

Ecology of Soul: A Rationale for Living with a Rule of Life

The challenge

Modern society makes it very difficult to experience anything but the surface of life. It is easy to lose touch with who we are at the heart of our being. Modern life is not only secularized, it has become compartmentalized. We tend to live in one sector of life at a time. Competence and results often overshadow our passion for living. The noise, activities, and demands of modern life, even when they are worthwhile, can stifle the solitude and silence we need to listen to God and experience the dimension of life that lies deep within us. How can our lives become congruent with what God desires for human life? (This is what Jesus called “the reign of God.”) What will help us manifest God’s presence and compassionate power in the world?

Torah

Jesus, as a devout First-Century Jew, lived according to the Torah. Yes, he interpreted it differently than some of the Scribes and Pharisees, but he never intended to replace it. For all Jews, the Torah is a path that guides each person in their life with God. The Torah is not Law, it is “teaching.” It is a way to focus on what God desires for human life and to discover the sacredness and integrity of our lives. Torah shows us what living in the realm of God looks like.

A Rule of Life

Torah is a daily reminder of who we are and challenges us to live in a way that is congruent with that vision. A rule of life helps us align our daily living with the Torah. It enables a person to orient her or his life to the manifestation of the realm or reign of God. For Christians, a rule of life is a path that helps us make Christ tangible through the way we live.

Single-minded attention and devotion to God

There is a myriad of voices and activities competing for our attention every hour of every day. Modern technology is a great gift, but the growing pressure to be constantly available and connected to other persons and tasks can devour our time and attention. It is possible to live on the surface of life in such a way that we lose touch with the deep-structure of life. A rule of life will help us be good stewards of our life with God.

Living in the fullness of human being

We live in an age of information and constant stimulation. We are prompted by a materialistic culture to focus on things that bring enjoyment, leading to “happiness.” But information, entertainment, and mental activity hide the depth of what it means to be a human being. Our minds can kidnap our creativity. The desire for “progress”, even in

spiritual formation, can place the rest of our life in solitary confinement. It will disappear as if it never existed. Yet, we will sense a longing for what our soul knows is real. Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life, and have life in abundance."

Balanced living

The development of "balanced living" refers to a lifestyle in which there is harmony between all dimensions of a person's life: body, mind, and spirit. Contemporary lifestyles tend to be seriously out-of-balance. This causes a lack of integration and congruity between the physical, social, and psychological dynamics of human life and an almost total neglect of the spiritual dimensions of life. The development of balanced living examines all these relationships and supports a restoration of congruency. Spiritual transformation refers to transformation of the *whole* person and the ministries of every parish should support this process. This brings better health to both individuals and to the systems they influence within the church, family, society, and nature.

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The example of Jesus:

The four gospels reveal a three-fold pattern in Jesus' life which was the source of his life with God: quiet listening, faithful discernment, and compassionate response. Jesus always found time to listen to God, the world around him and his inner self. This listening heart was the source of the guidance and will which, along with direct experience of God's love, led and sometimes drove him into compassionate involvement in the lives of others. All this took place in the context and in fulfillment of his own religious community. Jesus' life of prayer opened him to the vitality of God's energy and vision. He became what he sought. He loved what he saw. He transformed what he touched. He lived what he spoke.

Monastic asceticism (a single-minded discipline for our life with God and other people.):

The Greek word *askeo* means "to take care of something." An *ascetic* person is one who cares for something. *Ascesis* is a pattern or discipline of caring for something we value deeply. Throughout our Christian tradition the "ascetic life" (in a variety of forms) has been valued as a discipline that guides our life with God and reveals God's desires for us and the world. Asceticism is not only for monks; it is an essential part of each Christian's life. It is the way we care for our whole being, that wonderful gift of God. It is caring for and being a steward of: thoughts, words, body, mind and spirit, actions, neighbor, and the earth.

"When you come to see Jesus more and more as the compassionate God, you will begin increasingly to see your own life as one in which you yourself want to express that divine compassion. What can happen then is that you feel a deep longing grow within you to make your own life a life for others." (Henri Nouwen: *Letters to Mark About Jesus*)