

*In the Spirit, In the Flesh.* Eugene C. Kennedy. New York: Image Books, 1972.

**Introduction**

“... to explore briefly the implications of the Gospels as a *way of life* rather than as a set of dogmatic beliefs of a strictly historical record.”

‘... living our lives in the mystery of Jesus.’

“The life of the Spirit has to show through in our human experience, even when this is broken on the wheel of pain that has revolved slowly throughout all history.”

It is in pain and love that we live the Christian mystery.

“The life of the Gospels cannot be separated from the living and hoping, the loving and longing that mark our efforts to reach each other.”

“Incarnational theology.”

“Healthy people, acutely aware of what constitutes the heart of real living, need to know that their instincts are fundamentally correct: religion has to do with life, not with ceremony or power; it has to do with man’s freedom to be himself, not with controlling his every move.”

“I hope that these reflections will help people who take this life seriously to enter it more deeply and to know, in the heart of their deepest human searches, that they do live, suffer, and find new life in and through Jesus.”

**Chapter ONE: After Our Myths Have Died**

“Man is dealing with his *meaning* at the present time, sorting out the *myths* which have explained life to him through the centuries. He discards those which no longer bear the weight of his experience but he also *searches for a new and sustaining myth* to support him into the future. In this context we see the opportunity of the churches to speak again to man, in the language of myth that has always been so significant in transmitting religious truths, about the most important things in life, the very things men seem hardly able to speak about anymore.”

‘Myth’ is about the *mysteries connected with the commonplace but deeply human activities* that men long to speak both to themselves and to others in our time.

Rollo May sees man’s hopelessness as the cold inner echo of the alienation which he feels because he has lost touch with the human truth-telling power of the myths that have guided him for years.

The Church, through the work of its theologians and Scripture scholars, is learning to speak again the *language of salvation*.

“The Gospel is the guiding myth for which men are searching, the response to man’s painful alienation, the promise that man can make sense of it all, that he can grow and redeem himself.”

The Gospels are the myth that tells of our new life with God, a life in which we are caught up with our fellow men in the mysteries of incarnation, death, and resurrection which encompass all our days.

The Gospels are the new language that says we cannot save ourselves except we be friends with one another, that salvation lies beneath the ordinary faces of believing in, hoping for, and loving each other.

“Mankind cannot have hope unless the values of the life of the Spirit are presented in the context of a *saving way of life* rather than as a rigid and humanly estranging code of conduct or as the product of hopelessly neurotic fancy.”

Men want a reliable *interpretative scheme* that will enable them to take control of their own lives with a sense of their own significance.

The most important things to investigate are the psychological conditions and consequences for man as he lives the life of the Spirit.

## **Chapter TWO: Leaderless Christianity**

“The growth in a richer and deeper faith has shifted the center of gravity of belief in our day from those things outside of us to the internal forum where conscience and choice meet to shape religious response.”

It is a misinterpretation to see this as a challenge to the authority of Church leaders: “to wish to live without minutely detailed rules is not an affront to authority, it is an impulse toward mature Christian living.”

This growth toward Christian self-determination necessarily challenges the style and exercise of authority in religious organizations which are built on a less developed style of faith.

“The renewal of the Catholic Church can be understood as the effort of the world’s oldest institution to modify itself so that it can better express and strengthen an internalized religious faith while, at the same time, it maintains some kind of institutional integrity.”

But, in general, leaders in the Church have been little affected by this renewal.

E.g., one worries about a bishop when the supervision of people rather than the freedom of people is of paramount concern to him.

But: very little depends on bishops in a Church that is truly responsive to the Spirit.

“If we are truly pursuing the Gospel ideals, we must be strong enough to live without the leadership we might otherwise long to have.”

“When religious leaders think that the preaching of the Gospel or the life of the Spirit depends too much on them, then they assume a share of responsibility for the faith which is roughly equivalent to the attitudes of overprotective parents who try to live their children’s lives for them.”

“People who listen to the Spirit and who try to live by what he asks are not trying to get out of something when they feel a certain independence from Church authorities. They are, on the contrary, taking on something that demands self-sacrifice and constantly freely-chosen discipline.”

### **Chapter THREE: The Problem of Being Yourself**

“*Being yourself* implies going more deeply into ourselves, laying hold of the truth of our personality even when it has lain half buried for years, and then committing ourselves to that truth as genuinely possible.”

Features of extrinsic religious faith:

- a. A misperception and mistrust of the human personality.
- b. A willingness to settle for the hypocritical pursuit of an exterior style of so-called perfection.

Authentic religion, intrinsic faith: these invite men to *personal individuation* rather than to superficial perfection of the idealized self.

A number of things are necessary in order to achieve true self-revelation:

1. Face what it means to be a man and put aside any dream that would have us try to be free from the demands of the human condition.
2. Break through the cultural inheritance which makes us look on ourselves as if we were divided.

Accepting our feelings as putting us in contact with the depths of our experience and enabling us to sense the fullness of our personalities.

3. Realize the tension of being both individuals and sharers in some kind of community experience.

We are all social products.

“Our real personalities are revealed in those moments when we can see just how much of ourselves we give to human relationships.”

4. Be determined not to turn away from or be disdainful of any aspects of his human experience.
5. Persons are continually in a (crooked and halting) process that is furthered by opening the self steadily to life’s successive challenges.

“We must be able to look at the complexity of our personalities, affirming what leads us to grow, and putting to death what impedes growth.”

“This steady emptying of ourselves makes room for the action of the Spirit in assisting us to fulfill the promise of our personalities.”

The determination to be ourselves is an essential condition for living in Christ!

### **Chapter FOUR: Do We Believe in Growth?**

'Metanoia' describes the person who turns away from the pursuit of a false self and *toward the achievement of his true personality.*

"A new commitment to the profoundly human pursuit of life and love, to the *breaking out of self* that is the beginning of life in the Spirit."

This change involves a man in a *continuing journey.*

GROWTH: the normal condition through which personalities unfold and the grace of God operates.

"Our beliefs about the way man develop have wide-ranging implications for our own style of religious faith and for the mode of religious life which we allow for others."

The Gospel vision appreciated man as having been *created to grow*, to master himself and his environment, and to transform both through his cooperation with the Spirit – life is seen as the process of dealing with the obstacles of growth.

This model allows for man's failures but sees these, along with his possibilities, as linked to the overall process of growth.

"It summons up a trusting and confident response, a having-faith-in-man, a hoping-for man, that is not blind to man's wounds but understands that true healing comes from the inside."

This is contrary to two common religious models of man (Horney):

1. Man is sinful, and our concern is with checking and restraining him.
2. There is something good and something bad about man, but the 'positive program' rests either on supernatural aids of some sort or upon a strenuous ideal of reason or will (extrinsicist).

"The man who has weathered a lot of life with even a small amount of openness comes to realize that you cannot force persons to grow in a certain manner, and that, if you are wise, you can only help them to find and become themselves."

The Gospels urge us to *affirm man and his life*, to enlarge it, and to open up the horizons to which we can be guided by the Spirit."

"We experience the meaning of life in Christ whenever we have to let our real selves out in meeting and being with others in a serious way."

"The person who is alive to himself and to others and who tries to respond as humanly as possible enters into the mystery of the Christian life."

*Incarnation:* we make ourselves *personally present* to the other.

This involves the dynamic of *death-to-ourselves.*

“We put something to death in us when we shake ourselves loose from our own concerns in order to make room for the other in a truly human way in our lives.”

The cycle of recurring redemptive experience is closed by the reality of resurrection, the new life that comes to others when we have died, even in small ways, to ourselves in order to reach them.

“The Christian life is a lot more challenging than just asking whether we believe in God or not, it asks also *whether we believe in man* and the power of the Spirit to release and fulfill his growth.”

### **Chapter THREE: What Can We Believe In About Ourselves?**

“The Gospels are good news because they answer the question about what we can believe in about ourselves.”

Only the Gospels have underscored the *creative power of love* and located its origin *within man himself* instead of in some magic outside of him. Man-as-he-is cooperates with the Spirit, not to undergo some plastic surgery of the soul, but *to set free the human powers of growth*. Christianity is always aimed at helping man to find what he can believe in about himself.”

“Man is asked to hack himself free from the falsy mythologies which look to what is outside of him to explain his life and destiny” (i.e., demythologization of the gods of fate and nature).

Therapy = process through which the individual’s estrangement from his own truth is healed.

Neurotic ‘myth’ = trying to fit oneself into a pattern of beliefs or convictions that do not match what he is truly like.

The Gospels are about *faith, hope, and love* because these are the experiences that are possible for men who have learned that there is something trustworthy in their own personality.

Basic Gospel truth: *man can move forward* despite the fact that he is not completely perfect.

“Everybody experiences the *pain of growth*, of leaving familiar things behind in order to enter the future, or giving up dependency in order to assume responsibility, of giving up security in order to achieve a new fullness of being. That this very dynamic struggle is ever engaged in is one of the signals that has made many observers of man posit an *internal directional force* to explain the fact that man grows at all.”

“The pursuit of ourselves is a fulfilling of our calling to nothing less than *fullness of life* for ourselves and those whose lives are touched by our own. The passage of life is forward. Man moves to make more out of himself; he does not stand still.”

FAITH = commitment to the inner force in man that is freed by the Spirit to move him in the direction of greater growth.

Faith is an essential condition for a healthy Christian life, the laying open of man to himself and to others which is fundamental to any growth toward human individuality or human community.

E.g., "We see this kind of faith whenever a man and a woman commit themselves to each other in the great, utterly simple mystery of drawing goodness out of each other through a life of growth together."

Faith in the mystery of Christ says that growth will depend on involvement in the life, death, and resurrection rhythm that is the pulse of all life.

"The Gospels say that man can count on himself, that he can reach himself and others through the power of Christ's redeeming life. That power of the Spirit is available to him, not to replace his efforts to life, but to make it possible for him to live fully."

### **Chapter SIX: How Can It All Go Wrong?**

There are many kinds of crippling problems which a person experiences when the conditions for his psychological development are thwarted by certain external or internal factors.

- Organic psychological condition.
- Interpersonal effects on the growth of the person of those closes to him at the crucial states of development.

E.g., *parents* interpret the universe to the young child.

"Parents can, after all, insist that a child accept a symbolic word like 'love' to explain an experience which is very distinct from love.

"In the course of the ordinary individual's life, sincere parents who are honest with themselves and who attempt to be loving and fair with their children do most of the important things well enough to promote growth in their offspring."

But if the growing individual does not develop a sense of basic confidence in others and in himself, then he cannot get himself together for gradual growth forward in life.

"When parents love the child only on the condition that the child respond in exactly the ways they wish, then they have pressured the developing personality away from seeking its own truth toward accepting a highly distorted interpretation."

The Church, through appeals to fear of eternal damnation, shares in responsibility for man's lack of religious development: "Faith never develops when man is not brought to view religion in terms that go beyond his own self-consciousness."

“The manipulation of fear has prevented men from integrating religious experience with the rest of life. This has prevented man from truly sensing the existence and meaning of the religious dimension of his own personality.”

This has fostered an exaggerated dependence on authority.

“How could man go wrong in this most important dimension of his experience? He went wrong because men who would be gods sent wrong, and tried to keep religion drawn on the reduced scale of their own immaturity. Man became alienated from his deepest religious aspirations, but through the power of the Spirit, is now healing himself again.”

### **Chapter SEVEN: Where Do We Experience the Sacred?**