

PRACTICAL SPIRITUALITY FOR COMMUNITY

Spirituality of Enthusiasm & Pseudo-Community

2 Timothy 4:9-22

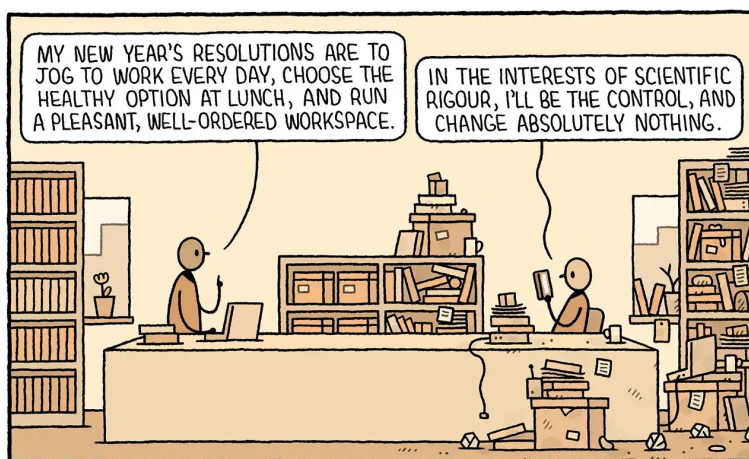
Do your best to come to me soon, Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry. I have sent Tychicus to Ephesus. '3when you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds. You also must beware of him, for he strongly opposed our message.

At my first defence no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! 17But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained in Corinth; Trophimus I left ill in Miletus. Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers and sisters.

The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Cartoon: New Year's Resolutions (Jan 2025 New Scientist)



TOM GAULD for NEW SCIENTIST

Biographical exegesis

- Who are the Christian Demases in your life?
- Who are the Christian Lukes in your life?
- Who are the Christian Marks in your life?

- Who are the Christian Priscillas in your life?
...and so forth

Substitute the names for church groups and communities of faith

- Who are the Christian Demas communities in your life?
- Who are the Christian Luke communities in your life?
- Who are the Christian Mark communities in your life?
- who are the Christian Priscilla communities in your life?
...and so forth

This series aims to draw these features out under a four headings or stages of Christian development - though it is not just a Christian schema

1. Spirituality of Enthusiasm & Pseudo-Community
2. Spirituality of the Roster & Chaos
3. Spirituality of Disillusionment & Emptiness
4. Spirituality of Mysticism & Community

Spirituality of Enthusiasm

Can you remember your religious honeymoon?

- What brought it on?
- What was it made you so happy to be propelled by it?
- How did it change your life?
- What role did the community of origin play?
- How did the community of origin change your life?

How much euphoric fervour was part of your experience>

- How much earnest reading of the scriptures?
- How much moral purity?
- How much rock'n' troll religion?
- How much speaking in tongues?

The first stage of religious life is one of fervour and discovery.

It is very much about the spirituality of attraction – beauty

It is living in the simple afterglow that God loves you - you matter whatever!

Pseudo-Community:

First stage of community life is joy of new discovery and willingness to engage without fear or trepidation. This pseudo-community is where we try to be nice to each other and subjugate our own urges and ego in order to build community. In this community building conflict is thought of as unnecessary or actively avoided.

Quote: High Mountains Deep Valleys (William Clemmons p.86)

*Community is that place where we enter into the presence of each other and the Lord who called us there, as fully and totally as we do in the engagements with ourselves and God. It is a place that calls me to abandon myself to you, for in so doing I discover myself. It is a place where I am available to you as I have learned to be with God and, because of my availability with you, I learn to be available to God. It is a place where I am totally present to you, aware of you and listening to you with the totality of my being. It is a coming together because Christ has called to be committed to him and to each other through his gift of *koivovio*.*

– Community before we learn to protect ourselves from trust that leads to hurt

Reflection on the Spirituality of Enthusiasm & Pseudo-Community

It is too easy to despise our unbridled enthusiasm as we gain the wisdom of years. Of course some of us find a second wind of enthusiasm that is not so much lost in fervour but a confident superiority in one's insight to transcend fervour. Sometimes that comes with going to theological college - sometimes that comes with new wisdom like progressive theology challenges. In doing so we are in danger of losing our passion for God and each other replacing it with a smug knowing look. It is to be left standing with a group of cynics - looking down at naive faith – as challenging as it is praying for car parks is still faith.

Perhaps pseudo-community is overly pejorative - after all most gatherings have an element of pseudo-community including church.

- do we know who attracted us this week
- do we know who we treated badly this week
- do we know who hurt us this week
- do we know who was frivolous with their money this week
- do we know who we relied on this week to get through
- do we know who had sex this week or a colonoscopy

Nor would we probably want to know

In a post-village urban world we live in a society where pseudo-community is about as far as it goes.

We only visit people's worlds - we are losing the sociological ability to be stuck with people in community or even invite people to share our world. It is pseudo-community with little of the pleasures of any other dynamic. It is pseudo-community with little chance of progressing through the stages of community.

Social media gives the impression of shared life but maybe I am stuck in village mode but feels very much like pseudo-community.

Of course villages with their face saving mechanisms are not immune to pseudo- community. In this context church is often found wanting because it aspires to more. It is easy to feel that the church has used and abused us - in doing so we are in danger of losing the baby with the baptismal water.

We condemn life in the church because it only lives at the level at the spirituality of enthusiasm and pseudo-community. Yet when we feel the bruises of encounter we are prone to cry disillusionment.

Conclusion

Illustration: *Things you get for free* by **Michael McGirr** @p. 165-165) ex-Jesuit

Mum and I are both Catholics up to our necks. But in different ways. We are divided by a common creed. I have never been one of those people whose approach to God has been 'prove it to me'; I tend to say 'show me more'. My faith depends on life becoming more dense, chaotic, inexplicable. It smoulders... Mum's crackles. Her faith is more exultant. It leaps over detail in its eagerness to get to safe harbour of 'trust God' or 'let God' or 'let God work it out'. In a way, this faith serves Mum well because it cheats on the hurt which could easily have undermined the faith of a more self-centred person. Mum's faith explodes at some powerful one-line powder keg about God working it out. Mine enjoys the journey. Mum's faith draws picture. Mine tells stories.

Or as one of friends puts it

1. Forming
2. Storming
3. Reforming

There is a real hubris in growing beyond a spirituality of enthusiasm and pseudo-community.

1. How do we nurture the reckless life fuelled by beauty that stems from a spirituality of enthusiasm and pseudo-community?
2. Is the innocence of seeing beauty and overlooking the less than savoury only available to the young?
3. To what extent do we need to grow out of this state to progress?