

## **THE FIVE PROMISES of INITIATION**

### **Based on Adam's Return by Richard Rohr**

#### **#1 LIFE IS HARD**

If we do not transform our pain, we will transmit it in some form – in one or more of the following ways:

1. We will become inflexible, blaming and petty as we grow older.
2. We will need other people to hate in order to expel our inner negativity.
3. We will play the victim in some form as a means of false power.
4. We will spend much of our life seeking security and status as a cover-up for lack of a substantial sense of self.
5. We will pass on our deadness to our family, children and friends.

Human beings will do everything under the sun to avoid the problems of me, now, and here.

Only suffering and certain kinds of awe lead us into genuinely new experiences. All the rest is merely the confirmation of old experience.

There is both paradox and mystery here. The contemplative mind is content here; the daily calculating mind will try to reject this universal truth because it works in a binary way; either-or thinking gives one a sense of control.

Ultimately, the only job of authentic religion is to teach people what to do with their pain. In deep spiritual work, deconstruction of the false self tends to begin sometime in midlife – when life starts falling apart but, ‘We also return to where we started knowing it for the first time (T S Eliot).

#### **#2 YOU ARE NOT IMPORTANT**

This truth does not deny that you are made in the image and likeness of God... but you are not God. Transformed people tend to transform people (and hurt people will hurt people).

Jesus (who was a layman) knew he needed to destabilize a person's false self before they could understand they had a true self, but this is always a hard sell ("What does it profit if you gain the whole world and lose your soul?").

True masters are both prophets and pastors: they deconstruct and reconstruct, so that we can "receive the kingdom like a little child" (rather than parroting answers, passing Catechism tests and getting good grades for following the letter of the law).

The basic idea: getting out of our own way, and we can't do that without help. Learning that your life is not about you means reeducating the intellect; learning you are not in control means reeducating the will. Predictability might be good for science, but it is not helpful for the soul.

### **#3 YOUR LIFE IS NOT ABOUT YOU.**

Here's a Copernican revolution of the mind – equivalent to that for earthbound humans when they discovered that our planet was not the center of the universe.

Formal religion has contributed to our denial of this truth. Catholics have made Jesus into a scholastic philosopher, Protestants have made him into a moralist: so when we can't get a clear moral code or dogma out of Jesus' teaching we simply abandoned it in any meaningful sense.

No wonder the Sermon on the Mount – the essence of Jesus' teaching – is the least quoted in official Church documents – though there were always people like Francis, Simone Weil, Menno Simons, George Fox, Catherine of Genoa, Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day who made it their life map.

### **#4 YOU ARE NOT IN CONTROL.**

The essence of modern self-help is: "Take control of your life!" But the perennial wisdom found in the Twelve-Step program teaches that you must admit you are powerless before you can find your true power.

The virtues in the first half of life are about self-control; in the second half about giving up control. "This is how we grow: by being decisively defeated by ever greater forces" (Rilke).

"If you are willing to serenely bear the trial of being displeasing to yourself, then you will be for Jesus a pleasant place of shelter" (Therese of Lisieux).

In America the real religion of America has become America itself – *pro Deo et Patria*, religion and country are the battle cries of Conservatives. The neoconservative movement, longing for some sort of stabilizing order, are on bended knee before presidents, popes and principles. But Liberals have rejected authority in favor of a specious equality and so the whole country is filled with gangs, and not just street gangs, but AT&T gangs, Enron gangs, Pentagon gangs, Capital gangs, Bishop gangs?" And so the single greatest weakness of most New Age systems and liberal churches is that there is no accountability system for what one says and believes.

Authentic spirituality recognizes the danger in either extreme and knows that Something greater is in control of life than our limited ego consciousness.

### **#5 YOU ARE GOING TO DIE.**

Healthy religion finds God more in the present than in the past. Educated people may prefer aesthetic substitutes (art, fine words, bells and smells religion) and the uneducated tend to prefer sentimentality and the certitudes of popular religion (religion as spectacle and reassurance). But the perennial wisdom teaches that to deny our mortality is the ultimate fool's errand. "Die before you die... so that when you die, you will not die," is the mantra of authentic spirituality.

Rituals of Death were an essential part of every great culture and civilization. But for the last five hundred years, the West has eliminated all such rites of passage. The authentic spiritual path is a path of Initiation which evokes the sacred and is the primary means of making us human and giving death a positive value." The grain of wheat must first die (John 12:24).

Sometimes the initiate went away from the tribe for an extended period – a form of psychic death. This all comes together in Paul's notion of baptism (Romans 6:3-11). The Benedictines prostrate themselves before in their final vow ceremony – a symbol of death. In every case, some ritual of death/resurrection was the centerpiece of all rites of initiation.

The sad truth is that even religious systems deny all of this: – so Catholics go to Mass repeatedly (Jesus did it only once) because we are slow learners; Protestants argue about the Bible, doctrines and moralisms instead of following Jesus into a new and risky place. Puritans and reformers can't laugh and the new parachurches love religious entertainment instead of loving peace or justice.

The transformed person knows that life is not diminished by death but enhanced by its ever present reality. And there is no greater love than to willingly give up one's life for others. Living in the shadow of Truth #5 means that we do not wait until our death bed to live lives of surrender and sacrifice 'for the good of the world.' The most life giving (and truly satisfied) people in history knew this and became fully human and actualized even in the face of their own suffering and death.