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My Life is my Prayer: Spiritual Ethics

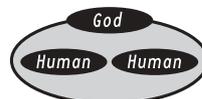
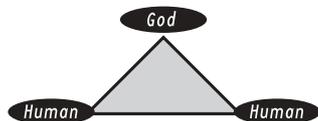
Consulting different lexica with the question of spirituality, you get a lot of different answers. If all of these answers hold at least part of the truth, then the answer must be that being spiritual is being close to God, or even more general; being religious. What then is the mark of Christian spirituality? As Christians we are close to God in anything we do, because God is part of us through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is shed over us so that we can live in and live out the will of God (Acts 2).

GOD IS LOVE

God is a term, not a name, and as a term it is empty. In Judaism the name of God cannot be spoken. The name signifies the essence and human cannot grasp the essence of God. Even now in Christianity it is so and that is why we use the empty term 'god'.

But then how do we know what God we praise? The essence of God cannot be grasped by human, but we see the works of God in the world, as it can be read in 1John 4: "God is Love". When we experience love we meet and know God. And thus Love is what defines god as God in Christianity.

Some picture the relationship between human and God as a triangular relationship but with the Holy Spirit it is enlightening to see God as part of the relationship between human and human as well. Again: God is Love; and love is in the relationship between men.

**IMAGO DEI**

Not only the New Testament speaks of human being close to God by doing God's bidding in accordance with love. Genesis 1,26-28 speaks of human being made in the image of God. This is not only what distinguishes human from the rest of creation, it is also the responsibility of human. As God created in love, human is supposed to rule over or administer the creation in love.

When human uses creation for his own benefit, he fails to fulfil his role given by God as the administer of creation. Thereby, human moves away from God, and God away from human for God is the love in which human administers creation. Human is created in the image of God and the Holy Spirit as part of human is thus two ways of expressing the same. And furthermore as God created all of the creation, human has responsibility for all of creation.

Israel was not just the country. Moses wandered through the desert with Israel;

the people. And God gave them the land of Israel. This country was for all of Israel, not just for the powerful. Isaiah says it in 5,8, that gathering land for oneself is a crime against God. Taking care of the weak that is the widows and the orphans is the work of God (10,1).

The country Israel was the gift of God, and thus the responsibility of the people of Israel was to administer the wealth of Israel for the benefit of all.

Creation is the gift of God to human and as human gains influence in the world this influence can be used in the love of God, or for the benefit of oneself. In ancient Israel the responsibility was bound to the country; to the people nearby. But now what we do influences people all over the world for example through commerce and thus the responsibility grows.

As a single person, this responsibility will seem overpowering: Who am I to save the world? But we are not just single persons; we join different societies. In these societies we have the power to change the inequities of the world – they are these societies that make the

inequities possible and they can also be used for the opposite; to correct the wrongs. As Isaiah says in 10,1: "Woe to those who pass out unjust laws to turn down the weak." As Christians we have a responsibility both in the Christian society

but also in society as a whole. Whatever power we hold can be used in love or in self-absorption.

THE NEIGHBOUR

The Bible is filled with places underlining the ethical responsibility of human. Jesus puts himself in the place of the low and despised, thus doing good to these is doing good to God (Matthew 25,34-40). Understanding the Holy Spirit as God Who is Love, means that being close to God is living in God's love. But love never stands still, it is always in movement. It is never something that human can just live in, it must be lived out. If it is kept for oneself, it withers and dies. Therefore it must be aimed at someone else and lived out.

We know this, not just from life, but it is also said by Jesus in Matthew 22,36-39. On the question of which of the commandments is the greatest, Jesus replies: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and great com-



THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE

The Western world is mainly Christian by tradition, and this part of the world is so much wealthier than the rest of the world, and yet the Western world in general does not seem to want to share this wealth. Today, 800 million people on the earth are starving and three billion people are living at the point of or in starvation – this is half the population of the world! This is grotesque, especially when there is enough food to feed the entire population of the world.

But it gets even more grotesque: twenty percent of the population of earth consume eighty percent of the Earth's resources (if you want to confirm these figures; they can be found on the homepage of the United Nations, www.un.org or on the homepage of the World Food Programme, www.wfp.org). These twenty percent is mainly part of the Western, Christian world; so it seems that the Christian world is not just reluctant to share its wealth, but the Christian world actually seems to be the main reason for the inequities of the world. It is sad to admit it, but it seems that we are not the good, but the bad guys.

But this is not the end of it! There are many different initiatives throughout the Western world, which you and your congregation can join in on. Examples are *Jubilee 2000*, (www.jubilee2000uk.org) started in England by a Christian group, and is working to relieve the debts of the third world; *Max Havelaar*, (www.maxhavelaar.nl) started in the Netherlands, working as a sort of a union to assure just payment for the products (fair trade); *Attac*, (www.attac.org) started in France, an international movement for democratic control of financial markets and their institutions.

mandment. And the second *is like it*: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

Loving God and loving the neighbour is alike; the relationship to God is related to the relationship with the neighbour. But the neighbour is not just the human next door; it is, as we have seen, those we influence in our daily lives – both through personal relations and through, for example, commercial influence.

The term 'neighbour' can therefore be misleading, and I much prefer the Danish term 'the Next'. The neighbour is the one next door, maybe friends and family, but the next has no limit, neither in time nor in space. It is the neighbour, it is family and friends, but it is also the next one beside this one, and the next one after this one. The love of God extends to all of creation, which human was created to administer in love.

THE CRY AND JOY OF LOVE

The Holy Spirit (God and Love) is not just in a single human, but in all of creation. This is what connects all of creation, and without the Holy Spirit (God and Love) creation will rise against itself with the destruction of creation as the end. The Holy Spirit (God and Love) feels the pain of each and every tiny part of creation, and this pain is mediated in the Holy Spirit to all of creation. We all know it – it is what turns into 'bad conscience', if the cry is not reacted to.

Feeling the pain of creation would surely shatter any human had it not been for the joy of love, which is given to human at the same time as the cry of love. The Holy Spirit is in any loving rela-

tionship between human, in congregations, friendships, families; in all of creation united, and this relationship is joyful in itself. Whatever good we do to any part of creation, however tiny, we also do to the Creator, Who is in all of creation. And thus we, Creator and creation, rejoice together. This is Love: Feeling both the pain and the joy of creation and reacting to this call. This is being a Christian.

PRAYERS OF PAIN AND JOY

Praying has many shapes and sizes, but in order to be a Christian, it must be directed towards God. If any of the above is to make any sense, then your prayers for a better world must include our willingness to live out the Love of God. When in despair we pray that God will take our burdens away. When not in despair we pray that God will show us where God's love through us is needed. This understanding extends to all things that are Christian: Being Christian is living in the love of God.



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