

Extract from Psalm 76

O Beloved,
You who know our innermost being,
You forgive us and raise us up.
From the depths of our soul
You call us to love,
To grow toward harmony
and wholeness.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

We are quite naturally impatient in everything
to reach the end without delay.
We should like to skip the intermediate stages.
We are impatient of being on the way to something
unknown, something new.
And yet it is the law of all progress
that it is made by passing through
some stages of instability—
and that it may take a very long time.

And so I think it is with you;
your ideas mature gradually—let them grow,
let them shape themselves, without undue haste.

Don't try to force them on,
as though you could be today what time
will make of you tomorrow.

Only God can say what this new spirit
gradually forming within you will be.
Give Our Lord the benefit of believing
that his hand is leading you,
and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself
in suspense and incomplete.

The Invitation of the Christian Contemplative Tradition: Beyond Rational Consciousness PART 2

The extraordinary invitation of the Gospel to become one with God involves the gradual development of a consciousness beyond rational consciousness into what some spiritual traditions call “non-duality.” In the Christian mystical tradition this is usually called the transforming union.

On the level of rational consciousness, effort is all-important. Effort becomes a hindrance, however, to further development at a certain point when rationality turns into the realization of the self-in-God. Some of us are slow learners. The purpose of the Redemption of Christ was to go to the most extreme lengths to convince us that God is willing to do anything to make us participants in the divine nature, both now and in the world to come. What dies, in this perspective, is the body and the false self. The ultimate Self is beyond the True Self. It is the Word of God manifesting in our particular human uniqueness.

Even though God is within us we do not deny the limitations of human nature with its weakness and proneness to selfishness. We make mistakes and we fail, but the relationship with God in the Christian perspective continues to develop. It gradually perceives that Ultimate Reality is love, and love is the most important activity that any creature can contribute to and that ultimately interests God. As Saint John of the Cross puts it, “We will be judged on love.”

The human race is a species that is completely interconnected and interrelated. It is one with God already. We just do not think so or experience it. But some people have, like Merton in the street in Louisville had this vision of the light that the Hindus speak of. He saw that light-up in all the people on the street and he could not help loving them all. Of course, it did not last, but God grants insights that will become permanent later on and which give us a huge boost forward in the transformative process.

Gregory of Nyssa says that in Heaven we go on growing in God forever. There is no lack of mansions, as Jesus put it but there are different levels of penetrating the full possibilities of the human capacity for transformation. We learn from contemporary psychology about the stages of consciousness. We cannot be an adult without ceasing to be in adolescence.

Teilhard de Chardin thought that bodily evolution is pretty much over and now it is time to focus on spiritual evolution and higher stages of consciousness. If you seek enlightenment too ardently you are on the wrong path. It would be just another ego trip. You cannot have any attachment to the process, so you try to possess nothing, have nothing, be nothing. Even after enlightenment, mystics strongly affirm there is a lot of spiritual work to be done.

As we grow spiritually, we move as human beings grow. A growth in one is usually a growth in the other. They are very interrelated. We have to die to the previous level, or if

you prefer less strong language, you have to be moved into a bigger box, as if you were a holon. The holon theory means that you can move from being a particle all the way up to divine union. Each box is inside another box, so to speak. In order to grow, we have to let go of the limitations of the previous level we were on. This does not mean there was anything evil about it, but that we are being called to move to a new perspective. We keep all that was good in the lower level which is translated into the new capacity. For example, the molecule becomes a cell, and the cell an organ, and an organ, a part of the whole human body. Human consciousness can go on expanding right up to union with God.

Science is becoming more and more a prophet for our time, telling us things about God we never knew and about how the universe works. It is reinforcing many mystical experiences of the past.

At the same time, we are in a body that is very fragile, and a will that has some measure of free choice, but is still very limited. The experience for most of life is a failure in varying degrees. In the Christian perspective, the exercise of faith is to keep trying, failing, and trying again. Although that practice is still part of the rational level of consciousness, it is a necessary foundation for the effortless activity of contemplative prayer that Saint John of the Cross describes as totally passive, at least when it is fully developed.

Like all other human experiences, God's relationship with every person is absolutely unique. In addition, we cannot negotiate the spiritual journey without a community to challenge us, to experience ourselves reacting with other people and seeing God in them, and exercising the kind of practical love that God manifests in helping us.

A Holon is something that is simultaneously a whole and a part. A word coined by Arthur Koestler