themselves from inside, and move beyond mere superstition, because of these kinds of sacred and self-critical texts. Jesus lived and taught in the genre of a prophet, but Christians have over-emphasized that he was simply “foretold” by the prophets. This changed the way we thought about the role of a prophet, and so we couldn’t see that Jesus truly was a radical prophet. There are many churches called “Christ the King,” but none, that I’m aware of, called “Jesus the Prophet.”

The biblical account shows that Israel did not distance itself from its own contradictions or the contradictions of life, from the horrors and sinfulness of human history—which finally became “the folly of the cross” in Jesus. These hard realities had already been presented in the stories of Job, the experience of exodus and exile, and Israel’s constant invasion and occupation by foreign powers. The Jews may have often felt like saying to God what Teresa of Avila is supposed to have said: “If this is the way you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few of them!”

Self-criticism is quite rare in the history of religion, yet it is necessary to keep religion from its natural tendency toward arrogant self-assurance—and eventually idolatry, which is always the major sin for biblical Israel. We must also point out, however, that mere critique usually deteriorates into cynicism, skepticism, academic arrogance, and even post-modernistic nihilism. So be very careful and very prayerful before you own any job description of professional critic or prophet! Negativity can do you in.

**Gateway to Silence:**
Astonish me with your love.

**Reference:**

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**From the Specific to the Universal**

**Scripture: Week 1**

**From the Specific to the Universal**

**Wednesday, February 24, 2016**

The Israelites gradually learned the transformative power of God’s action in their lives, as we see often in Isaiah and so many of the prophets. What formed a prophet was their ability to really trust that YHWH was actively and practically involved in the ordinary history of the Jewish people. One has to wonder where such confidence came from.

*Yes, as the rain and the snow come down from the heavens and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do.* —Isaiah 55:10-11

Israel’s history is the womb for the world’s initial sense of divine incarnation (God’s practical involvement in this world). In other words, they saw the patterns and connected the dots so well, that they could trust the same would continue to happen all the time and
The love and presence of God, when it is planted in fertile soil, will always have an exponential yield. In gradually accepting the daring initiative of actual intimacy from God, the Hebrew people became a true community of faith. It was not so much that God loved Israel more than all the other peoples of the earth, but somehow they were a people who learned how to hear and trust God’s initiatives better than almost anybody else. That is their eternal glory and privilege! So they were in the best position to hand the message of divine intimacy on to the rest of the world. They produced a worldview in which a Jesus could emerge.

The Hebrew Scriptures—what Christians unfortunately call the “Old” Testament (implying it is out of date)—were assembled over two thousand years of history. The New Testament or Christian Scriptures include the four Gospels, the Book of Acts, the many letters of Paul, John, Peter, James and others, and the Book of Revelation. These twenty-seven books of the Christian Scriptures were probably written over a period of a mere one hundred years of history. Yet together they have defined Western spirituality and even culture.

Catholic Bibles include forty-six books. Some of these are “apocryphal” and their inclusion in the canon of Scripture has often been debated. These books include First and Second Maccabees, Tobias, Judith, Esther, Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and parts of Daniel, which our Protestant brothers and sisters do not include. In essence, the foundational message is the same no matter which version of the Bible we accept.

The fact that Christians include the Hebrew Scriptures as part of our Bible should show us that Christianity was never intended to be an exclusionary religion.

We include another religion’s Scripture in our own Christian Scriptures—as two thirds of our Bible! Jesus, who was an observant Jew, brilliantly thin-sliced his own tradition and sacred texts, giving us a truly expert lens by which to discover the deepest Hebrew wisdom. And Jesus’ very selective interpretation of his own Scriptures represents the interpretive key.

In the stories of the Hebrew people we see YHWH, the God of Israel, gradually showing God’s Self to be the hope and the promise of all those who search for more. The principle of incarnation is this: start with the concrete, the specific, the personal—and then universalize from there. God is saving us as one people and, as Pope Francis has made clear, God’s covenant with Israel is permanent and enduring (Romans 11:1f) and never out of date. What was true for them is true for all.

Gateway to Silence:
Astonish me with your love.

Reference:

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Newer Entries Older Entries

**Order, Disorder, Reorder**

*Scripture: Week 1*

**Order, Disorder, Reorder**
**Tuesday, February 23, 2016**

The Bible reveals the development of human consciousness and human readiness for a Divine Love Affair. The differences between earlier and later Scriptures clearly show an evolution of human capacity, comprehension, and depth of experience. Jesus, for me, represents the mature image of what God is doing in history. In Israel’s growth as a people we see the pattern of what happens to every individual and to every community that sets out on the journey of faith. Israel is the “womb of the Incarnation,” for it is in their history that the whole drama is set in motion. Jesus fully grows up inside that womb. And we must grow up too. Little by little, human consciousness is prepared to see how God loves and liberates us. But we will face plenty of resistance, revealed in the constant hostility to Jesus even and most especially from religious people, ending in the very “killing of God.”

There are many models of human and spiritual development. We could describe three stages as Simple Consciousness, Complex Consciousness (both “fight and flight”), and Non-Dual Consciousness (“the unitive way” or “third way”). More recently, I have been calling the developmental stages Order > Disorder > Reorder. In short, I see this pattern in the Bible and in human lives:

1. Order: We begin with almost entirely tribal thinking, mirroring the individual journey, which starts with an egocentric need for “order” and “self.” Only gradually do we move toward inclusive love.
2. Disorder: We slowly recognize the invitation to a “face to face” love affair through the biblical dialogue of election, failure, sin, and
grace, which matures the soul. This is where we need wisdom teachers to guide us through our “disorder.”

3. Reorder: Among a symbolic few, there is a breakthrough to unitive consciousness (for example, figures like Abraham and Sarah, Moses, David, the Psalmists, many of the prophets, Job, Mary, Mary Magdalene, Jesus, and Paul). This is also what some call enlightenment or salvation.

Conservatives normally get trapped in the first stage, progressives are trapped in the second, and only a minority of either group seem to get to the third. The last stage is considered dangerous to people in the first stage, and rather unknown and invisible to people in the second stage. If you are not trained in a trust of both love and mystery, and also some ability to hold anxiety and paradox, all of which allow the divine entry into the soul, you will not proceed very far on the spiritual journey. In fact, you will often run back to stage one when the going gets rough in stage two. The great weakness of much Western spirituality is that there is little understanding of the necessity of darkness and “not knowing” (which is the transformative alchemy of faith). This is what keeps so much religion at stage one.

Thus the biblical tradition, and Jesus in particular, praises faith even more often than love. Why? Because faith is that patience with mystery that allows you to negotiate the stages of life and move toward non-egocentric love. As both John of the Cross and Gerald May point out in their own descriptions of “the dark night of the soul,” God teaches the soul most profoundly through darkness—and not just light! We only need enough light to be able to trust the darkness. Trials and darkness teach us how to trust in a very practical way that a good God is guiding us. I don’t need to be perfectly certain before I take the next step. Now I can trust that even my mistakes will be used in my favor, if I allow them to be. This is a wonderful way to grow in human love too, by the way. Darkness, mistakes, and trials are the supreme teachers. Success really teaches you nothing; it just feels good.

Love is the source and goal, faith is the slow process of getting there, and hope is the willingness to move forward without resolution and closure. And these are indeed, “the three things that last” (1 Corinthians 13:13). People who have these gifts—faith, hope, and love—are indestructible.

Gateway to Silence:
Astonish me with your love.

Reference:
Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality* (Franciscan Media: 2008), 54-55.

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Becoming God is a scientific guide to self-realization, spiritual enlightenment and transcending consciousness through a mind blowing unification of quantum physics, psychology and religion. "A Scientific Guide to Transcendental Consciousness and Spiritual Enlightenment". A book by FORD. The Book: Becoming God. Becoming God is a mind blowing journey that explores the nature of consciousness and its connection to the reality we experience in the here and now. On Becoming a God in Central Florida is an American dark comedy television series created by Robert Funke and Matt Lutsky that premiered on Showtime on August 25, 2019. The series stars Kirsten Dunst and is set in the early 1990s. In September 2019, the series was renewed for a second season. However, in October 2020, the renewal decision was reversed and the series was canceled after one season due to the COVID-19 pandemic.