

Discipleship and the Lifelong Process of Conversion

Notes on a Presentation by Tom Zanzig

Common misconceptions of the spiritual life and their consequences

- Spiritual life too linear and “programmed”
- Misleading and limited images of God
- Undeserved guilt and low self-esteem
- Leave it to the “pros”—priests and nuns
- Spiritual minimalism: “just get to heaven”
- Give up on the spiritual journey altogether

A cyclic model of conversion and spiritual growth [[Click here for Cyclic Model](#)]

- A process of hunger-search-awakening-response that recurs from conception to death and on multiple levels of life
- *Hunger* (yearning, the heart’s desire, the “hole in the soul”) drives the process of growth; without it we would become apathetic, stagnant; hungers change (i.e. are converted) as we grow; addictions are artificial attempts to block the hunger
- *Search* is an attempt to satisfy the hunger; can be positive and life-giving or negative and death-dealing (“looking for love in all the wrong places”); but as long as we are searching, grace can work
- *Awakenings* can occur in many ways—not just intellectual; can be intense (mystical) or very intuitive and unremarkable; we “see and hear” what we couldn’t see and hear before; awakenings are an invitation to change and, therefore, can be threatening, scary,
- *Response* will vary, too, according to our capacities, readiness, openness to grace, etc.; need not be full “surrender”; regardless of the depth and authenticity of our response, we go back into the hunger, though it will have changed—often more intense, deeper, demanding more. That deepening hunger, if we embrace it, will lead us into the very heart of God.
- This cyclic process is a *universal human experience*; religion is the attempt by people and cultures to express, participate in, mark and celebrate—and, sometimes, attempt to control (e.g. through magic, fundamentalism)—the process.

What difference does Jesus make?

- For believers, Jesus is both the Model and the Goal of the lifelong process of conversion
- In following Jesus, Christians discover their own deepest identity
- The Way of discipleship is the path to fullness of life
- The cyclic process of conversion *is* the Paschal Mystery