

A PERSONAL NOTE OF INTRODUCTION TO THE CHRISTIAN READERS OF THIS WEBSITE

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As an 82 year old priest, I would like to share some reflections and personal discoveries which have lead me into an entirely new perspective on the Christian message and experience.

For centuries, Christians like myself have read or heard St. Paul's words, "I pray that your inward eyes may be illumined ...," (Eph 1:18-19) and had no way to understand what he was actually talking about. Religious leaders have had little if any idea how to help people discover the "hidden self" to which Paul refers. Nor have they known how to help that self "grow strong, so that Christ "... (could) live in (their) hearts." Religious leaders and spiritual guides have talked about this, but known very little, if anything, about how actually to facilitate such a dramatic transformation within the human body.

In recent years, I have reflected on my experience as a Christian while following the approach of Dr. Eugene Gendlin's Focusing experience as the foundation for my own prayer "in Christ." At first, I gradually came to realize that the deliberate and disciplined habit of noticing and nurturing my important feelings had replaced my prior habit of not paying any attention to them. But something far more profound was occurring beyond the simple acquisition of this new habit.

I began to realize, as I read St. Paul's letters describing his inner transformation and experience of Christ, that I was now beginning to know within my own body what he was actually writing about! This was much more than simply learning new information in my mind. Paul finally began *to make sense* to me for the very first time!

My body's developed habit of regularly noticing and caring for the most real feeling of the moment had simultaneously become my "inward eyes that knew "... the hope to which God calls me." The new habit that had been born in my body's consciousness had opened not only a fresh quality of presence, an inside companioning of my important feelings that felt most real to me, but also something even more significant!

Not only did the inner world of my important feelings no longer feel uncared for. In addition, the discernible inner movement associated with this new quality of presence, best expressed in what Gendlin describes as the “felt-shifts” that can accompany such experience, had become for me the bodily-felt experience of grace, being a gifted, living integral cell within the Body of the Whole Christ. “I live, now no longer I, but Christ lives in me.” (Gal. 2:20)

The surprise of what I had found for myself was a missing key that opened the meaning of Christ in my life. It was a meaning hidden deep within the unique unfolding of my own inner personal story and call in life as this was held, not within my mind thinking and analyzing, but within my body’s felt-sense for being part of Something Greater than myself—St. John’s:

God is love (*agápe*). A person who dwells in Love is dwelling in God and God in that person.” (1 Jn 4-16)

Whenever I held my feelings in a loving way, especially the more difficult ones, I invariably found over and over again that I was surprised by grace! I also realized, sadly, that it was all too easy to lose touch with this deeper body sense because in our culture there has been little if any emphasis placed on our body’s awareness within the activities, education, and belief systems of religion.

Within the more dominative structures and emphases of churches, authority and correct interpretations tend to predominate. In this climate, it is so easy to lose sight of what our body knows. However, as one slowly grows beyond this more outside spirituality, a gradual change in personal self-identity that can be physically felt in the body becomes possible. Something can take place inside us that might be described as opening a Larger Life-Giving Presence from within our own body’s inner experience.

Like every other human being, my life is loaded with feelings—feelings from my past, feelings about the everyday relationships I have with people and my environment, even feelings about my future. But by developing the habit of regularly noticing and nurturing what is the most significant feeling right now—at least on awakening and before going to bed, I had stumbled upon a bridge of awareness, slowly being built and resonating with what St. Paul had written about his growing inner experience of being “in Christ.” I like to use the phrase, “What in my body right now most needs my loving

presence?”

Like Paul, I have never met the historical person, Jesus of Nazareth. Yet, Paul’s letters revealed to me a very personal self-revelation of his own inner journey and struggle to find Christ, just like the one I was going through! I was now able to read his letters through the lens of my own body’s experience!

Paul wasn’t merely describing outside events. The inner journey he struggled to find words for was somehow far different from what one might expect! He was not merely discovering Christ as someone outside himself. For him, Christ appeared inside his own person, within his own body and his unfolding inner story!

Unlocking this door of realization helped me to realize that the same path that Paul had trod could also be walked by other people who were gifted with their own call to live in God, and who were willing to live in their own body and care for their feelings with love (*agápe*).

Paul, knew, as did St. John, that “God IS *agápe* (love).” He believed that to bring a quality of loving presence into his relationship with his own body, together with all its weaknesses, limitations, and his suffering under other people’s “contempt” (for him), (their) persecution (of him), the hardship (of his life), and (its) frustration, (2 Cor 12:11-12)—was to live within and love his own body as a living, “groaning” cell within the not yet perfect Body of the Whole Christ on this earth. For Paul, this became a strong foundation that then made it possible to extend that same loving relationship out into the community. He prayed that all Christians might grow in this direction.

Throughout this website and in our new workbook, ***Rediscovering the Lost Body-Connection Within Christian Spirituality***, the prayers and Scripture quotations (mostly from St. Paul) will provide a more basic support and structure within a prayerful setting as you, too, can begin to develop the habit of noticing and nurturing your important feelings as a doorway into your body’s potential to experience the gift of knowing yourself, “in Christ.”

This habit will help to develop in you an experiential foundation to become more bodily alive “in Christ,” so you may grasp from inside your own body what Paul prayed for. I

believe this was what he meant Christian spirituality to be about right from the very beginning. It is the truly astounding, evolutionary, radically humanizing presence of God within our very bodies especially, as you will find, within those very negative feelings we so often run from and avoid. The goal of both the website and our workbook is to help you grow into a more embodied sense for being “in Christ.”

Given the potential of such a down-to-earth Pauline spirituality, one can only imagine what this might mean for the psychological health of children growing up in an environment where feelings can be such a problem. What would it contribute to their self-esteem, their creativity, their inner freedom and peace—just knowing from early childhood how to process their tears and fears. The social and environmental impact of this in itself would be enormous.

From such a community-building and peacemaking perspective, this website and our workbook are only just the beginning. They represent a first attempt to bring together vital pieces from several different sources in psychology and the Christian spiritual tradition, as we now know and can unveil them to the widest possible Christian audience.

Throughout the website and workbook, I will share some of the prayers of Paul as I have adapted them for my own personal and pastoral use. I hope that you, too, may feel the connection between how I believe Paul might pray with you today as you, too, struggle to grow into the habit of companioning your own feelings in Christ’s agápe, allowing God’s grace to bless you with an open and available body through the power of His Spirit.

May your growth in what I call a “Christian BioSpirituality,” help you to treasure ALL your important feelings as precious friends and companions on your journey, as you grow more deeply each day into your own body, “in Christ.”

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“We are God’s work of art, created in Christ Jesus for the good works which God has already designated to make up our way of life.” (Eph. 2:10)

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