

St. Martha's Adult Formation
April 1, 2008 - *TRIANGLES*
7:30 –9:00 PM

HOLY RELATIONSHIPS

“God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.”

(John Paul II - *Familiaris Consortio*, p.22)

Nothing, then, must keep us back, nothing separate us from him,
nothing come between us and him.
At all times and seasons, in every country and place, every day and all day,
we must have ***a true and humble faith***,
And keep him in our hearts where we must love, honour, adore, serve,
praise and bless, glorify and acclaim, magnify and thank,
the most high supreme and eternal God,
Three in One, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Creator of All and Saviour of those who believe in him,
hope in him and who love him;
without beginning and without end,
he is unchangeable, invisible, indescribable and ineffable,
incomprehensible, unfathomable,
blessed and worthy of all praise.

(Francis of Assisi - *Rule of 1221, Ch XXII*)

CONVERSION – *ONGOING*

1. **The New Way** – “law of liberty”: the pursuit of the *better hope of nearness to God* and not old “law of linearity” and the pursuit of the *better life of blessings*.
2. **Three Blessings** in this life for followers of *The Way*
 - a. *encounter* with God,
 - b. *community* that survives honesty, and
 - c. surprising *transformation* into the likeness of Christ.

The Pressure's Off - There's A New Way to Live
Larry Crabb - Waterbrook Press, 2002. (p. 196-199)

3. **Foundational Theology:** what revelation tells us about conversion to Christ and about ongoing conversion in the Body of Christ, the Church.
4. **Christological Knowing** – the kind of knowledge of Jesus that
 - a. - results from a practical assimilation to Him in the power of His Spirit.
 - b. - is first done , as a community whose shared consciousness of their faith results from sharing the charisms of the Holy Spirit.; and as individuals participating in the sacramental community of faith.
 - c. - happens when our own story and the story of Jesus intersect in ways that transform us.
5. **A Theology of Conversion** accounts for all forms of conversion. All forms of conversion include the turn (*tesuvah*) from irresponsible to responsible behavior in some realm of experience. Responsibility means accountability to oneself, to others, ultimately to God. According to Donald Gelpi, there are five forms of conversion that differ in their focus on different realms of experience.
6. **The Forms of Conversion** –
 - a. *Affective* - a decision to take responsibility for the health of one's emotional and imaginative life.
 - b. *Intellectual* - a decision to take responsibility for one's belief.
 - c. *Personal Moral* - a decision to take responsibility for justice or injustice of interpersonal dealings.
 - d. *Social Political* - a decision to take responsibility for the justice or injustice of social institutions.
 - e. *Religious Christian* – a decision to take responsibility for one's response to the eschatological and normative revelation of God in Jesus and in the mission of His Spirit.

- adapted from Donald L. Gelpi's work on *A Foundational Christology*
Review of Ignatian Spirituality XXXIV, i / 2003 / No. 102

SANITY AND SANCTITY

1. **Sanity** is about the health and integrity of our intellect. It is *seeing what is really there*.
2. **Sanctity** or wholeness is about the health and integrity of our will. It is loving *what is good and right and true*. Both are important goals for each of us.

3. **Prudence** requires that we *discern* the true good and *choose* the right means of acting. Discipline and detachment are prerequisites not only for our emotional well-being but also for the kind of discernment needed to act with integrity.
4. **“Sabotage”** is the phrase Ed Friedman used to describe the kind of resistance to growth that is an inevitable part of all human systems and a key to a *natural systems* view of leadership (i.e. as either a parent or as a president; as a spouse or as a supervisor; as a companion or a co-worker). Any individual’s capacity to be more self-defining and self-regulating, to maintain their own integrity while being connected to others is both maturity and leadership. Sabotage or “sin” (the word for sin in both Hebrew and Greek is “to miss the mark”) is how in the face of crisis or challenge we can be tempted to reactively regress (“**grow down**”) or we can consciously choose to act responsibly (“**grow up**”).
5. **The Natural and the Normal** – as Joan Chittister writes in her book, *Wisdom distilled from the daily*, **“The natural and the normal are the stepping stones to the holy.”** And suggests these ascetical practices:
 - a. Fidelity to the commands of God.
 - b. Creation of human community through individual responsibility.
 - c. Commitment to personal maturity and spiritual growth.

THE “TRIUMPH” AND THE FAILURE OF THE THERAPUETIC

1. Books titles capture some of the reality. Philip Reiff in his book, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, points out that even those who would never go into therapy accepted the untested assumptions of human nature based on Freudian theory. Later, came the book, *One Hundred Years of Psychotherapy and We’re not Getting Better* (James Hillman and Michael Ventura). Though one could also point out 2,000 years of Christianity and we’re not getting holier.
2. Psychology, for instance, didn’t even exist until scarcely a hundred years ago, and during most of the twentieth century, it was torn between two equally unhelpful poles: the semi mystical mythologizing of Freud and the sterile behaviorism of John Watson and B.F. Skinner.

3. Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R., writing in **First Things**(June/July 2007, p. 13-14.) on the life and death of religious life, points out that “many shaky theories of psychology, most of them now gone over the waterfall of time, were substituted for the gospel and sacred teaching.” And he also reminds us that contemporary positive psychology has rejected the general intellectual and emotional bankruptcy of the Freudian position. As one founder of positive psychology, Aaron Beck, has pointed out, there was an almost complete lack of common sense in psychotherapy from the 1940s to the 1980s.

4. If we do accept that grace builds on nature, it is necessary to find a theory of human behavior that is scientific in its approach. To date, the only theory that I believe does this in a comprehensive way is Bowen Theory. This natural systems theory moves beyond polarization and blame, and deals with what it takes to be mature persons in spite of how our emotions (as much a part of our nature as our intellect) tend to sabotage us.

5. Psychological theories are just that – theories to be tested. Tested in the light of the “facts of life”. Truths are revealed and to be believed. And it is Jesus who is the Way, the Life and the Truth (Jn 14:6). A rigorous science by study and observation of the natural physical world can inform us about the facts of life and offer theories about human nature. Faith through study and contemplation can instruct us about truth and insights about our metaphysical world.

“There is no such thing as insanity, only differing degrees of irresponsibility.”
 - Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness*

“The goal of taking back all blame and discontinuing all relationship positioning and posturing promotes and coincides with taking unilateral responsibility for developing more basic self.

...Knowledge of the family system one grew up in makes it possible to take differentiating steps from it, while staying in relationship with it.”
 - Roberta Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships*

“What is needed is no less than a unified concept of man, a frame of reference that will enable us to understand the necessary connections between cell and psyche and perhaps between psyche and the entity we know as the soul.”
 - Murray Bowen, "A Family Concept of Schizophrenia"

*True learning consists in the science of the saints; that is to say,
 in knowing how to love Jesus Christ.*
 – St. Alphonsus Liguori

TRIANGLES

1. As was pointed out last week in the contrast between Judaism and Christianity, ordinary Jews could not enter the Holy of Holies while in Christianity the holiest of holies, the inner life of the Trinity, is open to all.
2. Most psychological theories tend to focus on the individual and what goes on inside of the individual. One of the key concepts in Bowen Theory is that of the *triangle*. And one sees individuals not in terms of individual psychodynamics and types of psychopathology but in terms of the nuclear family emotional system and levels of differentiation.
3. **Natural Systems Thinking - or Bowen Theory** – to my way of thinking offers an "antidote" to polarization and blame. (Cf. Anthropologist Rene Girard and the role of scapegoating.) Thinking emotional systems:
 - a. Provides a new basic hypotheses re the nature of mental illness - mental illness is a dysfunction of that part of the human that is shared with lower life. (Cf. Aquinas “angemals”)
 - b. Redefines the concept *emotional* (Cf. Mc Lean's - the triune brain) as synonymous with the life force from one-cell to the human that governs automatic behavior and causes living things to grow; beyond superficial feeling states; instincts.
 - c. Requires *unlearning* conventional concepts and *unlearning* cause and effect/ individual thinking (*why? & why explanations*).
 - d. Requires the long, difficult and disciplined task of *learning to think systems about the human "systems"* and seeing the non-linear inter dependence of emotional processes (*What, Where, When, How questions; to wonder at and be curious about?*)
4. **Differentiation of Self** – applies to the level of differentiation in an individual, a family or any group.
 - a. It involves the capacity within one’s self to differentiate between one’s emotional guidance and one’s intellectual guidance system.
 - b. To manage the chronic anxiety that comes from the tension between two basic biological forces: **togetherness** and **differentiation/individuality**. (Cf. JP II’s “theology of the body”: *original unity* and *original solitude*.)
 - c. The life long process of striving to keep one's being in balance through the reciprocal external and internal processes of **self-definition** and **self-regulation**

- d. The life-long *process* knowing *where oneself ends and another person begins*.
 - e. The ability to regulate one's own reactivity and to not react to the reactivity of others.
 - f. Recognizing and being a *self* as category of **integrity** and maturity, not an instance of narcissism
 - g. Taking maximum responsibility for one's own emotional being and destiny rather than blaming either others or the context.
 - h. Striving to be a **NON-ANXIOUS PRESENCE**.
 - i. Cannot be equated with or reduced to similar sounding ideas such as individuation, autonomy or independence.
5. **Triangles** are ubiquitous not only in life but also in theory. “The theory states that the triangle, a three-person emotional configuration, is the molecule or basic building block of any emotional system, whether it is in the family or any other group. The triangle is the smallest stable relationship system. A two-person system may be stable as long as it is calm, but when anxiety increases, it immediately involves the most vulnerable other person to become a triangle. When tension in the triangle is too great for the threesome, it involves others to become a series of interlocking triangles.” *Murray Bowen, 1976*
- a. Gossip, rumor- mongering and making insinuations are among the numerous well-know move in which outsiders in triangles seek to form togetherness.
 - b. In the original triangle of two parents and a child, symptoms can show up in either of the spouses, in the marriage or in one of the children.
 - c. The child focus triangle: a parent is upset; the second parent “takes on” the upset; a child, by being near that parent, takes on the anxiety. If the anxiety lasts long enough or the parent maintains an anxious focus on the child, the problem and anxiety intensify over time and the child develops a “symptom”.
 - d. In intense triangling, one needs to work towards becoming emotionally calmer, and to get into the observing mode, so as to be a little more able to think objectively.
6. **The ABC’s of Anxiety – Anxiety** can be defined as the response of an organism to threat, real or imagined.
- a. *Acute anxiety* generally occurs in response to real threats and is experienced as time-limited. (A fear of *what is*.)
 - b. *Basic anxiety* is my term for an anxiety that is deeper than the psychological. Fulton Sheen writes in *Peace of Soul* (p.16-17) that this anxiety is rooted in the nature of the human being and the “double law of gravity, one pulling him to earth, where he

has his time of trial, and the other pulling him to God, where he has his happiness. *The anxiety underlying all modern anxieties arises from someone trying to be himself without God or from trying to get beyond himself without God.*" (A fear of *what we are* – dependent creatures, not the Creator.)

- c. *Chronic anxiety* generally occurs in response to imagined threats and is not experienced as time-limited. (A fear of *what might be*.)
- d. *Emotional reactivity* and *anxiety* are processes that are not easily distinguished from each other and so the terms are used interchangeably in Bowen theory. The distinction between "activity" and "reactivity" is important. Many seemingly inactive, low response people are called "nonreactive" when, in fact, their inactivity is a way of managing a high level of reactivity.
- e. "Differentiation of self is one of two principal variables or processes defined by family systems theory to explain level of functioning; the other variable is *chronic anxiety*. The lower a person's level of differentiation, the less his adaptiveness to stress. The higher the level of chronic anxiety in a relationship system, the greater the strain on people's adaptive capabilities." (Michael Kerr, *Family Evaluation*, p. 112)

7. The Binding of Anxiety – Individual Mechanisms

Relationships

Drugs

Overeating and under-eating

Over-achievement and underachievement

Preoccupation with physical health and physical symptoms

Sexual acting-out (cf. increase in pornography)

Hoarding or overspending money, gambling

Personality traits (obsessiveness & hysteria; impulsiveness &

Indecisiveness; passivity & aggressiveness; shyness &

obtrusiveness; optimism & pessimism; grandiosity & negative self-image; procrastination; perfectionism; paranoia.)

Rigid moralism/immoralism (scruplosity/sociopathy)

Idealization and romanticism of people, places and activities

Undervaluing self or others

"Beliefs" & "Principles" (when part of pseudo self & used as an anxiety binder)

Scapegoating (justify/blame)

8. The Binding of Anxiety - Mechanisms within an emotional system:

- Distance*
- Conflict (blaming and posturing)*
- Triangulation (dysfunctional child)*
- Reciprocal Functioning (adapting to preserve relationship harmony; dysfunctional spouse)*
- Cut-off*

In her book, *Extraordinary Relationships*, Roberta Gilbert points out that the above list are the immature or anxious ways that we manage the tension/anxiety of balancing the biological forces of “togetherness” and “differentiation”.

“Since trying to make a self out of a relationship cannot work, the attempt itself creates a certain amount of anxiety. *In order to manage that anxiety, partners begin to posture themselves in recognizable ways, and certain well-known relationship patterns form.*

These patterns form to “solve” the problem of relationship anxiety. The basic problem, emotional immaturity, does not get addressed. (p. 41)

9. Bowen Theory and John Paul II

TOGETHERNESS (either/or) emotion sabotaging principles mindless/reactive	DIFFERENTIATION (both/and) emotion in service of principles mindful/responsive
DISTANCE CONFLICT (BLAME) TRIANGLES RECIPROCAL FUNCTIONING CUT-OFF (Bowen Theory)	ENCOUNTER & DIALOGUE HEARTFELT ACCEPTANCE DISINTERESTED AVAILABILITY GENEROUS SERVICE DEEP SOLIDARITY (Familiaris Consortio) **

** In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II writes the following.

“The relationships between members of the family community are inspired and guided by the law of “free-giving”. By respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value, this free giving takes the form of *heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, disinterested acceptance, generous service and deep solidarity.*” (p.68)

CLOSING PRAYER

This, then, is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural, takes its name:

Out of God's infinite glory, may God give you the power through the Holy Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your heart through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth, until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God.

Glory be to God whose power, working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to God from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3, 14 - 21

A PRAYER of SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace:

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

And where there is sadness, joy.

O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled, as to console,

to be understood, as to understand,

to be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

AMEN.

BOWEN THEORY & RELIGIOUS SPIRITUALITY

- Alphonso, H. *Discovering your personal vocation*. New York: Paulist Press, 2001. *
- Bowen, Murray. *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1985, 1983, 1978.
- Brueggemann, W., S. Parks and T.H. Groome *To act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly: An agenda for ministers*. New York: Paulist Press, 1986.
- Downey, M. *Altogether Gift - A Trinitarian Spirituality*. New York, Orbis, 2000.
- Fleming, D.L. *Draw Me Into Your Friendship - The Spiritual Exercises*. St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996.***
- Fleming, D.L. (ed.) *Ignatian Exercises: Contemporary Annotations*. St. Louis, MO: Review for Religious, 1996. *
- Friedman, E.H. *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. The Edwin H. Friedman Estate/Trust, 1999.
- Friedman's Fables*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1990.
- Generation to Generation*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1985.
- “Reinventing Leadership” (Video). New York: The Guilford Press, 1997.
- Gilbert, R. *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory*. 2004, 2006.
- Extraordinary Leadership*. Leading Systems Press, 2006.
- Harter, M. *Hearts on fire -praying with the Jesuits*. St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1993.***
- Heschel, A. *The Sabbath*. HarperCollins, 1997. (1951)
- Kerr, M. *One Family's Story: A Primer on Bowen Theory*. Washington D.C., Georgetown Family Center, 2002.
- Metz, J. B. *Poverty of spirit*. New York: Paulist Press, 1968.
- Norris, K. *Dakota: A spiritual geography*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.
- The Quotidian Mysteries: Laundry, Liturgy and Women's Work*. The 1998 Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality. New York: Paulist Press, 1998.
- Nouwen, H. *Reaching out*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1975.
- Ryan, T. *Disciplines for Christian living*. New York: Paulist Press, 1993.
- Sheed, F.J. *The Instructed Heart*. Our Sunday Visitor, 1979.
- Sheen, F.J. *Peace of Soul*. Ligouri, MS: Triumph Books, 1996. (1949)
- Tetlow, J.A. *Manna for a Desert of Busyness*. Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1988.*
- Choosing Christ in the World: Directing the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola According to Annotations Eighteen and Nineteen*. St. Louis, MO: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1989.***
- Ignatius Loyola - spiritual exercises*. New York: Crossroads, 1992.***

(* ignatian or jesuit spirituality)

*** the Spiritual Exercises)

EILEEN M. RAFFANIELLO BARBELLA, PH.D.

Licensed Psychologist

The Trinity Centre

307 County Road 2192

Cleveland, TX 77327

281.592.9569/Fax: 281.592.2767 email: doctoreileen@doctoreileen.com

APPENDIX A: Family Diagram and Prayer on your Dossier

Preparing

Placing ourselves in God's presence (*gratitude*).

Exercises: Natural Gratitude: "Practicing an attitude of gratitude".

Reflective Thanksgiving: Praying in gratitude for God's gifts.

Knowing our place in creation (who & what we are, whose we are).

Exercises: Family Diagram (genogram)

Prayer on My Dossier

Family Diagram

Creating a family diagram involves three levels: 1) mapping the family structure, 2) recording family information, and 3) delineating family relationships.

1. Mapping the Family Structure

This is a graphic depiction of how different family members are biologically and legally related to one another from one generation to the next.

Each family member is represented by a box (male) or circle (female).

Lines are doubled around the index person.

Birth and death dates are indicated to left and right.

If dead, an X is placed inside the figure and the person's age at death is usually indicated within the figure.

The figures representing family members are connected by lines.

Male on the left, female on the right

Marriage: lines that go down and across

Living together: dotted line down and across

Separation and Divorce: single or double diagonal line with date

Children: list in birth order beginning with oldest child on the left.

Pregnancy: triangle (not box or circle)

Stillbirth: box or circle with X, or triangle with X

Spontaneous abortion/ miscarriage: blackened small circle

Induced abortion: small X

Twins: indicate fraternal or identical

Foster placement or adoption: used dotted vertical line

2. Recording Family Information

a) Demographic information - ages, dates of birth and death, locations, occupations, and educational level.

b) Functional information - more or less objective data on the medical, emotional and behavioral functioning of different family members.

c) Critical family events - important transitions, relationship shifts, migrations, losses and successes.

d) Family chronology - listing in order of occurrence of important events in the family history; or special chronology for a critical time period.

3. Showing Family Relationships

This is the most inferential level. Since relationship patterns can be quite complex, and also fluctuate, it is often useful to represent them on separate family diagrams.

a) very close or fused

- b) close
- c) fused and conflictual
- d) poor or conflictual
- e) estranged or cut-off
- f) distant

Prayer on My Dossier

(adapted from J. Tetlow's *Choosing Christ in the World*, p.119)

I jot down all the vital statistics of my life. As I note each piece of data, I raise my mind to God my Maker, and praise and thank the Creator for this detail in my life history and in my self. Note: God chose that I should come to be in a particular place and time, of particular parents and race, and all the rest. Am I content with God's choices for me?

So to begin, I write down my parent's full names, birthplaces, and birth dates. I note my own birthday, where I was born, and any significant medical details. I note my sex, race or ethnic group, hair and eye color, and my physical build. I also note my siblings - name, birthdays, significant details; and I note my extended family of uncles, aunts and cousins. I note the cities and addresses I lived at before I was seven. All this, God chose for me; for all this, I praise and thank God.

Then I note down a half dozen personal characteristics and qualities that were bred into me before I had a choice. Self-assurance or anxiety, intelligence, the language(s) I speak, activities I take pleasure in and so on. I note at the same time half a dozen characteristics and qualities that I have inherited from my parents or extended family, those I like and perhaps some that I would just as soon not have. All this, too, God chose for me within in the human family; for all this, I praise and thank God.

Next, I go on to note down five or six personal qualities in my self that I particularly like. I note down these qualities and acknowledge them as gifts from the One who makes me. For all this, too, God chose for me within the human family; for all this, I praise and thank God.

Finally, I note down five or six personal qualities in my self that I do not particularly like. I note down these qualities and acknowledge them as gifts from the One who makes me. For all this, too, God chose for me within the human family; for all this, I praise and thank God.

When my time of prayerful reflections is coming to an end, I recite Psalm 139. But I remember that God did not finish making me once, long ago, when I was conceived or born. I remember that God continues making me and has hopes for me and desires that I keep growing in love until I love as completely as God loves.