Opinion
Spirituality



by NCR Staff

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In a recent column, Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan suggests that it might not be such a bad thing to be spiritual but not religious. "What if our starting point in thinking about what it means to be a person in communion with God, oneself and the world was not reduced to institutional belonging, but instead began with humans' inherent capacity for God?" he writes. Below are letters to the editor from NCR readers that have been edited for length and clarity.

Congratulations on this article. I would like to see more on spirituality in NCR, much more. For me, all the religious rhetoric has at its aim is to get one in touch with one's own spirituality.

Now, that is tough work. One needs to sit quietly, listen, perhaps change assumptions, and do the hard work. There is no one or institution to blame. Often, it's much easier to talk about the issues.

Spirituality is alive today. Let's see more of it in NCR.

ELLIE AUGUR

Glastonbury, Connecticut



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Every individual has a relationship with God, whether they acknowledge God or not. The need for membership, let alone participation, in an organization to affect that relationship is, for many people, something superfluous. Membership in an organized religion can give an individual a sense of belonging which meets a psychological need. Others find that need met through interactions with others in different environments and religion does not provide that outlet.

Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan's essay is good food for thought and requires us to recognize the intrinsic value of all others whether they profess belonging to any religion or claim to be exclusively spiritual. Practicing a religion in the traditional sense for many is definitive of their relationship not only to God but to others who

share the same beliefs. Spirituality, as Horan states, can create in many people the same attributes with which we associate the religious; compassion and charity, among others.

From Horan's essay one can also gather that the cultural clashes we are experiencing and which, unfortunately, seem to be reflected in some of our fellow churchgoers gives pause to people who are not entirely committed to church membership as their means to express their need for a relationship with God. It seems those people see the hypocrisy in the clerics as well as in many of the laity and question whether they themselves would become part of that scenario which is diametrically opposite of what their church teaches.

CHARLES A. Le GUERN

Granger, Indiana

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This piece is the pontificate of Pope Francis in spades. Leave out the "perhaps" and put in "definitely." The author is correct that the Catholic Church as a religious institution is an impediment to one's spirituality. This is nothing new or unique to the young. As a septuagenarian and now "cultural Catholic," I can say it's been a problem in the church for at least my lifetime.

People are "spiritual" first and "religious" second. The church never understood this though it is what they said they believed. Scripture states humankind is made in the "ikon" of God. God is Spirit therefore humankind are embodied spirits = spiritual. Religious institutions should incorporate and reflect the spiritual life of humankind.

Has the Catholic Church lost the youth? "Perhaps." The culture warrior clerics are still battling in the trenches. With the abortion battle won, contraceptives are in their sights, then same-sex marriages, then — there is no end. Resistance to Francis is strong among so-called neo-conservatives and neo-traditionalists who have no interest in allowing let alone perpetuating his programs.

Those who choose a spiritual over a religious life realize the truth that God made them, loves them, and cares for them now and into eternity. Dogma says God is simplicity, so too is one's relationship with God. When the Catholic Church begins to realize this, it'll become relevant in people's lives. In doing so, it'll have something

genuine to offer and people will be drawn to it. Will the church change its ways before it's too late? Perhaps.

MICHAEL J. McDERMOTT

Tyler, Texas

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"Perhaps being 'spiritual but not religious' isn't such a bad thing" confuses issues through careless vocabulary.

Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan quotes Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, "Long before we do anything religious at all, we have to do something about the fire that burns within us. What we do with that fire ... is our spirituality. " Spirituality is part of all human life and has nothing to do with faith or religion. These three things must be kept separate in discussion, even though they are often intertwined in practice.

When someone says they are spiritual, they acknowledge the duality of human nature, rejecting pure materialism, affirming that human beings are composed of material and spiritual parts. Meditation, for example, can be spiritually, psychically, beneficial without any conscious reference to God or any faith. This is spirituality without religion. Horan confuses the issue by injecting a relationship with God into this awareness.

Horan's hope that "Catholicism generally and the various spiritual traditions ... can offer resources for meaning-making and religious belonging," is a focus on Christian cultures instead of the Gospel.

Christians are not called to any particular spirituality. Catholic are called to another renewal. We have failed to preach the faith in our lives, in our differences from the competitive civil culture. We need to live in communities rather than in institutions. We need to practice the loving spirit of Jesus.

TOM POELKER

St. Louis, Missouri

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