

May 16, 2021 Adult Education - Pilgrim UCC, FDL- Interfaith Conf of MKE

"Space for Spirit" essay by Ron Miller in *Finding A Way, Essays on Spiritual Practice*
Edited by Lorette Zirker 1996 Quotes to get us thinking of interfaith understanding.

We recognize the pervading malady, the "*the loss of soul*" that Thomas Moore describes so well in his book *Care of the Soul*. We seek room to stretch, and space for spirit.

We are seeking some breeze of that holy spirit that once moved so mightily over creation's waters. Like the deer of Psalm 42, thirsting for running water, so do our souls thirst for living spirit.

Spiritual paths should be seen as spokes in the same wheel, leading to the same hub, the same reality of spirit. Rabbi Kushner urges us to respect all those other sacred ways that lead our fellow human beings to the wells of the spirit. They are our allies, not our enemies.

There is a crucial distinction between a problem and a mystery. A problem is something that has a solution, because it is presented to us as something within limits, that is defined. A problem is something that revolves around something that can be defined.

A mystery on the other hand, is not reducible to being a problem. It is not something that "stands over against me" but something that contains me, not an object separable from me but a context within which I find myself. It is something of which I will never have an adequate definition. I am not in front of a mystery but inside it.

What then is the proper response to a mystery? Participation. One doesn't solve a mystery but participates in it.

This participation is not a single act but a process, often a lifetime of loving and faithful involvement and commitment.

Rudolf Otto's book *The Holy* he uses the phrase a "mystery is at once both overwhelming and attractive."

Isaiah 6 the prophet's temple vision where he is drawn to the holy presence and simultaneously repelled by his own sense of sinfulness.

Luke's gospel chapter 5 when Peter asks Jesus to depart from him since he is a sinner - this ambivalence is seen by Otto as characteristic of our awareness of the holy.

We encounter here the legitimate "fear of the Lord"; not the seville cringing of the slave before the master, but standing in awe before this mystery(what Rabbi Joshua Hescehl called "radical amazement."

These are moments that lead us to take off our shoes, like Moses in the 3rd chapter of Exodus, where he encounters the burning bush that is not consumed.

Diana Eck talks about a Christian missionary among the Hindus and the time she met a religious faith that was not Christian but was nevertheless a faith, in which the approach should be "one ought to put the shoes off the feet."

Where is the place for such encounters? Where is the door to the mystery where holiness dwells?

Thomas Aquinas once said that everything that exists participates in the divine reality by the very fact that it exists. Psalm 139 gives expression to this insight when the psalmist asks "Where shall I go from your spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend up into heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold you are there."

A miracle is not an unusual event but an event to which we are led to pay unusual attention.

All the great traditions recognize the priority of the divine gift, of grace, and of the need to trust life in the direction of that gift and its giver. In the Jewish tradition, the gift is the Torah. The Torah is Israel's "grace," and a Jewish life of good works is a grateful response to such a great gift.

No choice has to be made between faith and good works. They live together as naturally as our breathing and our breathing out.

In the Christian tradition, the gospels of Mark 10, Matthew 19, Luke 18 tell the story of a "young man" who approaches Jesus and asks what he must do to have eternal life.

The man exhibits what we today might call a "consumer mentality." He sees life in terms of possessions. Money can buy anything. Everything has its price. Why not see eternal life that way too?

Jesus leads the man into a consideration of the commandments, because fulfilling the commandments is a grateful response to the God who revealed them, and obeying the commandments is a way that leads to life. The man responds that he has kept the commandments from his youth.

Jesus sees that the issue of possessing things is what's blocking any kind of spiritual life in this man, so he says "Sell your possessions and give the money to the poor." The man becomes "sad" because he has many possessions and he is not ready for the reality of grace and the trusting act of faithful response.

Faith is essentially trust. It is the way we trust our lives forward. Faith is the way we open ourselves to the future. The Hebrew word *emunah* is from the same root as *amen*. When Jews or Christians end a prayer or song with their amen, they are saying in effect that the words expressed are worthy of trust, that they are the kind of words they can rely on, the kind of words that will open them to an authentic future, the kind of words upon which they can build their lives.

Grace, then, is first on God's part, in almost any portrayal of the spiritual life. Faith is first on the human part. Good works flow quite naturally from God's grace and our faith.

Ron Miller goes on in his essay to explore:

Gurus, Teachers, Directors
Attention
Lectio Divina
The Paradox of Practice
Exploring a Path - Symbol, Myth, Ritual,
The Fruit: True spirituality is known by its fruits, and those fruits are wisdom and compassion. Aquinas defined love as "willing to good of the other." True compassion wills nothing but the others deepest good.

What to do? Begin to allow space for the spirit, both in our personal lives and in our shared spirit. A spiritual friend or support group is of great help. Rely on the wisdom we can find in sacred books. Prayerful reading and quiet receptivity to the mystery of holiness they contain begins to give our spirits space. Simple practice of meditation gives a quiet centering to our souls. An environment of dialogue begins to turn competitors into allies. (quotes from pgs 1-34 of essay)

