

Thou shalt fall in love at least three times a day

Rich Heffern | Apr. 7, 2010 NCR Today

The late Fr. Thomas Berry was asked once what he thought was the most important element of a spirituality for everyday living. He answered: "Enchantment!"

In order to engage an active spirituality that makes sense, that works and is effective for our times, Berry urged the awakening of an energetic sense of awe and wonder within us. Enchantment comes as we see the whole universe, and especially the earth that gave us birth, as vast, sacred mysteries. We have been lost in the gaunt grip of a centuries-old split in our thinking and in our religious sense between the divine and the world, between the sacred and the secular, the holy and the ordinary, the consecrated and the congregation, between heaven and earth, saint and sinner.

In our day this profound split in our consciousness is beginning to heal as we rediscover a more creation-centered view — one that recognizes the interconnectedness of all things and the nagging, pervasive presence of the divine mystery always and everywhere within our world.

Enchantment! It means being completely charmed by, bedazzled with, under the spell of the mystery and beauty in the world around us. The most healing of all emotions are awe and wonder. What's more, the altar rail that encloses the holy sanctuary runs clear around our whole planet.

In the first book of the Old Testament we find Jacob exclaiming after an unexpected encounter with God in a dream, "Truly Yahweh is in this place and I never knew it! How awe-inspiring this place is! This is nothing less than a house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

When we see this world as indeed holy ground, we take off our shoes and connect with a dynamic and transfiguring energy and will. The greatest scientist of our time, Albert Einstein, said this: "The most beautiful and powerful experience we can have is the encounter with mystery. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of true science, true art, and true religion. Whoever does not know it is as good as dead, his eyes dimmed."

Matthew Fox has expressed the various paths of a creation-centered spirituality as commandments. These commandments are not so much imperatives for behavior as promises of rewards. If we look in these places, the commandments tell us, we will reap huge benefits for our living. The commandment connected with the very first path, the *Via Positiva*, is this: "Thou Shalt Fall in Love at Least Three Times a Day."

The beginning path of creation spirituality calls us to awe and wonder, to enjoyment, to savor creation's simple pleasures, to hunt out and befriend beauty, to spend time with our friends, to celebrate our blessings and return thanks by passing them on to others.

If we are ignorant of pleasure, then we are ignorant of God. To know the divine and sacred, we must become ripe and juicy, delicious people, falling head over heels for the beauty and inner mystery of things around us on a regular basis. Three times a day our hearts should throb. What a prescription! For falling in love kindles our

passions and energies into flame. Falling in love is the way out of addiction, which is to fill the emptiness within us with things or with numbness instead of passion, beauty, and fascination with the world around us.

A wonderful parable for this dynamic of enchantment and blessing was the popular movie *Babette's Feast*. In that film, a sumptuous dinner lovingly prepared by a French refugee thawed the ice-cold heart of a Danish village into friendship and poignant forgiveness. The film showed the miraculous power of simple, good things.

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