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Reflections

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

'BAD SPIRITUALITY / GOOD SPIRITUALITY'

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Spirituality has taken it on the chin – and rightfully so – when it becomes a cold task master, interested only in subservient obedience to human ambition. The “task master” is a far cry from the link to God and the fullness of life that is the promise of spiritual experience.

2 John lifts up for us a way to discern between wise spirituality that links us to the God of mercy and foolish spirituality that is only a projection of anger and self-loathing onto others: “Now I would make this request of you – but it is not as if I were writing you some new commandment; rather, it is a commandment we have had from the start: let us love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to the commandments; and as you have heard from the beginning, the commandment is the way in which you should walk” (vv. 5-6) In short, do the “commandments” or teachings of our spirituality lead us to love? If they do our path is wise. If the commandments do not then our path is but an illusion and we are fools.

God has no vested interest in any faith that is cruel and life-denying. Specifically in the Christian tradition God has no need for a cross that is still used to crucify others upon. Those who utilize the cross for this purpose have misunderstood what it means for Jesus to have suffered once-and-for-all. Such misunderstanding has led many a good person into foolish attitudes of contempt and scorn for those they deem unworthy of divine love.

Authentic spirituality stands against such foolish thinking. Love does not block people from the presence of the Holy. Rather, love invites us into the presence of God. The invention to love is the beginning, as it is love which directs us out of our own self-limiting concerns to the broader and deeper dynamics of humanity and creation.

Foolish spirituality is narcissistic. Foolish spirituality is the cult of the individual gaining access to God by force of personality. But what good is an assertive persona if you are limited to gazing upon yourself and all the world falls away? How boring. How lonely. How sad.

In contrast, wise spirituality results in a compassion that calls us into the midst of relationships with all the associated risks. There is pain, there is sorrow, there is loss, yet there is also connection, love, fulfillment, and joy.

Are we foolish or wise? Are we gazing upon ourselves or upon the whole world? Does our path lead to self-absorption (bad spirituality) or to love (good spirituality)?

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