



Seeking Genuine Contact with Spirit

I'm sitting here, drinking my coral calcium water. I'm trying to drink 1.5 quarts of this water a day. It is almost noon and I have just finished off the 1.5 quarts of water that I prepared two days ago. I'm hoping I do better today. This happens sometimes. I don't do everything I want to do or say I'm committed to doing. At this point I could begin to spiral into the whole guilt and shame scenario. Why can't I ever do this, I'm such a failure and on and on. No doubt, there are childhood events that come into play here. And don't forget the affect parents have on us. And then of course there is our understanding of our Spirit.

One day as I was reflecting upon the filters that I look through when I view the world, I was surprised that there was a very specific filter that I used when I looked at Spirit work in the world and in my life. It was a filter that was connected to this sense of not being good enough. Where did it come from I wondered. After all, I am well educated, psychologically minded, have good self esteem...what is this negative filter that I have when it comes to viewing things from the Spiritual side of life?

Then I remembered the written exam from graduate school. I was required to reflect on a theological topic. Of the three presented, I was to choose one and write for the next three hours. Of the three, one I knew nothing about. The second one I was sure I didn't know enough to write for three hours. The third one however, I felt I could write about for three days. The only problem was that I really didn't believe in that topic. But, knowing I had to pass this exam, I sat about to write everything I knew on the topic of Original Sin.

Original Sin is a theological concept that was put forward by St. Augustine, one of the early church fathers. It is the notion that as human beings, we come into the world sinful and unclean and in need of redemption from our sinful ways. This never made much sense to me especially as it concerned my arrival into the world. How could I be sinful and unclean. I just got here and not only that, although I couldn't prove it, I had this sense that I had come here from God. How was it I wondered could I have come straight from the presence of God, be born on to this planet and be viewed as sinful and in need of cleansing and redemption.

Some would say this notion of original sin permeates not only our personal lives but also societies and organization within our world. We see this notion when we work with organization in the way they present themselves to the world and the way they treat their employees. Organizations who choose as their main message: choose us and our services because they will make you a better person, are playing into this concept of original sin. In other words, You aren't a worthy person, you will never be good enough unless you use our products or our services, there is nothing of value within yourself.

These companies and organizations also treat their employees from the same point of view. This is seen in the philosophy of companies that base employee worth on the number of products, goods and or services that they can sell or make. The more you produce, the better person you are.

This approach as we know has about run its course. People are beginning to realize that there is something more to life within the organization than numbers. Employees know that they are of value despite the fact that they fell short of their production goal. But employers are often quick to make their evaluations on numbers. And employers have tried to motivate their employees



with bigger paychecks based on better production. Again, your value is based on a quantity of a product and you will be valued more if you can produce more. This too is a variation of original sin, value of the individual based on some outside quality or product.

For those of us involved in the work of Genuine Contact, we know that this form of evaluation is not complete and what really matters is Spirit. So, how do we who work with organizations and put forth a new theology of people that takes into account their Spirit?

At the same time St. Augustine was spreading his idea of original sin, one of his contemporaries was taking a whole different approach. His name was Pelagius. Whereas Augustine believed that to look at a newborn child was to look at a sinful being in need of redemption, Pelagius believed that to look into the face of a newborn child was in fact, to look into the face of God. Pelagius believed that creation and the creatures, including humans, were created by God and therefore contained the God within them.

Pelagius believed that God was in all things. And that basically people were good not sinful. And that within each of us was Spirit that was seeking to be authentically and genuinely expressed. For Pelagius even those who appear to be truly evil are thought to be those who have lost sight of their Godself. To me, this is the theology of the Genuine Contact Program. What we seek to do, is to help people make genuine contact with themselves. And I believe that when they do that they will find Spirit. And it is a kind and loving spirit that seeks not to judge but to nurture. It is a spirit that seeks to be in dialog with us and to be life nurturing. It listens to us and speaks to us (some call it prayer). This Spirit that Pelagius affirms is in us is one that encourages us to be free not be bound by rules. It encourages us to experiment and be creative. It calls us to speak up for what is true. It causes us to live in community to live in "life nurturing" ways.

For those of us who seek to stay in genuine contact with ourselves and share that with those organizations we work with, we know that this is an ongoing process. Perhaps like me, everyday you try to drink your water, eat what is healthy, do your five Tibetans, take a walk, ponder the night sky and whatever else it takes to connect to that Spirit within. As we connect to that Spirit within in us, a light shines from us. It is not a blinding light like the sun. But it is a light that pushes back the darkness within our lives and within the lives of others. This is one of the basic concepts of holding space. When we hold space we are shining our light so that others may go deep within themselves, find their light and together we find our way. When we connect to our Spirit, the God within us, we become the fullest of what God has called us to be and we experience healing. And in our healing we are able to give up those things that cloud our vision.

St. Augustine gave many gifts to the church through his teaching. So, I am not judging St. Augustine here. Rather I'm focusing on the process. For me, that means giving up the old Augustinian notion of Original sin and all its relatives who belong to the "life depleting" household. We know them as conformity, apathy, deception, judging and even victim behavior just to name a few. Rather I am choosing to focus on Pelagius and his cousins from the "life nurturing" household who we know as creativity, truth, autonomy, and community also, to name a few.

As we seek to share the message of Genuine Contact it has been helpful to me to know that I follow in a long line of thinkers and teachers. And it has been helpful for me to learn about Pelagius. Only recently has the Church begin to be somewhat tolerant of Pelagius. Although tried as a heretic on more than one occasion, it was not until The Synod of Whitby in 644, that the church officially rejected the teachings of Pelagius. Not because of his teaching about God's



presence in all creation although the church never really got it's head around that either. Rather it was a choice between apostolic succession John, the one beloved by Christ or Peter, the rock. Rocks are not very flexible and seem steadfast as was the thought of the church during this time. Love perhaps, seemed to weak and feeble. Perhaps that's why they chose Peter the rock as the form of succession. But as we know, the rocks to can speak and show us new ways of being. The tragedy of Whitby was that there had to be a choice of only one.

For me, Spirit really is all that matters. May each of us continue to seek the spirit within ourselves so that the light may shine on all, and all may be healed of depleted lives and find their way to a life nurturing life.

This article was first published in the Wellness (R)Evolution for Organizations, June 20, 2005. Michael Vinson combines over 25 years of experience in public health, education, organizational development and mentoring to aid organizations, helping them achieve and maintain health and balance. He bases his work in using the Genuine Contact™ program, specializing in using Whole Person Process Facilitation and Open Space Technology. These processes help organizations look beyond the "nuts and bolts" of who they are, examine their stories, and come to terms with the spirit of their organization. Michael takes a holistic approach when working with organizations as they seek to fully live their purpose. Visit www.healthyspace.net to learn more.