

Community of John XXIII

By Richard Scaine

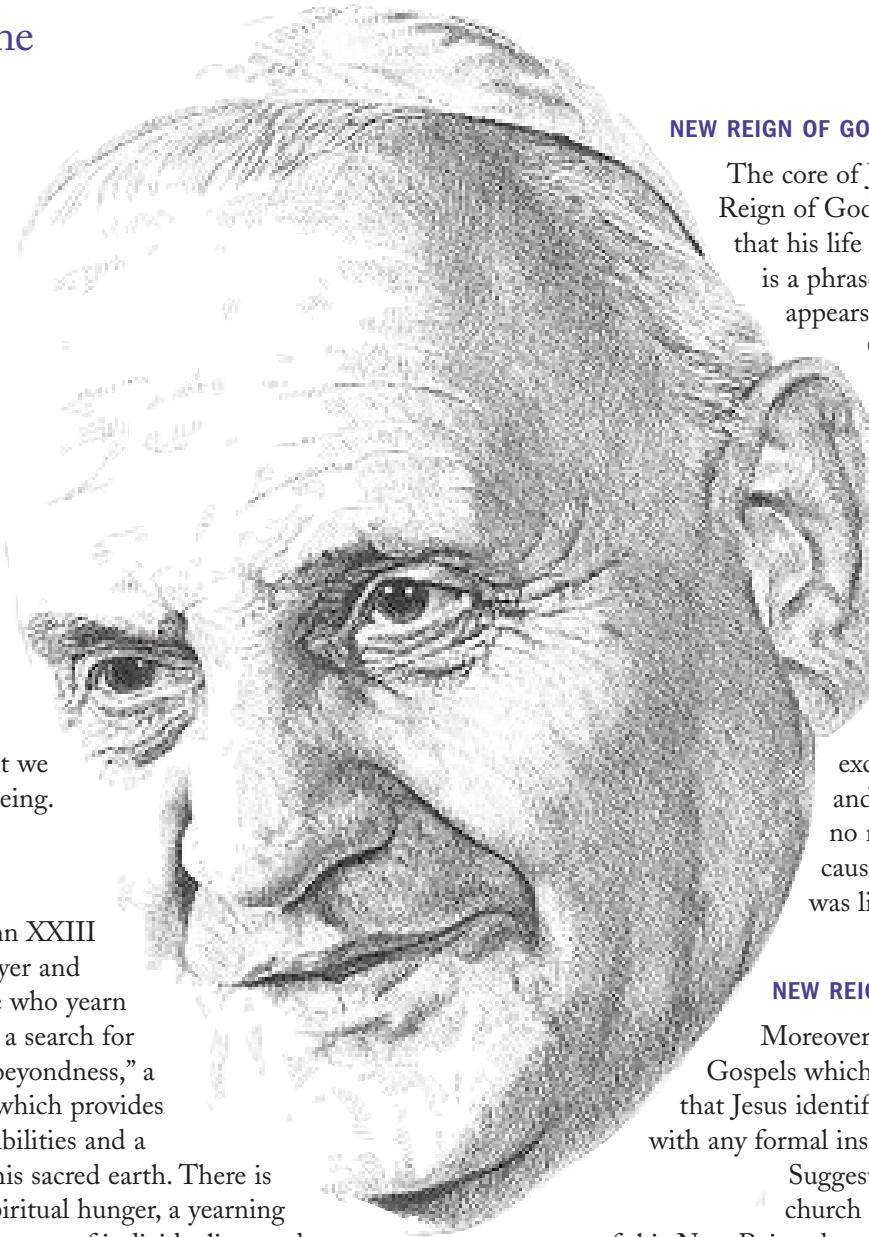
PATRIARCHAL STATUS QUO

Institutional religion is in trouble when it validates the patriarchal status quo, rather than pointing us toward the evolutionary Source of our being. There is a growing sense that our alienation is not only from God but primarily from creation itself. More emphasis seems to be placed on a not-of-this-world afterlife than care for our sacred earth, the primal sacrament in whose revolutionary Spirit we live, move and have our being.

SPIRITUAL HUNGER

The Community of John XXIII is a program of study, prayer and reflection offered to those who yearn for a renewed spirituality, a search for meaning that embraces “beyondness,” a larger life-force embrace which provides the impetus for new possibilities and a hope for the survival of this sacred earth. There is an awakening to a new spiritual hunger, a yearning to outgrow the competitiveness of individualism and instead relate cooperatively once again with the rest of creation and therefore ourselves. We need to be nourished in ways that enable us to engage more meaningfully with the world of our time.

There is no escaping the idea that Christians are or should be “signs of contradiction” in this or any age. Regardless of how one relates to the Biblical text as historical or metaphorical, two facts cannot be denied concerning the Risen Lord. First after the resurrection, the followers felt a powerful presence in their midst. Secondly, that Spirit urged the followers to expand the kingdom (kindom) of justice and peace.



NEW REIGN OF GOD

The core of Jesus’ vision is this New Reign of God, which summarizes all that his life and death represents. It is a phrase (kingdom) that appears 40 times in the four Gospels. Every Christology must be judged in light of the New Reign, a reign of justice and peace. Any isolation of Jesus apart from his mission tends toward idolatry and a watered-down following. Turning Jesus into “my personal savior” exclusive of environmental and social justice issues has no meaning apart from the cause within which that life was lived.

NEW REIGN INCLUSIVITY

Moreover, there is nothing in the Gospels which prompts us to think that Jesus identified this New Reign with any formal institutional structure.

Suggesting that a particular church embodies the core and content of this New Reign does not reconcile with the Gospel vision of Christianity. One of the results of this myopic view is that power and control come to be centralized in a very tight governing system that operates from above (M. Morwood). It suggests an authority which opposes Jesus’ accent on the inclusivity of the New Reign.

A “SAVING REMNANT”

Any thinking beyond the status quo for the 21st century prompts us to suggest that only a spiritual, theological rebirth of a progressive Christianity in the here and now will satisfy the hunger for realized possibilities and the hope needed in the current rather immobile situation. Because such a rebirth has already proved to be controversial and risky, perhaps “a

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saving remnant,” namely, small alternative communities might continue to emerge. Such communities would rely less on the historical Jesus whom we are invited to imitate, and more on the Spirit of creativity who prompts each of us.

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. All of us...are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit”

(II Cor.3:17-18).

A EUCHARISTIC COMMUNITY

When we were young, we were taught that the reception of Holy Communion was a way of surrendering ourselves to Jesus by abandoning or fleeing the world. Jesus has been so enthusiastically worshiped, his godliness so emphatically affirmed, his cross so adorned with jewels and gold, that many of us no longer see him as a human. In so doing, we effectively remove him as the one who so totally opened to the creative evolutionary Spirit that he capitulated in himself all that our species had biologically achieved to that point. More importantly, he embodies the inauguration and invitation for a new consciousness in the Spirit for the future.

A Eucharistic community allows the Spirit to release the Savior within ourselves, to pay attention to the call to authenticity, to become co-creators in a world of which we are a part by incarnating the creative evolutionary Spirit through our own humanity. Eucharist becomes a sharing in the table of the Lord whereby we, already invigorated by the Lord's Spirit, already the Body of Christ, renew our community strength and commitment to new possibilities.

John 17:6 announces Jesus' biological departure as a prerequisite for the coming of the Spirit. The Risen Jesus announces and affirms this newly established human being (Chardin, O'Murchu)

As a Eucharistic community, the “way” of Jesus for us, then, is not to accept his death/resurrection as a liberation from sin as we sit by and watch the world crumble. Rather it means to allow the Spirit to release the Savior within ourselves, to pay attention to the call to authenticity, to become co-creators in a world of which we are a part by incarnating the creative evolutionary Spirit through our own humanity. Eucharist becomes a sharing in the table of the Lord whereby we, already invigorated by the Lord's Spirit, already the Body of Christ, renew our community strength and commitment to

new possibilities. Jesus is too important to leave to the orthodox. He and his New Reign belong to the artisans of a new humanity (D. Abalos).

CREATIVITY

Creativity is at the heart of the spiritual journey (M. Eckhart). This is the way we say thank you. Becoming fruitful as a result of the gift is the only gratitude for the gift. As the creative Spirit hovered over the waters, as the fertile Spirit came over Mary to birth a son, so too that same Spirit inspires our creativity, working to give birth so that we might become co-creators of those new possibilities.

A mystical spirituality, fortified by interdisciplinary revelation, recognizes and opens to the power of this Spirit that inspires and animates all creation, a life-force described as a creative energy that blows where it wills.

PROGRESSIVE SYNTHESIS

The basis for a renewed Christian vision have already started to emerge.

A progressive synthesis of several disparate elements is being forged. Hopefully, it will lead to a more immanent recognition of our Creative Source and a greater appreciation of our own co-creative responsibility in furthering the New Reign.

There is no attempt here to downplay current church problems, many of which are sexual/power/control controversies and abuses. Nor is it fruitful to declare the past wrong. A new paradigm is suggested however, which can embrace questions that the dominant paradigm does not handle. A tradition that is alive allows for growth due to an expanded perception of reality. Within the new story of the evolutionary universe, and the new cosmology and physics that support it, the mystical spiritual tradition must reaffirm

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its central place, bolstered by the findings of depth psychology which sees that problems of our age have a spiritual component. Moreover, it seems essential that we pay attention to the current biblical scholarship and the feminist, ecological and liberation movements since the 1960's.

Our worst nightmare would be that we become prime enablers of an abusive institutional structure whose life can only be transformed by a new human consciousness forged by a progressive, evolutionary Spirit.

RELIGIOUS MATURITY

A sense of maturation in our religious development takes place when we recognize the following:

- That we are primed for creative interaction with not only humans but also with our earth and cosmos as God's primal sacrament and revelation,
- That we need a gentle time and place to develop a sense of prayerfulness, room for the Spirit to breathe from within, remembering that prayer is a disposition of heart rather than a formula,
- That a healthy prayer life urges us toward serious theological nourishment through reading and reflection, seriously neglected by many in the current religious atmosphere,
- That destructive, exploitive social structures must be seriously challenged by a new consciousness that sees the interconnectedness and interdependence of all creation. Juan Luis Segundo insists that any sacramental activity that does not foster transformation in the world is irrelevant (D. Abalos). Thomas Merton has indicated that deep contemplation always brings us to the heart of creation, where the Spirit urges us to preserve the interdependence of all things.

PRACTICUM: JOHN XXIII COMMUNITY

- Program of study, prayer and reflection.
- Emphasis on transformation as well as information.
- Should enable participants to be attentive to the promptings of the Spirit in their lives as they seek to develop a deeper awareness of their ministry.
- Focus will be on the wisdom of the Christian Mystical tradition, Jungian Depth Psychology and Teilhard de Chardin's cosmic vision.

SUMMARY

MYSTICISM - recognition of God's presence and the earth as sacred. Participants are invited to ground themselves in the wide and diverse tradition of both Judeo-Christian (Western) and Eastern spirituality, both traditional and contemporary. It is a mysticism which sees social justice and environmental concerns as constitutive of faith, not adjunct.

JUNGAN DEPTH PSYCHOLOGY - includes depth psychology's perspective on the spiritual component of the psyche, and the individual relationship to the unconscious, wherein the Spirit's promptings toward new and creative possibilities for the future are found.

TEILHARD DE CHARDIN'S VISION - situates the individual spiritual journey in a global and cosmic setting. The energies of evolution are drawing us into new and co-creative relationship with ourselves, other persons, with the

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physical universe and, of course, with the Spirit of Creativity. Exposure to other thinkers and movements influenced by Teilhard is included.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

- A readiness to reflect on one's spiritual journey and a growing awareness of the invitation of the Spirit to recognize new developments in our evolving religious tradition.
- Sufficient openness to study, reflect and share reactions in occasional short, reflection essays on the above three areas. These should take a format indicating how these and other self-chosen readings and reflections help integrate one's spiritual journey. This is both supportive and an acknowledgement of our interdependency. Communication might be best made via e-mail to one another. An ongoing list of membership will be provided as the occasion arises.

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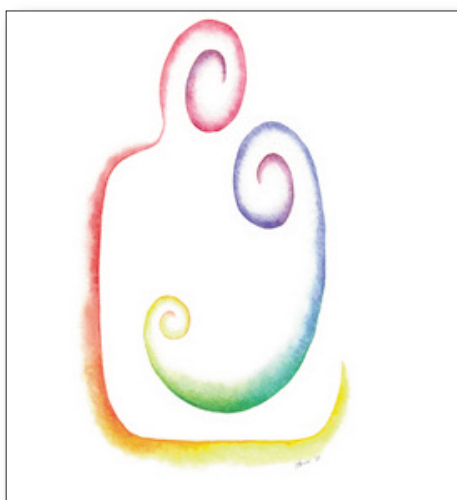
SUGGESTED INITIAL READING:

Consecrated Religious Life: The Changing Paradigm by Diarmuid O'Murchu, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2005. (May be ordered online through Orbisbooks.com, Barnes & Noble.com and Amazon.com).

Since vows are common to the religious life many of us knew, Diarmuid O'Murchu suggests that we first more fully understand them, then rename them. For some, the vows were viewed as regulatory procedures denoting what is allowed or disallowed. For others, they are seen in terms of the sacrifice made to be more fully committed to God. O'Murchu invites us to root the vows in the story of creation and adopt a new language.

The vows, then, focusing on values instead of laws. Moreover, their primary intent is not individual salvation as much as it is the harmonious functioning (shalom) of all creation.

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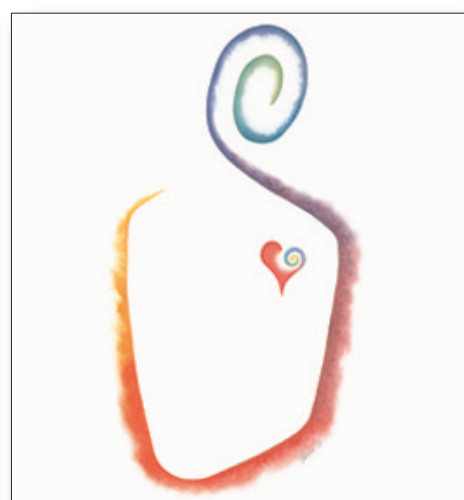
COMMITMENT TO RELATEDNESS

He begins with the commitment to celibacy and moves it beyond its narrow sexualized interpretation to a deeper meaning as a call to witness to authentic relationships at every level of creation. It also means to challenge not only deviant sexual behavior, but any political, consumerist or socially oppressive practices, which exploit our sacred creation. We might call it the Commitment for Relatedness.



COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE MAKING

The commitment to poverty might be renamed the Commitment to Justice-Making. Institutions thriving on a patriarchal will to power cannot be just. Justice, according to Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, is a process of relating according to a discipleship of equals. O'Murchu also insists that justice is egalitarian rather than patriarchal, essentially distributive rather than hierarchical.



COMMITMENT TO MUTUAL COLLABORATION

The commitment to obedience focuses on the strategies and structures pertaining to the Commitment to Relatedness is renamed the Commitment for Mutual Collaboration because of our need to work together to build a culture of right relating humanly, earthly and cosmically. It also means demolishing those religious and social structures which favor some over others. Abuse of this commitment, perhaps more so than the others, has emptied many of their dignity and worth.