

Companions on the Journey

October 6, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,

Recently I read a Book review: [Here All Along: Finding Meaning, Spirituality and Deeper Connection to Life—in Judaism \(After Finally Choosing To Look There\)](#). Authored by Sarah Hurwitz, a Jewish woman in her late thirties who had pretty much dismissed her early upbringing in the Jewish Religion but twenty-five years later made a breakthrough and rediscovered, in that very religion, something she dismissed as not there when she was a young adult. The Review was entitled: “Religion for Adults Means Embracing Complexity: If you think you’ve outgrown your childhood faith, you might just need to discover the real depths of its teachings. “

What struck me was that so much of what she spoke as taking place in her as a young Jewish woman I found eerily similar to words spoken to me by young Catholics who had also jettisoned their faith, sizing it up as bankrupt and devoid of adult meaning. Ms. Hurwitz makes the point that when you are young you don’t have the requisite intellectual acuity or life experience adequately to assess your faith. AND, those teaching the faith can only present it in terms that the young person is able to digest or risk not being understood at all.

It isn’t until, as an adult, that a person begins to grapple with the real questions of life that a particular faith begins to offer insight and present viable meaning streams. She says: “Mature forms of religion don’t traffic in simplistic or implausible answers but push us to ask the right questions. Not just “what does it mean to be happy or successful?” But “what does it mean to lead a truly ethical life? To be part of a community? To serve something greater than one’s self?”

To find this kind of religion, we need to seek out ...communities that embrace wise, loving versions of our faith. We need to find clergy whose spiritual depth is matched by intellectual depth; who understand that faith at its best is a form of protest against the self-absorption, materialism, triviality and cruelty of modern life; and who are comfortable uttering the phrase “I don’t know.”

In short, when it comes to religion, many of us still need to grow up, and that means doing the seeking, learning and grappling required to make these traditions our own.

You don’t have to be Jewish to think these thoughts and to speak like this. But it occurs to me that what has been happening in the hearts of many young Catholics has more to do with the culture than the faith. I have to do some more thinking about this but I thoroughly believe that the powerful pull of our high tech culture is very difficult to resist no matter which spiritual tradition is being presented. I think we need to find better ways to address the mindset of our young people that has them so easily accepting what the culture says—which is so often self-serving to the advertisers in the culture—versus the religion which calls us to a selflessness and a placing ourselves at the service of others. A hard sell at any time.

In the Peace of Christ,

Msgr. McHenry