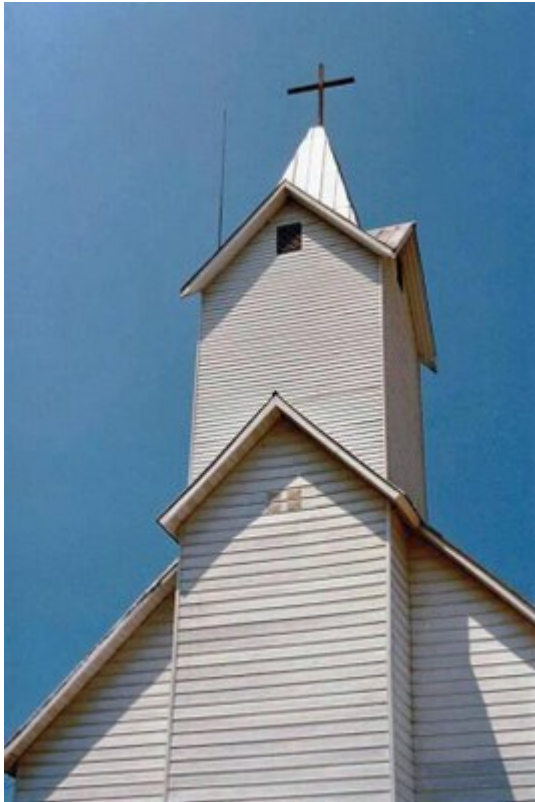


SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS

by Dr. Simone Brosig



There are many ways to live out a Catholic spirituality. Despite the richness of spirituality in the Catholic tradition, we often hear Catholics say that they are spiritual but not religious. Many people do not want to be hemmed in by the structure of organised religion but then find themselves continually seeking amidst the empty glamour of New Age spirituality. Some core principles of stewardship begin to explain why New Age spirituality fails to satisfy.

Dependence

Our culture emphasises independence and individuality. Self-sufficiency is something we consider a virtue, dependence of any sort we see as a weakness or a vice. Stewardship explains that in the spiritual life, we are ultimately dependent upon God, who is the source of everything we have and are. Acknowledging dependence, receiving gifts, and accepting help can be very difficult because all three place us in relationship with another. Once we enter into relationship, we are no longer completely in control. We will be changed in some way because of the relationship. To place independence above all else, is misleading. We think it makes us stronger. We think it helps us to be free. We think we can transform ourselves into happier healthier beings. In reality, we need God and others to enact self-transformation.

Interdependence

It has been said that one cannot be a Christian alone, yet, many try and fail to recognise

the irony in doing so. Central to Christianity is God's revelation through Jesus. It is by our relationship with Jesus that Christians are able to participate in the divine life of God. God also reveals himself through Scripture, the words of which are the testimony of a whole community of believers. It may be easier to be in relationship with the authors who wrote the Scriptures long ago than with the sisters and brothers in our community today, however, God continues to reveal himself to us through the experience of the sacraments, through our service to the poor, the sick, and the suffering, and also in the faces of one another—the realities of one another. By receiving the sacraments and entering into relationship with others, we accept certain responsibilities.

Responsibility

Consider for a moment the difference between hosting a dinner party and attending a dinner party, between a place you visit and a place you belong. Home for a child should be a place of love, acceptance, protection, and trust. But most children, as you know, can't wait to be old enough to leave home and get away from the rules, expectations, obligations, and chores! Yet, these are the very things that make the home more than a house. Similarly, people truly become part of a parish community when they have a job to do, for it gives them a stake in the community. Spirituality without religion, without community, is attractive because it makes no moral demands on people. But this is also why it fails to satisfy. I find cake attractive but if I only eat cake I will be hungry soon after. Then I might eat more and more cake to find satisfaction but no matter how much I consume, it simply does not contain the nutrients my body requires and truly craves. Our spiritual body requires more than cake. As Catholics we nourish our spirit with the food of the eucharist when we come together in worship. It is precisely that communal dimension inherent in our religion—community with Jesus and the saints, with the Scriptures, in devotional practices, spiritual reading, works of charity, family relationships, friendships, and good citizenship—that gives depth and meaning to our spirituality.

Being a steward of our spirituality involves cultivating relationships that make us dependent on God and interdependent with one another. These relationships entail many responsibilities but responsibilities that should give us life and freedom in providing us with a spiritual home.