

Intimacyand Solitude

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The Need for Intimacy

Love has at least two dimensions. It is practical service. It is also intimacy.

Intimacy is the energy source of practical love. Without an energy source, love cannot move beyond being "wished" to being "done".

What energises my decisions to love and serve if it is not intimacy? What energises my decisions to love and serve God (in and through people necessarily) if it is not intimacy with God?

In fact, what looks like love can proceed from multiple unrecognised agendas, some ultimately based on fear of one kind or other and often accompanied with a degree of anger, others based on desire or longing and often accompanied by a painful degree of self-uncertainty. None of them are experienced as life-giving for either the servant or the served.

Discovering what those other agendas are can be helpful, but needs to be accompanied by a developing intimacy with God. It is not enough to cut loose from inadequate or destructive energy sources. I would simply do nothing. To love in practice I need the energy derived from intimacy. Intimacy is what gives life to the lover and the beloved.

What is Intimacy?

In a work entitled "*The Book of Privy Counselling*" the unknown author of the better known work "*The Cloud of Unknowing*" describes prayer so:

*"All that I am, just as I am,
offered to
all that [God] is, just as [God] is". (Chapter 5)*

The same description would also perfectly describe intimacy:

*"All that I am, just as I am,
offered to
all that you are, just as you are".*

The unknown author is probably speaking from an ontological viewpoint. My description would be its psychological equivalent.

I believe that it involves three movements:

First:

It means that I need to be aware of and recognise myself, particularly how I am feeling and what is going on in myself. Where is my activity coming from? my desires and longings? my fears? my habitual sense of myself to myself? my sense

of myself before the other? This is an exercise of self-knowledge, and allows of deeper and deeper degrees.

It is an exercise situated in the immediate here and now: “just as I am”, which can be a very “slippery” spot. (I wonder if the “slipperiness” may be compounded by unrecognised avoidance and denial, which hide the real me and make the relationship unreal and unriveting.)

Second:

This real “here and now” me I show to you, as honestly and completely as I can. It involves a decision to “level” with you about my sense of myself and my sense of you, irrespective of how I would like to be and be seen.

Intimacy is not necessarily the airing of wanted feelings, of “positive” feelings. It is the airing of the real feelings, whatever they are.

I “offer” myself to you. This is a gift. I do not reveal myself in order to manipulate you and in some way hope to control your response. I do not reveal myself because I need your acceptance and approval. I do not seek approval.

I can offer myself because I trust you. I hope, not for approval, but for love. But I shall offer myself, even if you do not love. My gift of myself is unconditional.

This is part of the dialogue.

Third:

I allow you to be yourself, and I try to hear and sense the deepest you.

I allow myself to be surprised, to change my sense of you as necessary.

I recognise that my perception of you depends as much on your revelation of yourself as on my own capacity to receive and interpret that revelation. I cannot perceive you adequately, but am open to grow and to be changed by your love.

The Pursuit of Intimacy

My comments on intimacy above reflect more my experience of God than of another friend, but I think that the comments apply equally to both.

In the pursuit of intimacy with God, I think that it is important first to relate to Jesus, the human incarnation of the Mystery. The effort to relate directly to the Mystery will be affected by my own experience and understanding of “father”, etc., and may be more an exercise in projection than in listening and dialogue.

For me to find “me” in order to offer “me” to God, I think I may first need to relate to Jesus, who is closer to my experience. The dialectic of my relationship with Jesus may heal the energies that not only hide “me” from him but even from myself.

I believe that the unknown author of the *Book of Privy Counselling* was speaking of a simpler experience than what I am talking about. I suspect that he sees it sufficient to offer the “unexplored” me to God. I think that in my own case the endemic avoidances

and denials at work in me mean that what I attempt to bring is an unreal me, with the consequence that the “dialogue” is anything but riveting.

In getting close to Jesus, the Gospels, for all their inadequacy, are our best point to begin the contact. Getting in touch with the real him will proceed apace with my getting in touch with the real me, and will at any stage be incomplete. Will I ever mature?

I would expect that genuine friendship and deep intimacy with another three-dimensional, flesh and blood, person would assist the getting in touch with the real me, and so assist my capacity to meet the real Jesus.

As the growth and healing take place, and the real me emerges, perhaps the more simple presence to God may become more real and life-giving.

What is solitude?

I would like to see solitude as the context in which real intimacy occurs. So it is not really aloneness, though it probably means the absence of other persons other than the one with whom I am in dialogue, whether that be God or another friend.

I see such solitude as crucially important.

The Need for Solitude

I need :

- freedom from distractions
- a sense of time that will not be interrupted
- space to feel whatever is surfacing in me and to allow its expression

I also believe that the effect of solitude is cumulative: it becomes more powerful the longer and deeper it is.

The Pursuit of Solitude

Introverts (like me) find solitude easy and the context from which we draw energy. We don't easily draw energy from the surface of people or of ourselves but need a deeper contact. We pay the price in that we find it more difficult to initiate contact with others, and so to serve them easily. I suspect that extroverts find solitude more difficult. Contact with others and service come more easily. Yet I would suspect that the communication of life involves both contact and solitude. Both introverts and extroverts need the combination.

My lifestyle easily assists the pursuit of solitude. Busyness is the enemy. Yet busyness reduces ultimately to the question of priorities. Setting and sticking to priorities is often a matter of personal freedom and the conquest of psychological dependency. It obviously involves discipline - in choosing what to do and what not to do. But there is always time to do what God wants. If I have run out of time, I am obviously pursuing my own agendas, not God's. Time is not enemy. Time is friend.

Finding solitude in the midst of family life is beyond my experience. Perhaps it is not found: it has to be constructed!