



Of Seeds and Flowers



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“I AM NOT VERY RELIGIOUS, BUT I AM SPIRITUAL.”

I have been struggling with this reality for a long time. And perhaps, you are too with your own children, friends, or grandchildren. What EXACTLY does it mean to be ***“spiritual but not religious”***? This is a tough one!! Very touchy!

NO JUDGING, NO CONDEMNING, NO ACCUSING HERE, just some thoughts that have crossed my mind when I hear ***“I’m not religious but spiritual.”*** There is certainly nothing wrong with someone who is SERIOUSLY working at being spiritual. I believe there is much more truth for these people to discover but their faces are certainly turned toward the sun/Son.



I know these few words won’t adequately answer all of the questions, but perhaps, be a bit of a starting point.

I’ve been “around the track a few times and I have heard most of the “reasons” for these sentiments. The fact is, many people have been alienated, disillusioned or disenchanted with church and religion, in general, AND FOR GOOD REASONS. MOST UNDERSTANDABLE! Some reasons: “I am very angry with the church because of its detestable abuse of children OR I was treated badly by the third-grade nun, OR no one visited my mother in the hospital when she was dying OR Sunday liturgy leaves me empty, cold, I get nothing out of it, OR organized religion is not for me OR I get just as much spiritually from a walk on the beach or woods OR I don’t like being told what to do or believe , I can’t stand institutions, I want to do “it” myself, alone, and not be told what to DO OR BELIEVE by anybody, especially by an institution that has hurt so many people and should fix itself. I was on the edge of leaving the church when Covid began and realized I didn’t miss it, so I’m not going back.” “As a child, I was forced to go to church.” Etc.



“Most people have just enough religion to make their lives miserable.” - Billy Sunday.

AS A CAUTION, as we begin, it would be good for ALL OF US TO ADMIT that we all have been pre-programmed emotionally - ***beyond reason***, an automatic, non-thinking response - *to hear and believe what you want to hear and to reject what you are emotionally programed not to hear. This is true FOR OF ALL OF US, ***BUT this is not good!!!*** The opening lines of the Broadway show, “Rosencrantz and Gildenstern” say it rather clearly: ***“An audience will accept only what it is prepared to believe in.”*** Our Pre-conceived ideas and pre-programed values are a serious obstacle to hearing the truth ***ABOUT ANYTHING!!!*** Religion, Church, spirituality, like all things important in our lives, must be more than just an emotional response based on hurt feelings.*

Some of the reasons for not being “religious” can be solved by using a wide brush, simply saying, *“Time to let it go; it is only hurting YOU; give it up in the self-interest of your own personal growth, and your children and family. FORGIVENESS: let the past go, get beyond your feelings, your hurt. Do the bigger thing. Don’t let the past, as true, impressive and hurtful as it may have been, live “rent free” in your head. It is killing YOU. YOU are the only one being hurt (and MAYBE, YOUR SPOUSE AND CHILDREN). THE SWORD YOU USE TO SLAY “YOUR DRAGON”*

MUST FIRST PASS THROUGH YOUR OWN HEART. *It is your blood on the ground. You have shed enough already. LET IT GO. Give yourself a break. Begin again, fresh!"*

Ross Douthat, a New York Times columnist, wrote a very incisive book entitled *"Bad Religion, How We Became a Nation of Heretics"*. He argues in his book that America's problem isn't too much religion, as a growing chorus of atheists claim; nor is it intolerant secularism but it's bad religion: the slow-moving collapse of traditional faith and the rise of "Pseudo-Christianities" that stroke our egos, indulge our follies, and encourage our worst impulses.

"Busyness and laziness are the enemies of the SPIRITUALLY ADVANCED." - M. Scott Peck.

Douthat continues: In America the *"Jesus of the New testament ... has been replaced in the hearts and minds of many with a more congenial figure- a "choose your own Jesus", the "guy in the sky" who better fits their own preconceptions about what a savior should and shouldn't be."* - a Jesus that wants everyone to be rich, uncorrupted by original sin, a society that justifies the seven deadly sins; where pride becomes "healthy self-esteem," vanity becomes "self-improvement," adultery and lust become "Following your heart," greed and gluttony become "living the American dream." All intended for you before the foundation of the world." This is RELIGION-LITE.

"All of God's creation is constructed to avoid self-sufficiency."

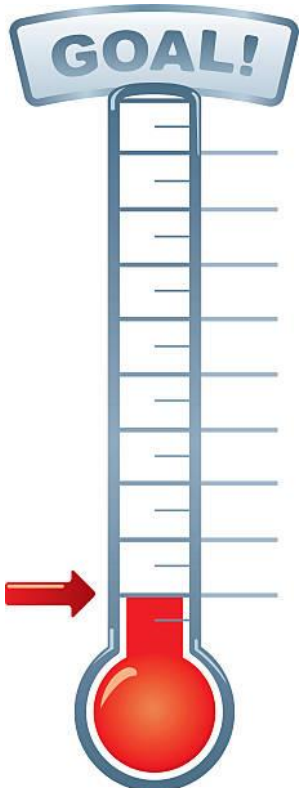
I understand all of the above reasons, however I also know that **The Creator of your life and your world, and holder of your next breath**, and those you love, is DEEPLY CONCERNED about your soul, spirit, life, eternal life and that this same Creator is now hurting in that special place reserved

in His heart for ONLY YOU. He loves YOU and wants YOU!! "I have loved you with an everlasting love and so I am CONSTANT in my AFFECTION FOR YOU. "Jeremiah. Affection!!! Emotion! FEELINGS!!



Are you spiritually advanced? One of the things I have found over the years is that most people who say that they are spiritual are **not very spiritually advanced**. American culture has a sneaky way of keeping people superficial.

"THE Non-Religious, but Spiritual Scale"



85 to 100% - Working at it with varying degrees, including complete commitment. Constant discouragement with the limitations of humanity, ego, need for praise, control, security, accomplishment. Sounds like the human predicament that all serious Christians have to deal with in their own spiritual lives but, with which, they have 2000 years of lived, expert wisdom, advice and direction.

70 to 85 % - some "working at it", but their spirituality is not much more satisfying than going to church or being religious."

50 to 70% - Good intentions but weak spiritual results.

0 to 50 % - are hurt and angry. Only words to justify a hurt position; weak or little spirituality to speak of. The SPIRITUAL GIANTS are here!! Mary, the Mother of Jesus, St. Peter, St. Augustine, St. Monica, St. Benedict (and the myriad of Benedictines that followed him), St. Francis of Assisi, (and his Franciscan followers), St. Thomas Aquinas, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Theresa of Lisieux, St. Mother Teresa, 900 years of Trappist monks, 1000 years of Cistercian hermits, millions of nuns etc. etc... It's been done, and very well! Why begin over?

Most Christians only have a grade school education in religion/theology - even those with advanced college degrees. In fact, many college courses in Christianity, **even at Christian colleges**, do very little to deepen a young person's relationship with God, the Church, Jesus... REAL religion. Classes like: Comparative Religions, Christianity in Western Society, The Bible as Literature, Christianity and the East, The Bible and Western Culture, The Greek of the New Testament. Jesus and Eastern Thought, Archeology and the Holy Land, etc. – These courses feed your head but starve your spirit!! ALL HEAD, NO HEART!



If you were accused of being a Christian...would there be enough evidence to convict you?

We implicitly trust all professionals in our lives. Doctors, dentists, lawyers, accountants, mechanics (to tighten the lug bolts on your tires), psychologists, butcher, teachers, bus drivers, cosmologists, anthropologists, ecologists, quantum physicist, etc.? Why not trust your local theologian? It would take ten lifetimes to become competent in all of the above sciences and services, yet, typically, we trust them all completely. On the other hand, because we are members of a church and have a relationship with God by birth, we believe we are all expert theologians.

HAVE YOU NOTICED THAT THE 'FEAR COMA' THAT WE ARE PRESENTLY SWIMMING IN HAS NOW MADE FEAR A VIRTUE? I'M MORE AFRAID THAN YOU; THEREFORE, I AM BETTER THAN YOU.
FEAR = VIRTUE.

BUT REMEMBER, in spite of the fact that you are not a theologian, YOU, yes YOU, without a college degree in anything, can have a deep, saintly relationship with God - a Ph.D. in God!! Mother Teresa had few educational degrees but deeply spiritual. - a saint!! I truly believe that if most people, who say they are "non-religious", had accepted Jesus into their lives in a transformative way, their genuine excitement for God,

and the things of God, would have entered their lives so deeply that their disenchantment would not have injured their hearts so deeply.

THE SILENT SERMON A church member who had been attending regularly had fallen on hard times and suddenly stopped going. After a few weeks, the pastor decided to visit him. It was a bitterly cold evening. The pastor found the man at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire. Guessing the reason for his pastor's visit, the man led him to a chair near the fireplace and waited for the lecture. The pastor made himself at home but said nothing. In the silence, he contemplated the dance of the flames around the burning logs. After some minutes, the pastor took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth - all alone.

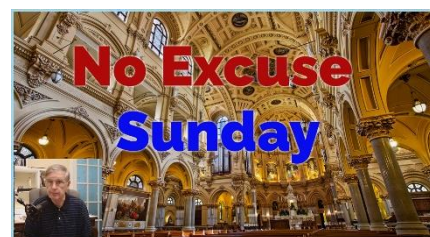
Then he sat back in his chair, still silent. The host watched as the one lone ember's flame flickered and diminished. There was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and dead.

Not a word had been spoken since the first greeting. The Pastor glanced at his watch and realized it was time to leave. He slowly stood up, picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow once more, with the light and warmth of the burning coals surrounding it. As the pastor reached the door, his host said with a tear running down his cheek, "Thank you for your visit and especially for the fiery sermon. I'll be back next Sunday."

Sometimes the best sermons are the ones left unspoken. **God speaks in the silence.**

"Be still and know that I am God." Psalms God's first language is silence!!

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The professor and the wells

A college professor from a Mid-Western University became quite disillusioned with his job and his life. He decided to quit his teaching post and to begin to search for deeper meaning in his life.

His search took him to the East and many conversations with wise men, gurus and holy people. Finally, he spoke with one very holy teacher who said to him, *"Stop, you're like a man who digs a well 3 feet deep and finds no water and then digs another three foot well with no water and then another and another."* *"You will never find what you are looking for if you don't stop and dig deep and deeper until you find living water."*

How many people are like our professor? Spiritual tourists!! One church after another; one latest self-help book after another; one conference, one rally, always a new guru. All of the deep mystic, contemplative, meditation practiced in the East was transplanted from Western Christianity.

If you want the same Eastern results start practicing Centering Prayer today. I have been practicing Centering Prayer for 25 years with a totally life transforming result. The book "Open Mind, Open Heart" by Thomas Keating is the classic teacher. He is a Trappist monk and a brilliant, very holy man. It will be the best move you ever made. More later!



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