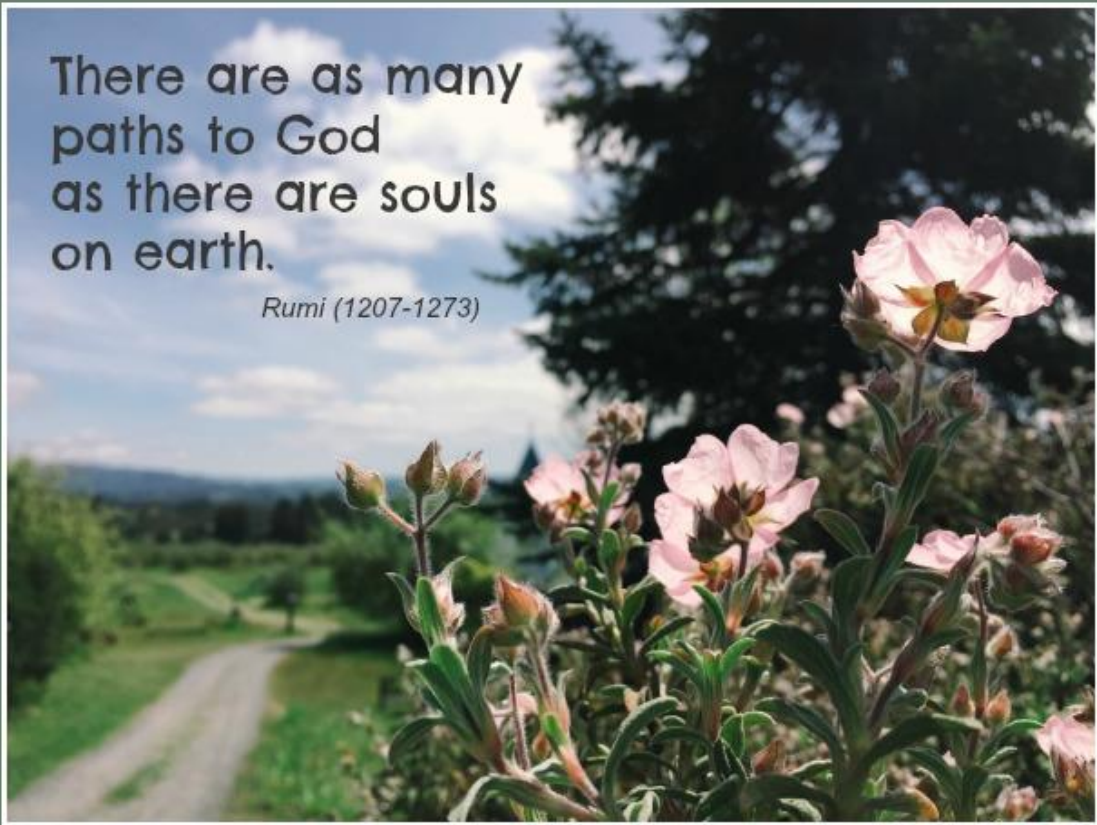


There are as many
paths to God
as there are souls
on earth.

Rumi (1207-1273)



THE COMPASS MUST POINT TOWARD LOVE

Sunday is the Jewish feast of Shavuot, which commemorates the wheat harvest in Israel, as well as the time that God gave the Torah (the first five Books of what Christians know as the Old Testament) to Moses. It is also the feast of Pentecost, which celebrates the descent of the “Holy Spirit” on the followers of Jesus. That is one side of my message.

The other side is that in the past few weeks several people have asked me to predict the future of organized religion. It has been assumed, erroneously, that I have my hand on the religious/spiritual pulse of many young people.

It's true that a large number of the young people who come to Starcross are spiritual seekers in their early 20s, but here we're talking about a small percentage of people in that age bracket. I've always assumed that most 20-year-olds are, in fact, jumping through the required hoops of starting a career, a financially attractive job, etc.

Someone who had reached the ripe old age of 28, recently described himself at 21 as *young and*



bold when everything was black or white. Except here, I suspect that should be “green or white”, because most of the young people I have contact with are exploring alternative approaches to life, including spirituality combined with ecological mindfulness.

Based on the young people I know, I would say that organized religion doesn't have much of a future in their lives. Part of this is because they are cynical about anything institutional. Many of them have considerably more faith in science, nature, or even crystals, rather than in a Catechism Book.

Expanding my view beyond the “young,” I feel that most people I know of any age, and probably many of you reading these Reflections, rely on your own spiritual experience rather than alleged revealed truths or religious dogma.



A long time ago there was something termed “Christian Humanism.” It combined Gospel ethics with classical principles such as those found in Plato and Aristotle. Universal human dignity, individual freedom, the primacy of human happiness and love were seen as compatible with the teachings of Jesus — indeed essential to it.

This never did sit well with organized religions' leaders who wanted to be the sole authority on faith and dogma. This battle was fought out dynamically at several points, but probably the most striking was in the 11th century between the followers of Peter Abelard (1079-1142) and the privileged church officials of the day. Abelard lost, and organized religion took a wrong turn at a critical time. The fight was as much about corruption as spirituality. Those claiming religious authority often used their power for personal gain.



Gradually the term “Christian humanist” dropped out of use, but the concepts remained alive. Recently, many people have bridged social justice with the Way of Jesus in numerous ventures, including “Liberation Theology” in Latin America and the civil rights struggle in our own country. In my own lifetime there have been many Christian humanists such as the farmer and poet Wendell Berry (1934-), the Catholic monk and Asian scholar Thomas Merton (1915-1966), the peace activist and priest Daniel Berrigan (1921-), the apostle for the poor and homeless Dorothy Day (1897-1980), theologians Paul Tillich (1886-1965) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), who warned us all by his actions and words that we must *re-examine the tenets of the religious heritage in which we may have been born.*

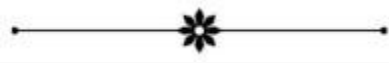


Many mainline churches have shrinking congregations. Fewer people are exploring careers as leaders in organized religion. Most of the young people I meet have not been *born into a religious heritage*. Somewhere along the line their parents or grandparents slipped out of the pews.

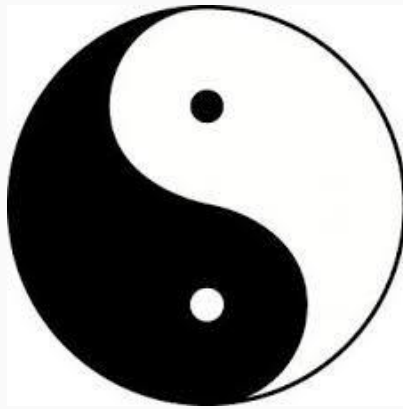
However, almost everyone benefits from being part of a loving, sacred environment. And, I think that a lot of creed and dogma has to be discarded before we can have healthy choices in organized religion.



I remember a poignant moment with one of the children we were caring for with AIDS. With tears in her eyes, our Sister Marti said, *I don't know why little Josh has to die. I don't know why Jesus had to be tortured and murdered!* The religion many of us inherited does not help much. We were taught that a loving heavenly father sent his son to earth to be slaughtered, because the first humans had been disobedient to the father. To be blunt, that kind of creed is just not going to satisfy most people today.



As I have remarked before, one of the problems of Judeo-Christian organized religion is that it tends to be Yin-deficient, which requires a brief definition of Yin and Yang. Many centuries ago it was simple. Yang was masculine, implying assertiveness, intensive, active, and the need for clarity — hence represented by the bright white part of the traditional circle.



Yin on the other hand was feminine with a tolerance for uncertainty, and was represented by the dark part of the traditional circle. The understanding of gender differences has advanced a great deal since those times, so we can forget the “masculine” and “feminine” concepts. Today, I believe that Yin also may well relate to the right hemisphere of the brain, which encourages the tendency toward stillness, the subjective, affective, creative, poetic, and metaphorical in their lives. Since about the middle of the past century, many people in the West have looked eastward for spiritual approaches that were more Yin based.

In my early Catholic school days I remember being taught that X number of certain prayers, recited verbatim, would get loved ones out of Purgatory X number of days early. That is a

pretty Yang concept, and for a short time, I thought of God as a sort of celestial bail bondsman.

There is a Zen Buddhist saying, which states that what is required for walking the spiritual path is *Great courage, Great Faith, Great doubt*. This does not mean that we have to discard the old roots of our spiritual path. Many of those roots are healthy, especially the concept of a caring community. I once discussed this with an old monk who had previously been a prizefighter. One day we were loading hay bales, and he said, *It has to be about love or it ain't gonna float*. He was right.

Here at Starcross our little chapel is on the highest point of our land. On the south slope are the gardens, orchards olive trees, and people working — that is Yang. On the north slope is the land we have dedicated to be “Forever Wild.” It is quiet and a place for mindfulness and reflection — that is Yin. Both of those slopes are needed to make the hill on which the chapel sits.



So, to pull this all together... A friend somewhat older than myself refers to herself as a “JewBu” — “Jewish and Buddhist.” I love that! The term was coined by Roger Kamenetz in his book, *The Jew in the Lotus*. Our Anglican friend Paul Clasper expressed a similar concept in his tract, *The Cross and the Lotus*. My son David, while studying in England, was once required to say something about his religious background. He came up with the term “Zenquakolic” — for Zen Buddhist, Quaker, Catholic.



The Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-), whom the Catholic monk Thomas Merton called his brother, has written a very popular book, *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. Close friends of Starcross facilitate popular gatherings in a college pub on Sundays, alternating between “Beer and Bible” and “Beer and Tao.”

It is probably obvious that I like multi-faith ventures, when each in its own way points us toward love!

Brother Toby

