

Richard's
Book

CHOOSING AUTHENTICITY

Religion Is Not Enough

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THE RIGHT OF LEGITIMATE SELF-EXPRESSION

The Source of Our Anger, Rage, Violence, Obsessions, and Addictions

Gs far back as I can remember there has been this powerful sense of being called to something profoundly different. At times that sense of restlessness is so pervasive it seems as if I have built much of my life on a lie, on a series of false assumptions about who I am as a person and what I need to be and do in this life. I have found myself seeking to discover who I am in the deepest part of myself. Yet, maybe even more significant has been a deep sense of calling to become that person in the reality of my active life. In a very real sense, this search does not seem to be just a religious calling. It seems to be a basic human calling. It is the quest for authenticity—the deep desire to live an authentic life. This quest for authenticity is the very essence of the whole religious vocation.

This search has taken me in a thousand different directions. It has led me to explore several different religious traditions. While each of them spoke to this calling in different ways, I have not felt at home in any of them. None of them addressed this deep longing in a satisfactory manner.

I have studied psychology, religion, and spirituality in undergraduate school, graduate school, and through self-study. Again, while my studies were both fascinating and helpful, there was still that same sense of not being at home with any of them. Again, none of my studies really spoke to my deepest longings. I spent sixteen years as a police officer, three years as the administrator of a retreat center, and thirteen years as a fraud investigator and manager for a health insurance company. In the process,

...while this denial of legitimate self expression came partially from family expectations, cultural demands, and religious dogma, most of it came from the turmoil within myself.

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Look for your own. Do not do what someone else could do as well as you. Do not say or write what someone else could say or write as well as you. Care for nothing in yourself but what you feel exists nowhere else and out of yourself create impatiently, or patiently the most irreplaceable of beings.³⁶

Unknown Author

My business is not to remake myself, but make the absolute best of what God has made³⁷.

Robert Browning

³⁶ Anonymous quotation on a plaque given to me by my daughter, Michelle S. Evens.

³⁷ Browning, Robert, Quoted in Stoddard, Alexandra, *Daring To Be Yourself*. (Avon Books, New York, 1990), p. xi

THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY *Rediscovering Our Sacred Inner Being*

I have learned much about who I am, but there has always been this powerful underlying restlessness—this sense of playing a role—this sense of not being authentic—of not being myself in any of these positions.

I have also been plagued with anger. That anger has at times seemed to pervade my life. It has spilled over onto my wife and my children in ways that I cannot begin to describe or even fully understand. For years I never understood where the anger came from, but I did sense that it was somehow connected to this pervasive restlessness and sense of not being at home, of playing a role.



Photograph by Teresa Parr

Then one day I was sitting in a college class and the professor³⁸ made the following statement:

When a person is denied the right of legitimate self-expression, a deep incessant rage develops in them that permeates their entire life.

I remember that statement as if it were yesterday. It all came together. The quest for authenticity and the anger—the two things that seemed to dominate my life were, in reality, two sides of the same thing. I was angry because I knew on a preconscious

³⁸ Father Adrian van Kaam, CSP, the founder of the Institute Of Formative Spirituality at Duquesne University, circa. 1986.

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level that I was not being the person I was called to be. I was, in the most basic sense, "denied the right of legitimate self-expression". As I have reflected on this insight I have come to understand that while this denial of legitimate self-expression came partially from family expectations, cultural demands, and religious dogma, most of it came from the turmoil within myself.

This insight gave my life a very different focus. While I did not know how to figure out what this meant for me, the problem was now defined. I began a quest for authenticity in earnest. I began to focus less on the people, events, and things in my life that frustrate and anger me. I was now asking the right questions. Who I am as a unique spiritual person? How can I become that person in the way I live my life? How can I be authentic in this particular event?



Photograph by Richard Southworth

Questions for Reflection:

Do you sometimes feel restless? Do you sometimes long for your life to be different without quite understanding what that means?

Reflect on your deepest longings. In what ways is your life an authentic expression of your deepest longings? In what ways do those longings call you to live your life differently?

In what ways do you sense that you are “denied the right of legitimate self-expression”? Are you sometimes sad, frustrated, or angry about that?

What external and internal blocks deny you “the right of legitimate self-expression”?



What do you need to do to begin to remove those blocks?