

Spirituality & Leadership:

ON HOLY GROUND

Exodus Chapter 3; Verse 5

A Facilitator's Guide

Based on
*Transformational Leadership for the Healing Ministry:
Competencies for the Future*®

The Center for Leadership ExcellenceSM

The Catholic Health Association of the United States
St. Louis, MO and Washington, DC

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The Center for Leadership ExcellenceSM
of the Catholic Health Association of the United States
4455 Woodson Road
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ISBN 0-87125-235-X

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Printed in the United States of America.

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APPENDIX A: WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

Carla Mae Streeter, OP

The search is on. From TV talk shows to the growing number of New Age books and Enneagram Workshops, spirituality is “in.” Why does this topic present such a fascination for us? What is it we are seeking? Do we have a hunch this spirituality thing may hold the key to the healing of our American soul?

We are a nation of many faith traditions. We have a fear of any one tradition—Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or any other—taking over our national soul. And so we tend as Americans to privatize our religion. It becomes our own personal business. We have come to frown on those who wear their religion on their sleeve in public. Religion causes arguments. It’s best left alone. Or is it?

Beneath the surface of our many religious traditions, and deep within those who disown church going, lies the heart of the matter. Deep within each human being radiates the spirituality that is mine just because I’m a human being. A vital aspect of humanness, a person’s spirituality shines in the lantern of a particular religious affiliation, and upon the lampstand of home or business. It is spirituality that often makes the difference in the crisis of illness.

What is this evasive yet vital reality? The core of spirituality is human longing. We long for intimacy. If we admit it, we long for communion with the Holy, that which is beyond our pettiness and selfishness. But within this ultimate desire is a longing for intimacy with the human too. When these two longings are pulled apart we use and abuse each other. When we hurt, our hearts ache to be comforted by a genuinely human presence.

We begin our search for the meaning of spirituality with our own deepest longings. We have discovered the first element of that meaning by remembering when someone was really there for us. Spirituality is experienced most as the tone of someone’s presence when we are in their company, or when we remember when we were. Spirituality is being really real, and others pick it up as a type of real presence to people and

events, a presence that points to the Holy, something we sense is beyond our human limits.

The Catholic Christian Contribution

As members of a distinct faith tradition, Catholic Christians bring a distinct tone to the authentic presence we are calling spirituality. As Christians, the person of Jesus of Nazareth is the icon in whom we come to understand what God really is like. As Catholic, a community of saints and sinners, with leadership and global presence, this identity is the context or family where we grow. Catholic Christian spirituality is deeply communal, not merely individualistic. This accounts for our deliberate gathering together to worship, to educate, and to minister to those in need. Most of all, Catholic identity brings a love affair with the earth, with smells and bells. Catholic Christians are sacramental people. We worship with water and oil, incense and salt, candles and rich color. From the incarnation of the Word, that wedding of God and our humanness, we celebrate by bringing all the elements of the earth into our sacramental worship. The distinct spiritual tone of the Catholic Christian, then, will include a sense of community, of public worship with others, and the rich sensual sacramentality that is the distinctiveness of the Catholic tradition.

Spirituality in Sun Glasses

Although spirituality often manifests itself religiously, it manifests itself mainly in the ordinary ebb and flow of everyday life. It walks around in galoshes, sun glasses, and jeans. It shows up at the supermarket, the board meeting, and the bank.

Spirituality is what being human is all about. The human being is a marvel of biological systems. We know them well. We go to the doctor when they don't work. This physical component is often taken for granted by us until it breaks down. But psychology tells us there is much more to us than biology.

We are also a collection of "motors" we call emotions, and these motors are revved up by our capacity to image things, to fantasize and imagine. This energy field is called the human psyche. It includes our emotions and imagination. The psychic energy field is deeply seated throughout our bodies through our neurological system. This is us, too, and so will be very much a part of the spiritual tone we bring to situations. But there is yet more to the mystery of the human.

We are most human by our capacity to think and choose. These operations are distinct functions of the human spirit. When we refer to the human person, then, we mean the physical and psychological functions which we can call "body" in a

broad sense, and the psychological/spiritual functions which we call "soul." Organism, psyche, and human spirit —these are the wholly integrated dimensions of the human being. Remarkably, the psyche is the joiner, the energy that links the physical and distinctly spiritual functions of the person. This explains why, in our times, the psychic condition of someone who is ill is treated in a way it never was in the past.

What are these "psychic motors" or emotions? Eleven are usually named. Love and hate (of what is perceived as evil), desire and aversion, joy and sadness are called "spontaneous" because they arise unbidden from external or internal stimuli. Courage and fear, hope and despair (powerlessness), and finally, anger, are more "considered" because thought feeds them or dissipates them more directly. These emotions are the energy field in which our thinking goes on. Emotion can block images, and new insight will be stopped in its tracks. Emotion can move us into real change, for images charged with feeling can motivate us far more than more abstract knowledge.

If this psychic area is so important to our growth and healing, how is it distinct from the human spirit? Is spirituality nothing but psychologism? Important and key as the psyche is, the operations of the human spirit are distinctive. The spirit does certain things we can identify as "spiritual" rather than "psychic." The most distinctive thing the spirit does is *question*. Questioning is the most basic spiritual activity. Questions are asked about my health, our house, the car, the cat, and the children. Most of all, questions pop up about the Holy. I have questions about God, and how this Holy One relates to me and those I love. But questioning for information is not enough. The human spirit presses on toward answers. It gathers data and reflects on what it has found. Eventually it concludes, "So this is what is going on here!" or "This is a bunch of lies. Do you expect me to believe this stuff?"

This inquiry and concluding to truth or lack of it is spiritual activity. It is either done in love or not, building up others or not, but it is going on all around us. Once the intelligence questions and settles on answers, the psychic energy with its images and emotion can be tapped, and when it is the person moves. We call this motivation, choosing because of values, acting, or deciding. This too is spiritual activity. In the past we called it "willing." We move. We do this or we do that. Or if we are not attending to our emotions, and not asking enough questions, and so arrive at half-truth conclusions, we make choices that ruin people's lives, injure ourselves and others, or make us look ridiculous. The human is designed to function on all levels, drawing from emotional sensitivity, intelligent questioning, reasonable concluding, and responsible deciding. When any of these levels are crippled, spiritual growth is stunted.

When God Comes Courting

This is the wondrous human being, with its integrated body/soul reality, that the Holy woos into holiness. Holy or unholy, the human is spiritual. But when the total human enters into relationship with God, then we get goosebumps. We are talking about the intimacy that we name holiness. Holy women and men are spiritual/physical beings who are in love with God. They have been grasped by a Lover they seek to respond to. They want to know what to do and what not to do. They very often seek out a group of people who are on this journey as they are. We call these pilgrims "church."

It will serve us well to reflect a bit on how the Holy comes to meet this human, or said another way, how the Holy works with this physical, psychic, spiritual person. God works with what God has made, and so the Holy will work with the human in all its dimensions. Again, we have clarified some terms: Every human being is called to holiness. This holiness will come about through the human relating with the Holy. This relating will involve physical, psychic, and spiritual response. Holiness is a summons to the full person to enter into relationship with the Holy.

So far we have paid some attention to the human partner in this relationship. We have named the dimensions of humanness as physical, psychic, and spiritual. What can we say of the divine? How does God engage the human? To understand this encounter, Christians look to how it was done in Jesus. We watch one in whom the union is complete and we are amazed. For his humanness is beautiful, complete, whole, and this is the result of contact with the divine. This is both "show and tell" and it is important for us. It calms our fears about getting too close to God. We have a secret fear that if we get too close we will be destroyed. Instead, we are shown the full transformation of the human in resurrection, and its survival even through what we fear most—death.

Christian spirituality and the mystics and theologians of the tradition have much to tell us about how the Holy operates in relation to the human. These people have had an experience, and some have tried to talk about it. Like people who stutter when speaking of something they cannot really put into words, they try, and some of us read what they have written and nod, for we recognize from our own experience what they are describing.

The Holy approaches the human like a beggar, with hat in hands. The initiative comes like a knock on a door. If the human so much as inquires, the Holy, present always at the depth of the soul keeping the human alive, enters into consciousness. It is one thing to be in God, and quite another to know this Holy One has come calling. When the divine enters one's perspective or horizon, and becomes a reference for

choice and behavior, we are looking at religious conversion. For such a person God can no longer be ignored or dealt with as one deals with a pesky fly. God stands at the door of my soul and waits. This self-gift of God we call "grace."

The Holy comes courting with three immediate gifts, one for each of the dimensions of the human being. For the psyche by way of the human emotion of hope, there is given a longing born of religious love. This desire is a hope for union with the Holy itself, nothing less. For the intelligence, a knowing born of religious love is given. We call it faith. The heart knows what the intelligence doesn't quite yet fully understand. And for the active will is given the capacity for action born of religious love. We call it charity. These three gifts, called theological virtues or capacities, seed the human with capabilities for human behavior beautiful to see. The change we call conversion has begun.

The change has immediate results in how one chooses. Moral conversion is a shift from acting for self-satisfaction to acting for long-term good. The latter widens our circle of concern, expanding us beyond narcissistic self-concern. When the Holy becomes explicit in a person's horizon, this presence begins to permeate the consciousness.

Another type of change or conversion may appear. We will call it psychic, because it is directed at dissolving psychic scar tissue, those blockages that cut off certain images in us because they cause too much pain. Love will call us from this bondage, and often therapy is the scissors that cuts the dead psychic tissue away. Religious, moral, and psychic conversion—the Divine, like some housekeeper with a one-track mind, will transform the place from within and without.

Then there is the most difficult change of all. It is the conversion that comes from knowing oneself. It is a new awareness of emotion, and the ability to call what we feel by name. It is noticing when we ignore what we need to attend to, and noticing our attending to it. It is catching ourselves shutting down on questioning, or worse, ignoring what we discover because it will impel us to act. It is taking stock of our own spirit, and coming to know our own soul.

This intellectual conversion puts us in charge of our own house. It calls us to accountability for our own human operations, or skipping over them and acting less than human. The presence of the Holy, once admitted into the consciousness of the human person, will do exactly what that presence did for the human Jesus: bring that humanness to utter fullness and completion.

How do we know this is happening? We know because there is evidence. There is fruit. This fruit is in the form of a tone and repeated patterns of human behaviors we call "virtues." We have already identified the first three of these hallmarks as the behaviors of believing, hoping, and loving.

The human begins to act out of a growing explicit relationship with the divine. The longing, knowing, and acting out of this new loving is experienced by the person, and can be discerned by those who know what to look for in a converted life. But there is other more public evidence. Four major qualities soon make their appearance in the day-to-day ebb and flow of ordinary living. We will call them by their classic names: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

Prudence is the capacity to weigh the appropriateness of thinking and acting in light of what has become a primary love. This discernment begins to mark the intelligence of the converted person, and we experience someone as level-headed, credible, and full of common sense.

A second major quality is justice. Informed by love and guided by prudence, the person begins to relate to all others as another self, worthy of respect, fairness, and consideration. As prudence sets the tone in the intelligence, so justice sets the tone in the will. Choices are made that fly in the face of the racism, sexism, nationalism, and political and economic self-interest that sickens us as we read our newspaper. The just person will have nothing to do with behavior that is outside the aura of the primary love that now directs his or her choices. Injustice or oppression of others can cause such a person to weep or speak out in healthy anger. The person can no longer be silent while others are mistreated.

A third quality is courage or fortitude. Hand in hand with prudent discretion, and a sense of justice, the person risks what is necessary to be true to its primary love. Grasped by this Love, now become most personal, the relationship with this Holy One becomes the rudder, the map, and the energy to attend to human affairs. Courage is most often shown in dealing with the ordinary daily challenges that can wear us quite thin, and can cause us to act small and egotistical.

Finally, the person in love with the Holy will give evidence of temperance, a quality of moderation in the areas of sexual hunger, food, and drink. This quality is formed by love's strong hand and is etched in the more physical aspects of living. It regulates sexual expression, food and drink, health and sleep, bringing the entire body into the service of Love.

The temperate person is wonderfully sensual, delighting in a beautifully served meal, fine wine, lovely music, and the rich colors of a delicately designed room. The temperate person knows how to fill another's life with beauty. Those who live this virtue out in a celibate lifestyle are warm and loving human beings, for whom their own emotions, longing, and compassion are no strangers.

These four qualities—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance—round out faith, hope, and charity, to give the evidence of “the big seven.” This is what the Holy effects in the human. The end result is a human being wondrous to know,

to watch, to hear, to work with, to live with, and to struggle with in a society that settles often for something far less.

What we have here is a real presence in our world. We have an authentic human being, made so because of the Love that has grasped it, one who can be no other than a full response to that Love in all facets of life. This type of spirituality is incarnational, a bonding of the human with the Holy that is pervasive and entire. Our world is in search of the real thing. We have all that we need to give it what is humanly authentic. This is the spirituality that reveals a Holy already in our midst, and calls us to full human response, whether we walk among our family members, our friends, those struggling with illness and death, or our fellow citizens. We can settle for no less.

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Questions for Reflection

Why do you think there is a current interest in spirituality?

How does the Catholic Christian faith tradition contribute to spirituality?

How do the "psychic motors" (emotions) influence your spiritual growth?

Do you see a relationship between the "questioning" mentioned and Peter Senge's "inquiry and reflection" disciplines (*The Fifth Discipline Field Book*, Senge et al.)?

What does "holiness" mean to you?

How do you understand and describe "faith, hope, and charity"?

How do you understand "conversion"? Can you cite some examples?

How would you give contemporary meaning to the four virtues—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance?