

# NATURE AND GRACE

A JOURNAL OF CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY AND WELL-BEING

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## Of Faith and Reality: Dis-illusion and Re-Enchantment

NATURE AND GRACE SEEK TO DWELL IN ONE PLACE. THAT IS WHY THE POET RUMI SAID,

'LET YOUR HEART BE SILENTLY DRAWN BY THE STRONGER PULL OF WHAT YOU REALLY LOVE.'

What is it to be a modern Catholic? To live within a secular society while having, as James Fowler writes in the book *Stages of Faith*, "the capacity to live at more than a mundane level"? To live and move and breathe within an "ultimate environment"? What is it to base our lives and "rest our hearts", as Fowler goes on to say, upon the Judeo-Christian foundation, which is about *call and response* to a living God Who we can feel dwelling among us? Do we identify with the story of Samuel, who, when he finally understands that it is God calling him, says, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears"?

What is it like to have been raised in what, on the surface, appear to be two competing worldviews, the religious and the secular-rational? How do we unite heart and head? Can these two inform each other?

Most of us have an uncomfortable truce between what we hope for from religion and know about human nature from the social sciences. We can't seem to think about both at the same time without uneasiness. We wrestle as we become more educated, more sophisticated. We struggle when we encounter crises from which we can find refuge in only one or the other camp. Much of psychology, for example, reduces religion to an illusion best outgrown, so we can face

reality head-on. And religion is often in a defensive position. There is even a book (albeit written by a fundamentalist Christian) which suggests that Christians cannot trust psychology.

We live in a creative tension between both realities. Catholicism, like most religions, offers a richness of meaning, more than symbols. As children we enter into this symbolized world. Our growing up, with its crises and turning points, often costs us our faith by disenchanting us of our beliefs in God. Just as surely as children grow up and lose Santa Claus, many of us, eyes opened in disillusionment, lose our God-as-sustainer. Our eyes are opened to tragedy, to loss, to our own evil potential, or how we cannot entirely master ourselves, no matter how enlightened we become via therapy and education. We lose our innocence and *mistake* this to mean we must give up our faith. Or, we make compromises.

The key to staying faithful while giving up illusion lies in waiting for our eyes to open *even wider*—in grateful surprise, in awe, in a great "Aha!" as our lives unfold and our God speaks to our hearts through it all. *We need to become newly enchanted after despair.* This issue will explore how Vatican II launched us from one stage of faith through another, from a naive faith through an examined one, to stand on the brink of another stage—that of a re-enchanted faith. We of the post-modern era need it.

—L.T. I invite reader response to any articles in *Nature and Grace*, at [ltoricsw@aol.com](mailto:ltoricsw@aol.com), or by mail.

Faith is not only what we do because of what we believe, but how we hope-fully live, despite our doubt. —editor

## Confessional Piece

## Returning to Innocence: Faith, Intellect, and "Second Naivete"'

*Those of us who have become "lapsed" or still-practicing-but-tired, have likely reached a stage in which intellect has done its job to help us grow beyond childhood faith, but without the heart, we've not fallen back in love; we've become jaded...*

*Editor's note: In these weeks after Easter, the church year settles into "ordinary time," and somehow, so do we. The intensity of Advent, Lent and Easter are over. Without these heady seasons, and their symbols of love, hope, loss and resurrection, we are somewhat on our own. Doubt creeps in more easily. The world isn't so shiny and new looking as during the high holy days. Our faith symbols get a little dusty. It is a good time to pause and reflect on where we as individuals stand in relation to the claims of our faith, and to the covenant of God's faithfulness to us.*

*Many of us in this "post-modern" society have a deep awareness of having lost our innocence, as far as religious faith goes. Belief and faith seem in conflict with each other; head and heart struggle. Some of us silently fret that we don't believe as easily as we did as children: we've been around the block. In our earnest to really understand the Sacraments (and to give up a "magic bullet" view of them), some of us risk reducing them to mere symbols. How lonely a time this is! But there is more for us, if we remain faithful...*

The train was nearly empty the afternoon my small daughter and I travelled from Chicago to Milwaukee that Christmas to see family. In the back of our car Ava jumped happily from seat to seat, while across the aisle two Jewish men talked with great animation about something. I'm sure they would forgive me if I fantasize them into two Rabbis, wrestling with God. The conductor wasn't busy, and we started chatting; I became aware that the two men were finding our conversation interesting.

After the usual polite exchanges about destinations and holiday plans, our conductor asked me what I did for a living. I never know what I'm in for when I answer that I am a psychotherapist with an interest in pastoral counseling. He seemed very interested in that, and asked about my

religion. I briefly mentioned Catholicism, wondering what stereotype that might conjure, and perhaps in attempt at antidote, added that I am interested in Buddhism. Then he pulled out a religious tract. I inwardly groaned. How to respond? I could feel the eavesdroppers' interest mount. I said something about being very happy in my Catholic faith, thank you very much, and that I respected all faiths, his too. Before he left, he tried to argue a bit, and closed by saying, "Just remember, you can't get to God through your intellect alone. You need a relationship with Jesus." Ker-pow! My cheeks reddened—how did he know to say that to me? I felt the gaze of my travel companions. Turning to them, I saw their sympathy for me for having been "hit on" for a conversion. But I don't think they noticed that in our exchange, something had, in fact, happened to me that could very well have been another step on a path I'd been trying to walk for some time.

A passionate, probing intellect is a gift from God, and a pleasure. Some of our cherished experiences are those late-into-the-night talks with old friends, about our ideas about life, love, men, women, God, politics, and so on. We wrestle together over these things, trying to understand them and ourselves. We gain perspective, insight, and humility. To think and wonder can lead to a love affair with the whole world, and with God. So, can intellect ever get in the way of faith? Without intellect, aren't we left with mere sentimentality instead of mature faith? The short answer to these questions is, *yes*. Intellect *is* a necessary, but insufficient, means to faith. As my Jesuit friend Jim Sunderland points out, Catholicism is an intellectual faith, yet intellect *is not*, in itself, faith. Intellect without heart leads to dead ritual. Reason (in the Greek, *Logos*), needs *Eros*, love, so the person of faith can become *re-enchanted*, and fall in love all over again.

But first, we have to become disenchanted, as when we undergo a loss of faith. Those of us who have become either "lapsed Catholics," or still-practicing-but-tired ones, have likely reached a stage in life in which intellect has done its job to help us grow beyond childhood faith, but instead of falling back in love, we've become jaded; we've lost something. As we grow up, we rightly lose our childhood belief in God as a white man with a beard and flowing robes, seated on a throne. But we also might lose our faith in God as alive, loving and powerfully working in our lives. And we find our experience of sacraments appropriately stripped of their "magic bullet" status, but wrongly reduced to mere symbols of a power we no longer believe we will receive from them. "Jesus" becomes a sentimental concept like peace and love, and we cringe whenever T.V. evangelists utter his name. We pray, if we do at all, without enough abandon, not daring to ask for much anymore. At a certain stage of life, we lose our innocence, and our trust.

Thank goodness it's only a stage. Beyond it are others, if we just keep growing, and in them, our faith is restored. Theologian James W. Fowler explains that there are six stages of faith; the last three of them are reached, if at all, only after we reach adolescence and our intellectual abilities really take off. (See the brief outline of these beginning on page 6).

### The role of Vatican II

To get an idea of the stages of faith, and of where each of us might be personally, it is useful to think of the second Vatican Council as having aimed the Church toward Stage Five faith, or *re-enchantment*. But many Catholics, lay, religious and clergy alike, landed short of that, in Stage Four faith, which I'll call *examined but disenchanted faith*. Not that the aim of Vatican II was to dis-enchant anyone: in fact, many Catholics have been able to fall back in love with God and the Church because of the insights gained in this council. But ask any pre-Vatican II Catholic if they miss anything from before the mid-1960s, and they'll tell you: churches graced by statues, prayers to saints with emphasis on the rosary, the mystery of the Latin Mass and the

Sacraments...the certainty about things with which Catholicism was imbued.

A bit of history will help us understand the stages of individual faith development, which are mirrored in humanity's historical development over centuries. Coming about two hundred years after the Enlightenment period began in Western culture, Vatican II brought Catholicism from a medieval to a modern self-image in just a few years! In the mid-1960s, the Council brought into the open the kind of struggle that people of any religion underwent, on a grand scale, during the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment changed the way people considered God and religion because science changed the way people looked at the whole world. What couldn't be proven with rational examination was discarded by the thinking person as mere suspicion or wishful thinking. For many, God went out the window. At the same time, democracy replaced autocracy (rule by a single person with unlimited power, such as kings), and theocracy (rule by a person who claims divine sanction), as the dignity of every individual and his and her (largely *his*) right to self-determination became recognized. Internal authority based on the individual's assessment of reality became paramount. Out the window went the ability of the people to put (blind) trust in any authority, religious or political. Science and the human mind could, it was believed, solve all human ills and evils. An arbitrary God wasn't needed: an educated society could progress to enlightenment on its own.

The gift of the Enlightenment was in recognizing individual dignity and autonomy, and the value of examining beliefs in the light of scientific inquiry. The loss was the dismissal of the non-rational, the devaluation of what can only be a *felt* truth, like that revealed in poetry, literature, song, and art. Reason, which tries to control and understand something by taking it apart (even if that kills it), went to war with *Eros*, which lives with a thing in order to come to know it. *How many of us have experienced this personally, regarding our faith? Does any of this sound a lot like what happens to us individually as we grow into adolescence? Or later, when a life crisis occurs to us? We become dis-enchanted, as we learn that the*

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*(Continued from page 3)*

authorities with their traditions don't know everything. If we can't see it, we don't believe it. We lose our ability to think poetically.

Vatican II knew that it had to address this. The council did so by valuing the gifts of the Enlightenment, which had paved the way for the wisdom of the social and biological sciences, including psychology. The laity, with their combined wisdom in the sciences, had a right, and a duty, to voice themselves about religious matters. Religious orders were allowed to modernize. Liturgical practice acknowledged the psychological needs of children and adults. Priests faced the assembly during Mass. Laity held and offered to one another the Eucharist, when prior to that, a layperson would have dropped to the floor to pick up a dropped wafer with the tongue! And they were also empowered as they became religious educators and pastoral ministers.

But between the Council's intent and its translation, the mystery and the sacred, for many, started disappearing from our Catholic psychological and emotional landscape. Statues and holy water fonts, so prominent in older Catholic homes, didn't have any place at all in the homes of many of us "sophisticated" moderns. Novenas and rosaries became the responsibility of the elder women. In our effort to get modern, we also got Spartan: our sacred images were minimalized. Not that it was intended.

By allowing for examination and updating of the Church, Vatican II gave permission for any Catholic to bring their private inquiries (and doubts) into public discussion. When I taught parents pre-Baptism classes in the early 1980's, people who perhaps had returned to church only because they were now parents, met in dialog with parents who had never left. The air in those meetings was charged, and exhilarating! People voiced their questions and doubts and I, with my theological training, didn't always have "the answers." And, neither did my co-leader, the associate pastor (bless him for his humility! Can any of us imagine such a class prior to Vatican II? The black-cassocked priest signalling, intentionally or not, anything

other than absolute authority by his uniform alone?) So people heard each other, argued with each other, received each other, and came to their own answers. We encouraged people to stay open to their struggle to find God. Our dialog was never un-holy, probably because we prayed together. We never left it all just an intellectual exercise. That is the saving grace (no, the pun wasn't intended) of religious practice throughout millennia: Eros, the heart, has a place of respect here as a home for the sacred.

If the Enlightenment made the sacred look irrelevant, the era begun in the twentieth century, called the Post-modern, made the sacred look attractive again, but only in a strangely secularized, pop-cultural form. That is why psychedelic drugs were so alluring: they seemed to hold the opportunity for transcendence without doctrine or obligation. Years from now, at Vatican III, the Church may say that it was not a coincidence that Vatican II was held at this time.

The council met at a time in history in which our Euro-American culture was left dis-encharmed by a half-century of large-scale tragedy: two World Wars, nuclear holocaust in Japan, the Holocaust of the Jewish people and other "undesirables," and the Cold War. The Postmodern Age had begun, heralded by the bomb. One hallmark of postmodernism is humility, because we as a modern culture see that progress demonstrates that we don't yet know it all. And some of us believe that knowledge alone may not save the world. When humanism is found lacking, the other hallmark of the post-modern era presents as a great emptiness, and a barely admitted yearning for...God? As individuals, when availing ourselves of therapy or medicine or the courts fails to heal our wounds and our lost innocence, we, too, yearn for Someone Who embraces us...not something we elect to take into ourselves, but a powerful Someone who just *takes us*.

A journal entry from that Christmas, after the train trip, told of my own dis-enchantment and yearning:

*Though I've thought of [the wish for innocence] as a resistance to [growing*

into] womanhood, and though I read that it means "to not speak" or "to not know," I can only express my prayer for healing from loss, and from self-doubt, by saying to God, **I want my innocence back.** It's more than trust in the universe restored. Maybe it's my view of myself that needs a cleansing, a restoring. A baptism out of sin and into something alive and grateful and open and confident.

What I was praying for, unknown to me then, was to enter my *second naivete*'.

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We are ready for stage five, the *re-enchantment stage*, when we are burned out, tired, jaded, and hungry. People who haven't entirely dropped out of religion are hanging in there waiting for it. Church communities who take risks and make changes in their liturgies, or in how they catechize children, because of shared witness to each other about personal needs and visions, are seeking to enter into second, or *willed naivete*'.

Unlike a first naivete', in which we are at a younger stage of faith and are simply blissfully unaware of any other perspectives on our beliefs, or any threat to them, this naivete' follows the loss of one's religious symbols. Theologian Paul Ricoeur coined the term to mean coming full circle after our religious symbols are broken or demythologized. Some people quit religion when they recognize religious symbols *as symbols*. If, for example, the Eucharistic bread and wine get separated from the Body and Blood, then they are just symbols of Jesus' sacrifice and our salvation. They no longer have real power. In his book, *Stages of Faith: the Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, Fowler relates a story theologian Harvey Cox told about his loss of sacrament: while a high school student, he and a girlfriend, who was studying college anthropology, attended Mass. At communion time, she whispered to him, "That's just a primitive totemic ritual, you know." Cox said, "A what?" She went on to completely demythologize Eucharist for him, by explaining how the people of almost every culture have ceremonies to bind themselves to divine power by a cannibalistic act of eating the bread of a dead god. Fowler

says, *A symbol recognized as a symbol is a dead symbol.*

Those who go recover from such a loss do so because they come full circle: somehow the symbols seem once again to be united with what is symbolized. They don't give up what their intellect has taught them, but they add to it from the realm of feeling and heart. Like a tree planted near an unseen underground stream, their faith is renewed and replenished, fed by something not seen but sensed and trusted. Modern Catholics, and believers of any faith, return to their roots in this way by learning that intellect tells only part of the story, and, as a tool for understanding, is the wrong tool for understanding faith, which is about not only belief, but a way of feeling and being in the world.

When we want to be re-enchanted, we are praying hard for rebirth. If we lost the childhood faith which let us be swept up by the sacraments, we now seek to be grounded and rooted *down* into the grace-full reality they promise us. We leave behind either/or thinking (the sacraments are either magic bullets or nothing at all), and enter into a "both/and" view, in which they are both symbolic of and part of the reality they convey.

We want to fall in love all over again, with the same thing that once attracted us and then broke our hearts. We want to give this errant love a second chance. To be re-enchanted, we must become open to our yearning for God to be powerful again.

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These days, I feel as if I'm slowly being born again. It continues to be a very long labor.

After the years of childhood catechism, in which we learned about transubstantiation vs. consubstantiation (remember?), I had pretty much given up on Eucharist ever inspiring me again the way it did at my first communion. I tried, devout young person that I was, to figure out how the bread and wine could become the Body and Blood. It went something like this: "Well, the bread and wine get metabolized into body and blood within myself, so that's how I am part of the Body of Christ...is that it?" It

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## Fowler's Stages of Faith

In *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (1981), theologian James W. Fowler develops his faith stage theory. Based on the developmental psychology of Piaget, Kohlberg and Erikson, he names one pre-stage, in infancy, and six stages which individuals may or may not reach, depending on different cognitive abilities and life experiences. It is important to know that holy people live at any of the stages. Some of us never have the crises of faith that push us from one stage to the next, and perhaps we want to thank God for that. If we do move from one to another, we also revisit outgrown stages sometimes.

I have added new names for these stages, in italics after the age ranges. I hope they are helpful.

*Undifferentiated or primal faith*—a pre-stage in infancy. The seeds of future faith are planted by our caregivers in the way they nurture us (or don't).

1. *Intuitive-projective faith*—ages 2-6 or 7—"fantasy and magic"—we project onto God the traits of mom and dad, for better or worse. God is a "Linus blanket," a transitional object standing in for our parents. "God" therefore evokes both some measure of terror and guilt, and love and companionship. The gift of this stage is an indwelling sense of God's presence; the risk is shame and a false front.

2. *Mythic-literal faith*—ages 7-pre-teen—"law and order"—God is fair, though not yet merciful, so the universe is orderly and predictable. Punishment for mistakes is expected. "God" is imaged in mythic ways: the old, bearded man, and we have a one-way relationship of distant respect. Prayer is comfortable when mediated through saints or clergy who do it *right*. The gift is trust in providence, the risk is perfectionism.

3. *Synthetic-conventional faith*—adolescence through young adulthood (sometimes lifelong) "conformist-conserving"—the need to belong makes us bow to peer pressure and conformity to

sounded impressive, but it wasn't powerful. Then, over a few Sundays, things began changing. At one Mass our celebrant thoughtfully called us all up around the table. I stood within inches of the offertory gifts and the ritual. In that intimacy, I felt something new. Crowded together, we were not just us, but every person over every year, in every communion that had ever taken place in history. Not only in the Church, but in every gathering of faithful people in the presence of the divine. I could hardly stand still, and I wept, for here was reconciliation: it was suddenly as if everything and all of us and God were reunited through all time and everywhere.

My ongoing conversion addresses my chronic struggle with the idea of the Cross and salvation, which is pivotal for the Eucharist to make any sense to me. Again, in this post-modern, post-holocaust era, it may not be hard to see why we need saving from ourselves, but it is hard to figure out how the Cross does that. Thinking hasn't answered it. But one morning, waiting for Mass to start, I was telling Jesus (my conductor would have been proud) how, in addition to how good mothering is, it is also very hard for me. Bemoaning my limitations, I apologized for not being able to adequately meet my daughter's needs because of real, desperate needs of my own. I said, "I can't die for her." And immediately, a kind of internally heard voice said, "I've already done that." (Really.) Although I don't know how, I understood that somehow, she would be healed of the effects of my failings, and so would I. And more importantly, we are and will be mutually graced and redeemed by each other's participation in our lives. We would be fine, good enough. I needed to rest my heart on this in faith. It didn't mean I would have no amends to make, or that I could quit trying harder. It didn't mean there'd be no emotional scars. It meant that everything would be alright, that she would have enough, between me and God as our love manifests in her life. It wasn't entirely up to me; grace was more powerful. My heart heard Innocence, as an unshaken trust in Another, calling to me. Perhaps I am caught in a re-enchantment? I pray so.

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create a stable, unified community. Diversity is felt as divisive. Feelings of ambiguity are repressed, authority is external and authoritarian. Symbols are exactly what they symbolize: Scripture is a god in itself. The gift is unity and belonging, the risk is black and white intolerance. Pre-Vatican II church, though still pervasive in many individual Catholic, Protestant and Jewish communities.

4. *Individuative-reflective faith*—young adulthood-30', 40's (or lifelong)—"examined and dis-encharmed faith"—shift to internal, personal authority after crisis or loss of our unquestioned faith. Symbols (and sacraments) lose power as they separate too far from what is symbolized. Seeking other faiths as an alternative to one's own "dead" religion, or attaching to only the cultural legacy of one's religion. A lonely but provocative time. The gift is in taking responsibility for one's own faith. The risk is stagnation or "lapsing."

5. *Conjunctive faith*—midlife and beyond—"re-encharmed faith"—head and heart reconcile, diversity and ecumenism are valued for their wisdom, "second naivete'," depth and power restored to prayer, sacraments, liturgy. Intimacy with God as companion/savior. The gift: truly becoming "born again" in an inclusive way. The risk: having to live in an untransformed world.

6. *Universalizing faith*—ageless—saintly, incarnational, radical, contagious with their grace, creating "zones of liberation" for those in their midst. Imperfect, yet "more simple and more human than the rest of us." Gandhi, Merton, Day, Mother Theresa.

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