

# AU NATUREL

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## SOULFUL UPDATES

Living in the dark and the light--Selah

It's an over-cast day--rain is in the forecast. I don't know why I love the feel of days like this. Perhaps it's because the heavens are pregnant with blessings that are about to be unleashed on the subjects below. Maybe it's because overcast skies are a metaphor for life on the Earth plane--a

mélange of dark and light. Or maybe it's because I love the rain... I remember talking with

...OVERCAST SKIES ARE A METAPHOR FOR LIFE ON THE EARTH PLANE--A MELANGE OF DARK AND LIGHT.

my Dad one day and he told me how much he loved the sound of rain on a tin roof. Having lived in Jamaica, I knew the sound very well. It's a beautiful cadence, hard to describe. It's one of those sounds you have to experience to truly appreciate. I knew exactly what he meant. In fact, I recall the first time I was in my home here in the US and it rained. I was so disappointed. The house was so well insulated, I couldn't hear the sound as I had anticipated. I was accustomed to being much closer to the

elements, able to hear the melody of rain as that of the whisper of a lover's breath on your eardrum. So, I rose and opened the window. Then, I drifted off to sleep.

I am a lover of nature. But strangely enough, I have no desire to go camping. I'm not

that down!

Too much a girly-girl though I'm a tom-boy in many respects.

Contradicti

ons, that's me. I guess if God wanted me living out among the trees and brush, we would have placed me in an African village rather than Raleigh, NC. Or I would have been born at another time and place altogether. Well, since I'm here, I appreciate technology. Heat is the most divine ingenuity!

Have you ever imagined life back in the Wild West? Open prairies, harsh winters. I love to watch Westerns. Not because I love the whole Cowboys and Indians vibe. In fact, as soon as I

## NATURAL HAIR CARE CLASSES

Well, spring is just around the corner and natural hair care classes at Wake Tech resume. It promises to be a joyful semester of learning and sharing. I have nine students with my first gentleman being among the group!! I'm very excited to see how their knowledge and skills manifest.

As an fyi: If you're interested in a future class, please [visit the website](#) to get more details about the program. Also, please know that you need to be registered at least a 4-6 weeks before classes begin to ensure that your uniform, books and kit supplies arrive in time for first day of class. Wake Tech's program is the most affordable option on the market...hands down. So, sign up early. They have only just begun to advertise; so, I imagine that when the word gets out, there will be a recurring waiting list.

see them killing Indians, that's usually my cue to change the channel. I love the Westerns which show the human battle against the elements of Nature--the struggle to survive when every day is a crap shoot. Death and calamity loom ever on the horizon and its sheer grace and hard work that strike the balance. And then, there's always the fascination of outlaws who chose to take life by the horns and live by their own rules. When I hear the stories of Billy the Kid and Jesse James, I'm fascinated because they were the early [American gangsters](#). When a man's first crime is stealing food to feed himself or his family, is he really a criminal at his core? In those days, some outlaws became criminals because their farms and land were stolen by railroad barons and banks. How many families today have lost their homes through no fault of their own? Are we hearing the [cries of despair](#) of our [fellow brethren](#)? Other men in despair (primarily minorities) are never heard--only gunned down innocently. How many criminals has war created through the desensitization of the human soul and psyche to the greatest evil known to man--fratricide? Wyatt Earp (my favorite Western character) is someone who lived on the dark side but eventually gravitated to the light--like [Malcolm X](#) (my favorite human rights leader). I love stories like

this because they ring so true to life. Who can live, stand and remain in the light in a secular world??--a truly blessed soul! There was only ONE. The rest of us aspire. ☺

It is against this backdrop that I present a rather one-dimensional newsletter to you this month. If you view and listen to all the links, it's really rather protracted. But, I believe the links are necessary to make my point. I've tried but I have nothing much to say about hair this month. Rather, my message is about the soul, the heart and the mind. We live in a world that is so full of judgment, yet we were told to "love our neighbor as our self." When I see civil war in Africa, I see people struggling for place and identify. When the kings of Great Britain battled for territory and honor and built castles and warred for Wales and Scotland in the early 1200s and beyond, it was their reality. The wild west of the 1800s was a lawless time not so different from the reality of some African nations today. But we judge Africans harshly because we've been there, done that already. But the whole world wasn't watching as England and America went through their growing pains. Otherwise, the outcome would surely have been very different. Those who know better do better. But, did we know better? Did we do better? I abhor war and don't condone it under any

circumstance. But, that's not to say I would not engage should the time come. I know that I most absolutely would. There's another contradiction. It's the nature of life in a secular realm.

I recall talking with my mother about the Bible as a young person. She said, "It's a strange book really--full of contradictions. I believe it is called the **Holy** Bible because it is the **whole** truth. I believe it has the voice of good and evil therein." Radical idea!!! I thought, "That must surely be a blasphemous concept. I'll file that thought away for later." Then when I started to read [books like Joshua](#), I suddenly better understood why my mother said what she did. I've always had difficulty with that book of the Bible. But, like so many aspects of my life, the unfathomable is making a bit more sense to me of late. In short, I'm inclined to wonder if God has not allowed the whole truth of life--both sides of the proverbial coin so to speak (dark and light), to be placed in one space knowing that the heart of the reader would determine which voice they listen to and which doctrine they would pattern their life after, while fully believing themselves to be following the way. And so, [He judges the tree by the fruit it bears](#). When men in history have quoted [Joshua 10:26](#) while doing "God's work", I'm compelled to wonder further about the mystery

that is God. We war and we argue for righteousness sake, when Jesus allowed Himself to be killed. That is why we all fall short.

***I have no answers, only questions.*** In presenting my next article, know that it is written by the heart of a sinner. There is no

judgment intended. I am merely speaking my own truth. And I am unapologetic in being true to myself...as imperfect as I am.

## POETICALLY SPEAKING...

### An Ode to "Tough Love"

I had an interesting salon experience just prior to Valentine's Day (February 13<sup>th</sup> to be exact) which has given me considerable cause to reflect since its occurrence. I believe the timing was a Divine appointment. In fact, I hesitate to include this story because the relevant party will recognize "self" immediately and may "feel a way" about reading it. But, I share the experience, not to call anyone out. Rather my intention is to pray that there is a lesson for anyone venturing to read past the opening lines of this soliloquy. At the time, our exchange was a love offering. But, the net effect of the delivery was perhaps "tough love." But, I did recognize the love all the same. And I acknowledged it first and foremost. So, please see that love is the backdrop and grounding of this entire frame. I give thanks for the sister who inspired this piece as she had the fortitude to share what "God placed on her heart." The gracious, humble thing for me to do would be to just forget the whole thing. I got through three whole days of doing just that. Then, I picked up my pen... Please don't think there is a

heroine in this story. It's just a story. I empathize with this sister doing what God has placed on her heart and then facing the likes of me. I'm really kind of "out there"; but, I do not believe I am conformed to this world at all. I respect the challenge that I imagine I present to some believers. In fact, if you are to judge purity of heart, I would say hers is more so than my own; because, she put her heart on the line freely and openly. And when I saw the offense coming (as unintended as it was), I pulled a counter-offense rather than to defend. Now, I had plenty of arguments to defend my position. But instead, I chose to offend. That shut down the entire conversation. Then, I picked up my pen. In writing this article, is my aim vengeance? I sure pray not. You decide. Let me explain...

On the said day, my 1<sup>st</sup> client for the day arrived "on time" as is her way. She is the wife of clergy and she wears the title with the grace, professionalism, humility and integrity that one would expect of a blessed soul. As she entered, she searched frantically for her earbuds. Upon removing her coat, she realized that they

were around her neck. So, she thanked Jesus and smiled with great relief. I smiled and took her coat to prepare for her service. As we began, she asked me general pleasantries about life. In some vain, I acknowledged that classes at Wake Tech resume. The photo of my 1<sup>st</sup> class hangs on the wall to my left while I work. I spoke of the deeply spiritual nature of that group and how they sometimes played gospel music as we navigated through the whys and wherefores of new hairstyles. The most spirited were mostly the younger women with one very beautiful exception. (I wanted to outline the evidence of God's work in the young.) She then stated paraphrasing, 'I'm glad you brought that up. I've been meaning to ask you about that. Do you listen to gospel music?' I said, "I appreciate gospel music but Neo-soul is my genre of preference. So, that's what I listen to most." She followed, "So if you don't go to church and you don't listen to gospel music, how do you commune with God and fellow believers."

I thought, 'Am I not communing with you now? Do I not speak of God inside my salon

as much as politics or any other subject? Do I not work 40 hours a week with fellow believers for a faith-based organization doing the work of God among the "[least of these](#)" (i.e. the poor)? Am I not doing and teaching the message that God put on my heart: "Embrace the beauty of you" through my salon and teaching at Wake Tech? Do I not tithe through my labor through many facets of my life?' I spend ~~almost~~ every day of my life in service to God. But because I don't attend church, [I have fallen short of the glory of God](#). I didn't intend to outline these arguments seemingly trying to defend myself; because frankly, I'm not sure they would have been ~~heard~~ understood. And more pointedly, I don't believe that there is one prescription and one path, and that "that way" is through a church body. I don't need a church to save me. [Jesus teaches that this world will beat and batter you and hang you on a cross to die. And by God's grace ALONE, you are saved.](#) And so, I listened. Things only became bristly when she suggested that it may NOT have been God's direction that led me to my husband who questions His existence. I understand why she thinks this. In her mind, *a loving God would not give you to a non-believer*. But there are many women who attend church every Sunday with a non-believer. I consider myself blessed to not be

in the company of a hypocrite. So, I was not outwardly offended. God has given me a gift since childhood to see from another person's perspective and understand their point of view. So, I understood her viewpoint. And, I understand my husband's as well. But, the words stated were an offense all the same because I love my husband; he is my life partner and my gift. With that, my response became outwardly combative as I stated: "Guess I'm going to hell!" I said it with a coldness that suggested *well if God watched Satan direct me to a man whose going to help my soul go to hell, then I'm going--hook, line and sinker. I'm committed!!* She rebutted, "You seem unconcerned about that." I responded, "Actually I'm not. But, [I am not the one to judge where he is on his journey and how God may be using me in his life and him in mine.](#)" After this clear affront, she closed the conversation, put on her earbuds and dived into her gospel music as I listened to smooth jazz of [Urban Knights](#).

I was pretty cool with the silence. Not because I was angry but because I was reflecting. She is doing what God has called her to do, and I am doing what He has called me to do. So, there's really no need for tension. Isn't that the problem with religion? God didn't choose her path for me in this life; so, I honor the road I'm on, and give thanks for my

truth. But, I couldn't help thinking: If I'm a baptized believer who feels this heavy from the effects of evangelization, what does [the average person on the street](#) feel after such an exchange as this?! I felt really drained and still had a long day ahead of me. So, I prayed to remain open and peaceful within my spirit. My wish was granted. After some time, she struck up conversation and we chatted casually again. Afterwards, she prayed for me by saying, "You said one thing that was right: God honors marriage. I know you're on a good path because I know your heart. But, God has more in store for you." And she prayed for and with me. I was appreciative. She then asked me to put down the Neo-soul music for a moment to listen to two gospel artists ([Anthony Brown](#) and [Pastor Dube](#)) who have blessed her soul of late. (Powerful music!! NO DOUBT!) As my next client had arrived, she then departed. I pray she returns. I love talking to her, and I DO love her spirit. She's a beautiful, blessed soul.

The goal of this "ode to tough love" and the full purpose of my reflection is simply to deliver this message: God is found in ALL THINGS--secular and sacred; because, love is found in ALL PEOPLE. So likewise, the gospel can be found in [ALL MUSIC!](#) The essence of the music is found in the soul of the traveler. And God's face shines out of each

and every one of us. We're all on a journey. None of us has arrived; otherwise, we wouldn't be singing on this side of glory. So, I choose to find the shred of true that pounds within the heart of each musical creator as they navigate through this very secular and challenging world in which we live. Because I don't attend church, the lyrics that strike at the core of my spirit are often found in the secular hallways and pathways of life. These lyrics define the truth of life on this profane battleground as well as any gospel ballad. But when you seek Him, you find God's face there too. I am imperfect: I curse when I shouldn't. But not for the sake of cursing. I curse so that you know just how vehemently I feel about a thing. And I have no

desire or intention to find a nicer way to say what I'm saying. My sons (and husband) know when I go there, "Listen." Likewise, I want revenge when "I'm wronged" even when I know that *whatever IT is*, it's ultimately NOT about ME at all! God loves me anyway. Is it any wonder that I gravitate to those who are equally broken and are unapologetic enough in their brokenness to acknowledge that righteousness, prescription, circumcision, purity, deeds and judgment are not the pathway to salvation. [For it is by His grace alone, that we are saved.](#) So as for my [Neo-soul vibe](#), I remain as "incurable" as I ever was and will surely die that way. I will listen because I love these artists. Many times, I see myself in their

soul book. [My message is simple \(as presented by those artists who most accompany me while working in the salon\): Truth speaks through many tongues,](#) and [divine love has many colors.](#) [God knows them all.](#) [We give thanks.](#) [And to my "doubting Thomas" husband of almost 25 years...](#) He is a happy man and often asks: "How am I so blessed?" (Yes, he uses the word "blessed." We're wearing him down!! ☺) That is more than sufficient... it's divine grace. [Amen.](#)

Through divine coincidence, Fr. Richard Rohr posted the ensuing Daily Devotional on February 14<sup>th</sup>. My life is indeed a poem penned by God... [simply beautiful.](#)

## RICHARD ROHR'S DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Cosmos Instead of Churchiness (Sunday, February 14, 2016)

Once you are in an authority position in any institution, your job is to preserve that institution, and your freedom to live and speak the full truth becomes limited. Francis taught us to live on the edge of the church, rather than managing the institution. We were not intended to be parish priests. Francis himself refused priesthood, and most of the original friars were laymen rather than clerics. This position offered the Franciscans structural freedom. We were to always occupy the position of "minority" in this world. (The M in OFM stands for *minorum, Ordo Fratrum Minorum.*) Francis wanted us to live a life *on the edge of the inside*--not at the center or at the top, but not outside throwing rocks, either. This unique position offers structural freedom and hopefully spiritual freedom too.

The early Franciscans said the first Bible was not the written Bible, but creation itself, the cosmos. "Ever since the creation of the world, God's eternal power and divinity--however invisible--have become visible for the mind to see in all the things that God has made" (Romans 1:20). This is surely true; but you have to sit still in it for a while, observe it, and love it without trying to rearrange it by thinking you can fully understand it. This combination of observation along with love--not with resistance, judgment, analysis, or labeling--just observation with love and reverence, is probably the best definition of contemplation I can give. You simply participate in what one Carmelite described as *a long loving look at the real.*

For Francis, nature itself was a mirror for the soul, for self, and for God. Clare uses the word *mirror* more than any other metaphor for what is happening between God and soul. The job of church and theology is to help us look in the mirror that is already present. All this "mirroring" eventually effects a complete change in consciousness. Thomas of Celano, Francis' first biographer, writes that Francis would "rejoice in all the works of the Lord and saw behind them things pleasant to behold--their life giving reason and cause. In beautiful things he saw Beauty Itself, and all things were to him good." [1] This mirroring flows naturally back and forth from the natural world to the soul. All things find themselves in and through one another. Once that flow begins, it never stops. You're home, you're healed, you're saved--already in this world.

That's the kind of salvation that so many of us perhaps expected, but only in the next world--and only for a few it seems--if we follow our own criteria. Meanwhile, we live unhappily and with a sense of scarcity in this world, hoping for some victory later. I believe the victory is now, or it isn't much of a victory; if you don't have it now, you won't know how to live it later, or to even desire it.

Either this world is the very "Body of God" or we have little evidence of God at all. "Transactional" theories of a *later* salvation--instead of transformation now--have come to mean less and less to most people. Yet those whose livelihood depends on this theory continue to keep many sincere seekers codependent on such a message and even their precise formulation of it. Such codependency only works among people who do not know how to pray and see for themselves. Salvation is not something you arbitrarily believe in. You only believe in it because you first of all *see* it. Francis, a living contemplative, walked the roads of Italy in the 13<sup>th</sup> century shouting, "The whole world is our cloister!" By narrowing the scope of salvation to words, theories, and select groups, we have led many people not to pay any attention to the miracles that are all around them all the time here and now.

### **Gateway to Silence**

A long loving look at the real.

### **References:**

- [1] Thomas of Celano, "Second Life of St. Francis," *Saint Francis of Assisi: Omnibus of Sources* (Franciscan Press: 1991), 494-5. Adapted from Richard Rohr, *Franciscan Mysticism: I AM That Which I Am Seeking* (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2012), disc 3 ([CD](#), [MP3 download](#)); and *In the Footsteps of Francis: Awakening to Creation* (Center for Action and Contemplation: 2010), [CD](#), [MP3 download](#).

Embrace the beauty of you.