

## ZEALOTS AND PHARISEES

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Core Principle: The best criticism of the bad is the practice of the better. Oppositional energy only creates more of the same. (emphasis)

There seems to be two common avoidances of conversion or transformation, two typical diversionary tactics that we humans use to avoid holding the pain: fight or flight.

The way of *fight* is what I'll call the way of Simon the zealot—and often the way of the cultural liberal. These folks want to change, fix, control, and reform other people and events. The zealot is always looking for the evil, the political sinner, the unjust one, the oppressor, the bad person over there. The zealot permits himself or herself righteously to attack them, to hate them, even to kill them. And when they do, they think they are “doing a holy duty for God” (John 16:2).

You can take it as a general rule that *when you don't transform your pain you will always transmit it*. Zealots and contemporary liberals often have the right conclusion, but their tactics and motives are often filled with self, power, control and the same righteousness they hate in conservatives. Basically, they want to do something to avoid holding the pain until it transforms them. Because of this too common pattern, I have come to mistrust almost all righteous indignation and moral outrage. In my experience, it is hardly ever from God.

“Resurrected” people prayerfully bear witness against injustice and evil—but also agree compassionately to hold their own complicity in that same evil. It is not over there, it is here. It is our problem, not *theirs*. The Risen Christ, not accidentally, still carries the wounds in his hands and side.

We've all been there at different times—I know I've been there—trying to drive out “the devil” with our own “prince of devils” (Mark 3:22). You're actually energized by having an enemy, someone to hate, because it takes away the inner shame and relieves your inner anxiety.

It gives you, strangely enough, a very false sense of control and superiority, because you've spotted the evil and, thank God, it's over there. As long as *they* are the problem and you can keep your focus on changing them, correcting them, expelling them as the contaminating element, then you can sit in a reasonably comfortable position. But it's a position that the saints called *pax perniciosa*, a dangerous and false peace. It feels like peace, but it's not a true peace. It is the peace of avoidance, denial and projection. The Peace of the Crucified comes from holding the tension; the dangerous peace comes from expelling it elsewhere or denying the pain. Yet, to the untrained, it feels like peace.

It has taken us a long time to realize that we cannot afford to hate because we become a mirror, a disguised image of the same. Once you let the other determine the energy and agenda, you can only react to it, and soon you are the same energy and the same agenda. But *you* can't see it.

This leads us to the second diversionary tactic: the way of *flight*. This is the common path of the “Pharisee,” the uninformed, the falsely innocent and often the conservative type. They deny the pain altogether, they refuse to carry the shadow side of anything in themselves or in their chosen groups. There will be no uncertainty, there will be no ambiguity. There will be no problems. It is a form of narcotic, and sometimes probably necessary to get through the day.

But the flight people are also subject to hypocrisy, projection or just plain illusion: “We are right and you are wrong. ...The world is divided into black and white and I know who the good guys and bad guys are. ...It's all figured out in my head, and fortified with well-fed emotions

and like-minded people.” These attitudes can generate huge energy, identity and perseverance. One sits on a pedestal of purity and false innocence. Who would want to leave, if not for a major humiliation that possibly forces you into the pain? Paul symbolically had to be thrown to the ground and have scales fall from his eyes to admit that he was a self-serving Pharisee.

Denial is an understandable way of coping and surviving. It is often the only way that many people can deal with the complexity of their human situation. Sometimes when you conscientize (to arouse political consciousness) the poor or do social analysis for the happily naïve middle class, you wonder if you are not just creating psychic problems for them. Wouldn't it be better if they did not know? Now they will only be angry and dissatisfied. That is the dangerous path of enlightenment.

The question is now more daring yet. How can I know, work through the anger, and still be a life-giving presence? First **naïveté** is different from second **naïveté**. The first is a kind of virtuous ignorance; the latter is a spirit of informed openness, often gained after disillusionment. In fact, between the two there is all the difference in the world. But, normally, we are so sure that people will not be able to work through true enlightenment that we avoid telling them the whole truth. Or they avoid knowing the whole truth. It is much, much easier *not* to know. Jesus himself understood from the cross: “Father, forgive them, they do not know” (Luke 23:34). They really don't know! But Jesus took the harder path, to know and still forgive, and still understand.

That is the *Third Way*, beyond fight and beyond flight, and yet in a certain sense including both of them. It's fighting in a new way from within, and fleeing from the quick, egocentric response. Only God can hold such an act together within us. The small self is always too small. Only the True Self can live the gospel.

Maybe our greatest disservice has been that we have given the Law and the gospel to the fragile self that is incapable even of understanding it. We ended up condemning people to subterfuge, denial, mental gymnastics and trivialization—*by preaching the Law without also offering people that “identity transplant” that we call the gospel!* The Third Way is impossible except for the True Self, “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). Paul took most of his Letter to the Romans to struggle with this dilemma. Law without gospel actually paralyzes and condemns to failure.