

CELLULITE SAVIOUR? – The importance of real relationships

Relationships, who'd have 'em? When my last serious liaison ended, I was left with 'what if's', 'if only's' and 'I should have's'; and I initiated the split. If human connections are so tough, how on this earth are we supposed to be intimate with God? Language limits us, experience bruises us, and emotions come and go like celebrity handbags. We are told, often in rather severe tones, that God is ever present and everlasting. Frankly, this summons up for me, an image of a stalker you can't shake off; always emailing, ringing and popping up in unwelcome places. My cellulite is a private matter, I don't need another pair of eyes gloating at it in the bathroom; dear Lord, give me some time out!

Those 'what if's', 'if only's' and 'I should have's' have plagued me like overweighted platform shoes throughout my faith journey. They are normally prompted by lists of 'should's' and 'ought's' pumped from some pulpit or another; go on, hammer another shaming nail into my frail human frame – the pain means I must be alive. Doesn't it?

No it doesn't. It means the preacher is a sadist, and I am a sucker for self-flagellating punishment. Flip the other way, and you're led to believe that a relationship with God is like a passionate affair. Intoxicating, illicit and all-consuming until the physical gymnastics gets boring, and your lover's bad breath irritating. A shallow love, all sex and fury signifying nothing. So which is it to be – is God the punitive patrician, or the seductive Lothario?

Neither, of course. Or maybe both and some? Can I pick and mix my divine characteristics? Or am I lumbered with someone else's definitive belief system? I don't want a second hand God – I want my creator to allow me to be; to allow me to swear, curse, weep, wail and gnash my teeth, and to celebrate my joy and elation when the occasion demands. I want to become more of who I am meant to be, individually and as part of a community. My current book of the moment is Jeremy Young's 'Cost of Certainty'. Former priest, now turned family therapist; his analysis, for me, is spot on; 'very often the faithful have been encouraged to sacrifice themselves before they have developed sufficient of their own mature identity to have a self to sacrifice. In many different ways the cross has been used as a justification for the repression of genuine emotional growth and self-confidence in both children and adults'.

He also flags up our great human inconsistency when it comes to desiring a relationship with the Creator; 'there is a paradox in human nature: although we long for a deep and intimate relationship with God, and the full acceptance of ourselves as we are, we are unable, for the most part, to tolerate such an acceptance if it should come our way'.

I am a frail and vulnerable human creature, craving love, but afraid of it. In Moot I have found a community that appears to honour that frailty, rather than criticise me for it. Its flat leadership structure; simple, short and creative services (with refreshments) – acknowledge my need for a cuppa as much as my desire for a deep spiritual encounter. If I want to talk like a bloody idiot, I can. If I want to keep quiet and shut the fxxk up, I'm allowed. What is said appears to be said in love; there is no sales pitch type persuasion demanding that I be one thing or another.

I cannot hope, of course, to define the divine, that would be heretical. It has been a struggle for me most days, to believe that I am 'enough', and that all God desires is for me to seek her/him first, and all other things will be added. That struggle is soothed by my connection to Moot. I am engaged, I feel safe, and belonging doesn't mean I have to expose my cellulite to strangers.

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