



Stop the presses! Change of plans! This is NOT the reflection I intended to send out this week. There was a surprisingly large response to the last reflection. Not so much, I think, to what I had to say as to the quote from Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984) that too many in the official church *“profess him [Jesus] with their mouths and deny him with their actions and this is what an unbelieving world finds unbelievable.”*

A number of you sent stories of deep disappointment, personal pain, and disillusionment in institutional religion, Roman Catholic and otherwise -- even Buddhists, Jewish, and New Age. But what

especially troubled me were those of you asking for practical advice on what to do. I can only speak on this, and anything else, from my own experience. I feel that in these matters the spiritual course a person takes has to be guided by their own experience. But I don't want to squirm out of the challenge some of you presented. So ....

1) If your original faith community is very important to you then do whatever you can to stay in it so long as you do not compromise your integrity. And remember, some of these churches, like the Roman Catholic are very big, and if you have had a disgusting experience in one parish you may find another where you would feel at home.

2) if you have tried the above without success, then search for alternative faith communities. Maybe it will be another denomination. Or if you have had it with denominations in general you may find a group of people existing on the margin of traditional religions. You will discover some very supportive people in surprising places. Historically, this has been one of the roles that both Christian and non-Christian monastic communities have filled. They just do it, they don't talk about it. An ecumenical and inclusive example is the Benedictine Women of Madison. <http://benedictinewomen.org/communities/sunday-assembly/>

3) OK if #2 did not work either but the idea of having the support of a community is important to you, then consider forming your own faith community. See your family as your fundamental faith community (Jewish families often develop this very well) or gather some friends, or join those who were walking out of a traditional

parish for some reason. This may require transcending the sense that ordained clergy have a spiritual monopoly on sacramental matters (you could read Garry Wills' *Why Priests?: A Failed Tradition*). Communities which are lay, interfaith, and inclusive are popping up all around. A nice one near us is Emmaus in Santa Rosa. A YouTube of an Emmaus service is <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4F8chv--e8>

4) OK – none of the above. For whatever reason if you're going to walk your path alone it is important to remember that in spiritual matters you should never be satisfied with just walking AWAY from a situation but should be always walking TOWARD a more nourishing and enriching one. And that statement is as dogmatic and preachy as I'm going to get on the subject!

5) Now a special note to those few of my generation who are still wrestling with a Papal gene. Just go easy on yourself. We 80-somethings grew up singing songs like “*Long live the Pope! His praises sound again and yet again...*”. So it is understandable we will occasionally still get caught up in the brocaded pageantry of Rome. Just remember that the Roman Catholic church is an absolute monarchy and, for many including me, that method of governance has a systemic fault. John Dalberg-Acton (1834-1902) was referring to his own Roman Catholic church when he wrote his familiar statement, “*Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*” (If you wish more you might see John Julius Norwich's *Absolute Monarchs: A History of the Papacy.*)

Enough of the practical stuff. I respect anyone at anyplace on their

spiritual journey. And I hope that I, and Starcross, can give some supportive help to people on many paths. I like to think of us as a crossroad. No matter where you have been and where you are going, come on up on the porch and, as my Scotch-Irish ancestors would have put it, “sit a-pleasuring for awhile.” You are welcome here.

***Brother Toby***

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