



The New Epistle

a newsletter of

The Progressive Episcopal Church

Volume I Number 3

May 2015

MAY





Bishop's CORNER

The following article does not reflect the official theology or doctrine of The Progressive Episcopal Church. The Bishop's Corner is the personal reflections of Rt. Rev. Mansell C. Gilmore, the Presiding Bishop of The Progressive Episcopal Church.

The Nature of the Barriers to Realization

The sense of our separation from GOD goes deeper than the wounds we carry or the pain we have endured. It is a sense of deep dissatisfaction with who and what we are, with our place in the world, and with the world itself. We go through our lives with an undercurrent of disquiet that something is off, not quite right, that, somehow, we are not who we are supposed to be. Sometimes this sense of dissatisfaction can result in destructive attitudes and habits aimed at ourselves or at those around us, however, it can also lead us to great heights of creativity or leadership. Most of us learn to live with it, to put up with it, even to be happy in spite of this dissatisfaction. I identify this sense of dissatisfaction as the primary spiritual problem that we face. Everything else is secondary to this sense of dissatisfaction and its many forms.

It is this sense of dissatisfaction that gives birth to theological and metaphysical theories about the eternal soul, the afterlife, the perfection of GOD, the need for salvation, healing, even the need for such provisions as food and water. It is one major source of reactions such as anger, indignation, frustration, sorrow, and fear caused by unpleasant events, unfulfilled desires, and when things come to an end. Saint James refers to this as being bound to our cravings, which governs even the way we pray, trying to manipulate GOD into fulfilling our cravings (James 4:1-10). We live our lives walking a tight rope anchored between our desire for pleasure and our aversion to pain. Many of us, trying to live a somewhat harmonious life, will attempt to balance these extremes, living in the tension between dissatisfaction and outright pain. The fulfillment of our desires never seems to come, however. Peace is never truly ours. Contentment is surrendered to the requirements of our tension. And then we die. It ends. And no one, in spite of what they might say, truly knows what (if anything) is on the other side of death. For this reason, satisfaction, peace, and contentment must be found in the stream of life, with all its uncertainties, distractions, and even pain, without projecting false indubitableness on those things we cannot know.

The Causes of the Barriers to Realization

If the discipline of the Way of Christ is to pull down the barriers to our realization of our unification with GOD, we must have a reliable working model of the causes of the creation of the barriers to realization. For if we are to transform our perspectives and our lives into vessels for the continuous experience of our unification with GOD, we must know how the barriers to this experience arose and how to either deconstruct or transform the barriers for use as tools for our continual growth in realization and experience of our unification with GOD.

At this point, it is important to pause and more fully explain the idea of the working model. The working model is not a statement of beliefs; it is not used or applied with a sense of absolute certainty. Rather, a working model is a theoretical structure that allows us to understand the process of growth

and transformation, including numinous or divine experience, which is open to growth and evolution as new understanding arises to inform the model. It allows us to process potentially traumatic inner, subjective experiences that arise as we engage in the process of deconstructing, transcending, or transforming the barriers to your realization of our unification with GOD. An inner-focused working model will often give an account of the origins of consciousness and the structure of the soul as well as the origins of delusion and suffering and the mechanism of curing delusion and ending suffering. An inner-focused working model will also often have an elaborate system of stories and myths that allow direct engagement and participation through meditation, visualization, and ritual in order to process the energy of divine encounter without traumatizing the soul. This is also the reason that most spiritual traditions are passed on in a graduated manner. These disciplines lead to the direct experience of increasingly deep levels of the soul, the world, and the divine. If the foundations are not well laid, then, there is the possibility that the inner mechanism for relating to both the inner and the outer worlds can become traumatized and sometimes even crippled. It is similar to the training of an Olympic weight lifter. If the athlete is placed under too much of a load, muscles can tear and bones can break, potentially crippling the athlete for life. Spiritual growth often requires us to handle greater levels of uncertainty and inner tension. A comprehensive spiritual discipline will make sure that we can handle a certain level of uncertainty and tension before leading us into greater depths of awareness of our own experiences of our souls and the divine. The working model is at the core of the strategies of a particular spiritual discipline, allowing us to orient ourselves in both the inner and the outer worlds.

The origins of the barriers to our realization of our unification with GOD are found within, in the constructs we have inherited and received from our parents, our families, our social group, our religion, our culture, our experiences, and our world. Each of these constructs shape our personalities, our views of the world, our relationship with each other, our relationship with GOD, even the way we view and relate to ourselves.¹

These constructs act as lenses through which we view the world. They also act as lenses with which we define GOD, the world, and ourselves. These constructs skew our ability to engage with reality and give birth to such primary attributes as greed, avarice, and delusion. These primary attributes then give birth to secondary traits such as arrogance, jealousy, sloth, uncontrolled and misplaced desire, and self-indulgence. These secondary traits then give birth to tertiary states of mind such as depression and paranoia. It is important to qualify this statement. The attributes, traits, and states of mind listed above are not comprehensive, but are also not in reference to medical conditions. A qualified professional should treat anxiety, depression, paranoia, and other such conditions that have a biological cause. While these conditions may be affected by our discipline, we should not expect psychological or spiritual cures to such biological conditions.

The deconstruction and transformation of the barriers to our realization of our unification with GOD must be embraced in a methodical manner, as work, as training. Trying to will these barriers away simply will not work.² We need to discover the core and foundation of these barriers before we can deconstruct them and use the constituent parts to construct a tool for growth, or if these barriers cannot be reduced to their parts, we can discover how to transform them, as they are, into tools for growth.

There is a basic consequence that is true for each of these constructs. They misinform our experience, and if we accept the filtered contents or qualities of our experiences as indubitable, rather than testing them by reason and wisdom, then we mistake our ignorance for truth and embrace

¹ Edward F. Edinger, *Ego and Archetype* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 7.

² Bodhi, *Eightfold Path*, 9.

delusion over illumination. It is this mistake that sits at the core of greed, avarice, and delusion and gives birth to the traits and states of mind mentioned above. As long as these constructs remain above our awareness, obscuring our experience of reality, we are slaves to our ignorance. However, we can challenge, deconstruct, and transform these barriers into tools and elements of focus for our realization of our unification with GOD as well as for manifesting that unification in our lives and in the world.

Transforming the Causes of the Barriers to Realization

In order to actively cultivate our realization of our unification with GOD, we must challenge our ignorance. Since our ignorance is the result of misinformation caused by the filters of our constructs we must seek to solve the problem of that misinformation as best we can. This effort is comprised of the cultivation of several different ways of knowing, all of which must be balanced by actively refraining from imposing absolute certainty on this knowing. While we embrace knowing based on evidence (especially applied to the history of our tradition and the development of the teachings and rituals of our tradition), we seek primarily a knowing that arises from experience, which is then processed through our working model in a way that allows this knowing to be lived, manifested in our lives for the welfare of all. This is called wisdom.

Wisdom can be cultivated. In our tradition, wisdom is cultivated through love of GOD, love of self, and love of neighbor. This cultivation of love produces the Fruit of the Spirit, which is the hallmark and map of Christian maturity. Love of GOD and love of self are cultivated through the deconstruction and transformation of the barriers to our realization of our unification with GOD. Love of self and love of neighbor are cultivated through the transformation of the barriers to our realization of our unification with GOD into elements of focus for the manifestation of the realization of our unification with GOD in the world.

The diligent growth of the Fruit of the Spirit through the cultivation of love avoids two primary extremes that often mar disciplines of spiritual development, which, in the Christian tradition, is called the *via media* (or middle road). The first extreme is that of hyper-emotionality in spiritual exploration. This extreme will often mistake an emotional high as indicative of spiritual experience. While there is often an emotional response to spiritual development or divine encounter, this extreme will attempt to trigger emotionality in order to *feel* spiritual. This includes the sense of calm or the passing feeling of contentment that often arises after such an emotional experience. This extreme will often result in unrestrained self-indulgence in an attempt to chase the next emotional high. It can also mask real spiritual experience or divine encounter that does not meet the emotionally charged criteria, and it can lead to the over-dependence on our emotional state as an indication of our spiritual health.

The second extreme is that of self-hatred or extreme physical and emotional asceticism. This extreme often arises with a devaluation or hatred of the material world, the flesh, and the needs that are the result of living a material existence. This second extreme will often claim that the physical world is imaginary and the spiritual world is the only reality. In this view the body is often seen as a prison for the soul, and the only true salvation is to escape the demands of an imperfect material world. This view will sometimes lead to the active degradation of the body through self-torture, extreme fasts, and personal shaming.

The mistake of both of these extremes lay in the trust placed in the constructs of the soul. Both of these extremes call us to total investment into certainties. In many ways, both of these extremes are the result of the investment of certainty in the constructs of the soul. The *via media* seeks an open-handed faith, or the total investment of the individual, without the requirement of certainty. This

avoidance of certainty also removes the crutch of security, which can be frightening for those of us who have built our lives on the security of our culture, our religion, our country, or any other affiliation that makes claims of absolute certainty. This is another argument for the graduated structure of spiritual discipline and the need for a spiritual mentor or director throughout the beginning and intermediate stages of the process.

The diligent growth of the Fruit of the Spirit through the cultivation of love transcends the mistakes of these extremes by placing our faith, or the total investment of the whole of our being, in the experience of GOD as transcendent, the experience of GOD as immanent, and the experience of GOD as personal. Our faith, then, is in GOD rather than our constructs. This discipline that arises from this faith in GOD facilitates the transformation of our constructs into tools for further growth and transformation to the degree of becoming a walking, talking, thinking, feeling manifestation of GOD as personal, all the while refraining from claims of certainty or indubitableness. This is the *via media*, the essence of the Way of Christ.

Next month I will discuss the **Four Elements** of the *via media*.

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Mary Month – Why May?

Some have pointed to the fact that, in classic western culture (both Greek and Roman), May was recognized as the season of the beginning of new life.

In the Greek world, May was dedicated to the goddess Artemis. Roman culture linked the month of May to Flora, the goddess of bloom and blossoms – this led to the custom of *ludi florales* (or floral games) which took place at the very end of April as a preparation for entering into the month of May.

It seems that this ancient tradition of connecting May with new life led to a realization that May is very much the month of motherhood – this may be the reason why Mother’s Day is celebrated during May not only in the United States but in many countries and cultures of both the East and the West. In the month of May, the winter comes to an end (in the Northern Hemisphere) and the spring season begins (this was the official beginning of spring in Roman culture). This new beginning and new birth is a testimony to the motherhood of Mother Earth.

The connection between motherhood and May led Christians eventually to adopt May as Mary Month.

MINISTRY SPOTLIGHT



Rev. Claudia Hall - Progressive Faith Church

St. Louis, Missouri

www.progressivefaithchurch.org

Progressive Faith Church is a community ministry led by Rev. Claudia Hall. She writes “The church started in 2007, when I left my prior denominational home because they were unwelcoming of LGBT persons. I had been in ministry with people of all kinds, and felt then as I do now, that a God who is pure love will never call us to reject people in need of Christ’s love. Starting a new ministry is an exercise in discovery- self-discovery as you have to learn limits; group discovery as you find out how best to meet the needs of the people with those who gather; and community discovery as you find where you are called to serve. In the last few years my ministry has drifted away from regular services and into a niche of spiritual direction and pastoral care. Of course, most of the people I work with call it by other names, they are mostly people who have been abused and hurt by churches of various kinds, so much of my time is spent one-on-one talking with people, building trust, coaxing them from a place of woundedness to healing. It is intense and time consuming work, but the rewards are very much worth it, as I see people encountering God in their own way, free of shame and fear and guilt and pain. It is truly astounding and humbling to be a part of such work.”

Asked to talk about where her ministry was now, she replied “In 2012 my family welcomed a beautiful baby into our lives, and it was not long before we realized that our small person had some very big needs. Since then, my ministry has included long months in the hospital, building relationships with the doctors and nurses who care for our child, helping parents at 1 a.m. as we all sit in the waiting room, scared for our kids. It has taken the form of pastoral care, spiritual direction and mentorship to individuals and small groups. We don’t always meet regularly, although I stay in touch with everyone via email and texts. A lot of my ministry at this point is presence, going places and meeting people where they are, helping them find wholeness and healing through spiritual means. It’s an ever-evolving work, led by Spirit and fueled by passion to reach out to those whom the church has hurt, showing them God’s love and care.”

Rev. Claudia Hall has been in active ministry since 2001. In 2005 she graduated with honors from Saint Paul School of Theology, receiving her M.Div. In 2007 she started Progressive Faith Church and Ministries, a ministry of presence and outreach to those who have been hurt by traditional theologies. She is finishing her PhD in Transdisciplinary Studies, combining insights from psychology, mythological studies, and sociology to explore new versions of the Hero archetype. She lives with her family in St. Louis, Missouri.



Commemorations in May

1. **St Philip & St James, Apostles**
2. Athanasius
8. Dame Julian of Norwich
14. ASCENSION DAY
19. Dunstan, Abp of Canterbury, 988

20. Alcuin, Abt of Tours, 804
- 24. WHITSUNDAY / PENTECOST**
25. the Venerable Bede, 735
26. Augustine, 1st Abp of Canterbury, 605
27. 1st Book of Common Prayer, 1549
31. TRINITY SUNDAY

Little Rose and the Gentle Stream

by T. Berend

Once upon a time, in a place very much like this, there was a gentle little stream. One day, a very young girl named Little Rose came upon the stream while she was out for a walk. She had never seen such a gentle, beautiful stream before, with such pure water, so she sat down on a smooth rock to look at it for a while.

After a long time, the little girl was quite sure she heard her name. But no one else was there. Who could be calling her? Then she heard it again. It seemed to be coming from the stream. “Little Rose!” she heard. She looked very hard at the stream, and listened very carefully. “Little Rose!” It was the stream! The stream was talking to her!

“Hello, Stream,” Little Rose said timidly.

“Hello!” replied the stream. “I have been watching you sit there on that rock for a long time. You must really like me, for you have been watching me for quite a while.”

“Well,” said Little Rose, “I have never seen a stream quite so gentle and beautiful as you before. I wanted to sit here and watch you, and listen to the beautiful sound you make.”

“Thank you,” replied Gentle Stream. “Did you know that even the trees and animals sit and listen as you do?”

“They do? Even those BIG trees in the forest?”

“Yes, even those big trees. You see, their roots come and sit next to me. I give them some of my water. The roots take this water back to the tree, which can then grow big and strong, because my water is pure and good, because Great Spirit gave it to me. I even have little tunnels where my water can run to the trees that are too far away for their roots to come to me.”

One of the trees nearby heard the stream talking with Little Rose, and in a big gentle voice said, “Yes, Little Rose, many of my brothers and sisters here in the forest for many miles next to Gentle Stream drink freely of his water, and all of them are strong and healthy. He is a good stream.” The leaves murmured together as they agreed with what the big tree had said.

As Little Rose sat and thought about this, she saw a deer come out of the woods. She sat very still on her rock and watched as the deer drank water from the Gentle Stream. When the deer had finished drinking, she came over to the little girl and said, “Hello, Little Rose!”

“Hello, Deer,” replied Little Rose.

“What brings such a beautiful young girl like you out here to the forest?”

“I wanted to walk in a place I had never walked before. I saw a little path and started walking. Then I found Gentle Stream. He is so beautiful, I just wanted to sit and watch him.”

“He is a beautiful stream,” agreed Deer, “and he is good to us here in the forest. My family all come here to drink his water. Many of my flying friends, like the owls, and the sparrows, and the warblers, come here to drink and also to take a bath in Stream’s pure water. And sometimes we like to come here just to rest, and to listen to the beautiful music he makes. It makes us feel better if we’re sad or tired.”

“Goodness!” exclaimed Little Rose. “You are an important stream!” Gentle Stream gurgled happily.

“Yes,” said the Deer. “If it were not for Gentle Stream, the trees would not be here, and my family and friends would have to find other places to live. You see, the trees started to grow after Great Spirit put Gentle Stream here. They grew big and strong, and now provide shelter for so many of us. He may be a small stream, but he is very important to us, and we thank his every day for being here and giving us life.”

Little Rose sat quietly. She had learned a lot today. “Little Rose,” called the Stream, “please come back and visit me again. I think many of my friends in

the forest would like to meet you and be your friend. And I have many stories to tell you.”

Little Rose promised Gentle Stream that she would be back often to hear his stories and to make new friends. Before Little Rose walked back home, she sat for a long time with Deer, and they listened to Gentle Stream as he sang to them.



Saint of the month : Dame Julian of Norwich

“Saint” is a bit of a misnomer here, in that Julian was never beatified or canonized as a saint. She was an anchoress & mystic who lived from 1342 – 1416, and is venerated in the Anglican and Lutheran churches on the 8th of May. Her work *Revelations of Divine Love*, written around 1395, is the first book in the English language known to have been written by a woman.

Very little is known about Julian; even her name is unknown. “Julian” is given as her name because her anchoress’s cell was built onto the wall of the Church of St Julian in Norwich, England. During a time when she was gravely ill and near death, she had a series of intense visions of Jesus Christ, which ended by the time she recovered from her illness in May 1373. She wrote about her visions immediately after they had happened, in a version of the Revelations of Divine Love now known as the Short Text. Twenty to thirty years later, perhaps in the early 1390s, Julian began to write a theological exploration of the meaning of the visions, known as The Long Text, consisting of some 86 lengthy chapters.

Julian’s theology was optimistic and spoke of God’s love in terms of joy and compassion, as opposed to law and duty. For Julian, suffering was not a punishment that God inflicted, as was the common understanding. She believed that God loved everyone and wanted to save them all. Popular theology, magnified by catastrophic contemporary events such as the Black Death and a series of peasant revolts, asserted that God punished the wicked. Julian suggested a more merciful theology, which some say leaned towards universal salvation. Her theology was unique in three aspects: her view of sin; her belief that God is all-loving and without wrath; and her view of Christ as mother.

Julian believed that sin was necessary because it brings someone to self-knowledge, which leads to acceptance of the role of God in their life. She taught that humans sin because they are ignorant or naive, and not because they are evil, the reason commonly given by the mediaeval church to explain sin.

Julian saw no wrath in God. She believed wrath existed in humans, but that God forgives us for this. She wrote, “For I saw no wrath except on man’s side, and He forgives that in us, for wrath is nothing else but a perversity and an opposition to peace and to love.” Julian believed that it was inaccurate to speak of God’s granting forgiveness for sins, because forgiving would mean that committing the sin was wrong. She preached that sin should be seen as a part of the learning process of life, not a malice that needed forgiveness. She wrote that God sees us as perfect and waits for the day when human souls mature so that evil and sin will no longer hinder us.

Venerable tales

Singular distinction

Mr. Mossman, a Scotch minister, preaching on the sin of taking God's name in vain, made this singular distinction: "O, sirs, this is a very great sin; for my own part, I would rather steal all the horned cattle in the parish, than once take God's name in vain."

Reading the Athanasian Creed

The Rev. Mr. Wright, a curate in the West of England, refused to read the Athanasian Creed, though repeatedly desired to do so by his parishioners. They complained to the Bishop of the Diocese, who ordered it to be read. The Creed is appointed to be

said or sung; the curate accordingly, on the following Sunday, thus addressed his congregation: "Next follows St Athanasius's Creed, either to be said or sung, and with God's leave I'll sing it. Now, clerk, mind what you are about."

They immediately commenced singing it in a fox-hunting tune, which having been previously practiced, was correctly performed. The parishioners again met, and informed their curate they would dispense with the Creed in the future.

-- from *The Percy Anecdotes*, Reuben & Sholto Percy, London 1823.

Book of Prayer

- The recent earthquake in Nepal, with many thousands of people dead across the entire region in several countries.
- Those affected and displaced by the eruption of Calbuco volcano near the town of Ensenada, Chile.
- All those around the world who are persecuted for their faith, or for any other reason.
- For the continuing recovery efforts following the Germanwings air disaster in March.
- For the continuing search for the remains of Malaysian Airlines flight 370, lost on March 8, 2014; to date the plane has not been found. We pray that the families of those lost may feel God's comforting presence throughout the long wait for answers and closure.
- We give thanks for all those who minister to those in need; tending the sick, feeding the hungry, providing support and companionship to all those who are in distress, and who in any way serve to meet the needs of the world and community around them.

Birthdays

May 20 - Rev Johan Reiners

Anniversaries

May 11 - Rev Francesca Fortunato & Lynn Walker