

PART ONE

GRANDIOSITY IN OUR LIVES

*This article "Ron Rolheiser speaks on "grandiosity" in life, was written by J. Michael Parker, for "Today's Catholic" newspaper from the Diocese of San Antonio Texas. Fr. Ron's talk was given at the 2014 Summer Institute at Oblate School of Theology. Reprinted with permission.*

All the inner struggles we face, both good and bad, arise from the godliness inside of us, a godly energy that most of us don't know how to carry, said Father Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, in a keynote address during Oblate School of Theology's 2014 Summer Institute.

The June 16-18 event at OST's Whitley Theological Center explored the theme "Grandiosity in Our Lives: The Deity and the Dragon Inside of Us." Dr. Robert L. Moore, of the University of Chicago, who has studied theology and anthropology for 40 years, also gave three keynote addresses, and Dr. Margaret Speicher gave one.

Father Rolheiser, president of OST, began his address on the subject by reviewing the classical Catholic and Protestant doctrine on original sin, then illustrated a "mitigated view" espoused by Dr. Moore, author of *Facing the Dragon: Confronting Personal and Spiritual Grandiosity* and other books. He ended by speaking of how grandiosity affects people today.

Fifty years ago, the priest said, both Protestants and Catholics believed that our human nature - woundedness, grandiosity and narcissism - could be explained by the fall of Adam and Eve, based on a literal interpretation of Genesis. "Adam and Eve were in a 'preternatural' state. It wasn't supernatural and it wasn't natural - 'preternatural' is a wonderful word because nobody knows what it means," the priest joked, bringing a laugh from the audience. "They'd have natural happiness, they'd never die, they were naked but didn't know it, they walked with God at night, and they had perfect harmony on the planet."

Tempted by Satan, they committed the original sin and fell from that state. They were banished from the garden, and "nobody could go to heaven until Christ came. Every baby born, even today, is born outside the full love of God and had to be baptized to be brought back in." Anthropologically, he explained, all our tendencies come from original sin; had Adam not eaten that apple, we wouldn't have those things inside us. So there's this huge difference between before the fall and after the fall," Father Rolheiser summarized.

Interestingly, he pointed out, Jesus never mentioned original sin. "For centuries, we had Jesus coming to undo original sin; but if he knew about it, he never mentioned it. St. Paul mentions it only twice, in passing; but they're powerful texts." St. Augustine seized on Paul's comment that "just as in one man (Adam), everybody died, so in one man (Jesus), everybody comes to life," and used it to formulate the classical Christian doctrine of original sin. The Fourth Council of Carthage canonized it, Father Rolheiser said, "against the opposing view of the Irishman Pelagius, which the Irish have never forgiven Rome for."

Not only do we suffer the consequences of Adam's sin, according to St. Augustine, but we're congenitally deficient when we're born. The church canonized that belief, the priest explained. The classical Protestant reformers, Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, made it even deeper. Luther, an Augustinian monk, said that "we aren't just flawed by original sin; we are corrupted by it. That's been the classical Protestant view."

Catholics mitigated that, contending that we are not corrupted by original sin, but we're congenitally flawed. "Either way, the common denominator was that before one was baptized, one could not go to heaven," Father Rolheiser explained. "That's why baptism was a make-or-break thing. Catholics tried to resolve what happens to good and sincere people, and especially to babies who died without having a chance to be baptized. We invented a place called limbo, so they would at least get natural happiness, but they could never see God."

Injecting humor into the subject again, Father Rolheiser noted that, "to his credit, Pope Benedict XVI put limbo into limbo forever." As the audience laughed, he added, "Limbo is no longer a Catholic option; the pope has

thrown it out. Protestants never bought limbo at all, but we shared this idea that unless you're baptized, you can't go to heaven."

More important for the lecture, he said, we all share "concupiscence," the tendency toward sinfulness. "St. Augustine gave us that word. Given a choice between the high and the low, you invariably tend towards the low; you'll tend towards selfishness, narcissism and grandiosity; the flow of human nature is always to what is lowest, not to what's highest, and you'll always be tempted, and so on. There's a certain un-wholeness in us that's a direct consequence of original sin."

The OST president noted that the Seven Deadly Sins - pride, envy lust, gluttony, greed, wrath and sloth - are still worth studying. His new book, *Sacred Fire*, devotes a chapter to these sins, he said, "As they're manifested in people like us." Sloth, he observed, was added on later. "It used to be called "acedia" (restlessness), and actually, that's a better word. Sloth implies a kind of laziness, yet most of us who are workaholics and are driven have very different addictions. The idea is that we struggle with moral life in general because of the effects of original sin. The roots of our grandiosity, of egotism, of narcissism, selfishness and our pathological restlessness lie in original sin. Had Adam and Eve not sinned, we'd have a very different world."

Father Rolheiser said his own parents were not highly educated but were well catechized, and they understood Christian symbol. "They understood the concept of original sin existentially, in a way my nephews and nieces in today's generation don't. They were equipped to handle frustration and to watch the news at night. So when life didn't turn out well, it was, 'Adam and Eve ate the apple, and the world is the way it is.' Today, the world is the way it is, but kids have no explanation whatsoever. We haven't symbolically given them the tools to understand it. My mom and dad had an answer for everything, and in some sense it was the right answer - a huge, mega-narrative answer." Consider the beautiful chanted prayer called the Exsultet, sung each year during the Easter Vigil liturgy, he said. It includes the words, "O happy fault! O necessary sin of Adam that gained us so great a redeemer."

In other words, the priest said, it seems to suggest that Christ came into the world because Adam and Eve sinned. "Here's a little footnote," he interjected. "The whole church bought that for 2,000 years, except the Franciscans. They never bought it, and I think they're going to win the day. They said Christ wasn't Plan B, as if God had planned the world, and Jesus wouldn't have come if original sin hadn't happened. Christ was part of the original plan."

The "mitigated view" held by Dr. Robert Moore, the Summer Institute's main keynote speaker, is that "the roots of many of our struggles lie within our very makeup and within the image and likeness of God inside us. They come from the very greatness in the way we're made by God." He said we all experience ourselves as grandiose, adding, "Inside, we all nurture a deep secret: we think we're God. We have seven billion people on earth, and every one of us, subconsciously, can't help but think we're God because there is godliness inside of us. That's not a bad thing, but we experience this as a fundamental dis-ease that lies at the center of our experience."

This divine energy in us has been characterized by prominent authors from Plato and Ecclesiastes in antiquity to Henri Nouwen and Nobelist Doris Lessing in modern times. Plato's observation was that "We're fired into life with a madness that comes from the gods," the OST president explained. "It has us believe that we can have a great love, that we can perpetuate our own seed and that we can contemplate the divine. Outside of Christian thought, I don't think you'll get a better expression." Elaborating, he parsed Plato's words: "He says we're fired into life; he doesn't say we're born serenely, waking up in the crib contemplative and surveying our options; we're born full of hungers and thirsts, and we wake up crying and reaching out. Babies try to consume the whole planet and do everything they can to try and heat the earth. Plato said we have this madness and it never goes away, but it comes from the gods."

Along with the noble purpose of this madness, he asserted, comes our belief that we can have great love. "Nobody wants second best in this world; in your daydreams, you're always God. You're not achieving second-rate love; you're always making love in the highest ways. We think we're immortal, and we're driven to that. We're hard-wired to perpetuate ourselves and to contemplate the divine. Our vision, our horizon, is always huge. We can try to cut it down, but it never quite works."

He noted the poetic passage in Ecclesiastes that says there is a time and season for everything, but he said that people often stop reading the beautiful text before reaching its point: God has made everything beautiful in its own time and season; yet God has put timelessness into the human heart, so that the human heart is out of step with the seasons from beginning to end. "That's some text," the priest observed. "He's saying God made everything with this wonderful rhythm, but you've been out of synch with that from the time you were born. God has put this timelessness into you which is not in the animals."

In our own time, Nouwen asserted that, "We're not restful people who occasionally get restless; we're not people who live in habitual intimacy who sometimes get lonely, or who live in solitude but sometimes experience disquiet; we are restless people who sometimes find rest; we're lonely people who sometimes experience intimacy, and we're deeply disquieted people who sometimes experience solitude." He said that our default experience is "a disease, a disquiet that marks the center of every human heart. In fact, when it goes out, you're in trouble. If we don't have it, we lose our humanity."

Father Rolheiser reiterated a favorite aphorism of his own: "Cattle contentedly munch grass in pastures; humans discontentedly smoke grass in bars," which underscores that cattle don't have this timelessness and restlessness that is in humans. He observed that the late Doris Lessing, the 2007 recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, had a fictional hero who always struggles with this overpowering energy inside her but she has no place to put it. Lessing characterizes this energy as "10,000 volts" that is for everything - creativity, heroism, sex, or whatever. "You're always driven with this voltage inside of you. St. Augustine said, 'You've made us for yourself, Lord; our hearts are lonely and restless until they rest in you,'" the priest stated.

Finally, he cited the German theologian Karl Rahner: "In the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable," Rahner said, "we ultimately learn that here in this life, all symphonies must remain unfinished." Father Rolheiser summarized it by saying, "You just never get there. We're not going to get to the rainbow; but it's not because there's something defective in us but because we're overcharged; we're overendowed for this planet."

With this godly energy, we have infinite appetites that don't make easy comfort with limited Earth, the priest said. Putting it philosophically, "There's an infinity inside you, and you're living in a finite world. That's an equation for a lot of frustration. But that's not a bad thing; it's the source of all that's noble and great inside of us. Remember Plato's quote: 'We're fired into life with a madness that comes from the gods; it doesn't come from demons. God gave us godliness; because of that, there's a perpetual disquiet, this madness, and our grandiosity comes out of that.'"

Much of the reason we are grandiose, the priest asserted, is because we don't know how to carry this powerful godliness, and "it knocks us all over the planet." We have simplistic, romantic notions of it, we are naïve about its power; and we are naïve in believing that this power is friendly. In fact, he continued, the notions are not only romanticized; they are pious to the point of being dangerous. "We think that somewhere inside we have this wonderful icon of the Trinity stamped on us, and that may also be true; but Scripture tells us that God is fire."

PART TWO

USING GODLY ENERGY TO DO GREAT THINGS

*By J. Michael Parker - For Today's Catholic*

Pope St. John XXIII, Blessed Mother Teresa and former United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold all recognized and used the godly energy inside them to do great things in the world, Father Ron Rolheiser, OMI, told an audience at Oblate School of Theology.

They realized that God was using them for his purposes and were able to carry it well and gracefully. Hammarskjold was secretary general of the United Nations from 1953 until his death in an airplane crash in 1961.

Father Rolheiser noted that St. John Paul II and Blessed Mother Teresa had egos "the size of the Grand Canyon," but said that didn't make them egotistical; they recognized that the greatness inside them was not their own and that they were simply vessels God had chosen for God's purposes. The Oblate School of Theology president spoke June 18 at OST's Whitley Theological Center on the last day of the school's 2014 Summer Institute.

"John Paul II could say to the whole world, 'I love you, and it's important for you to hear this from me.' You and I couldn't do that; our tongues would break off. Mother Teresa knew she was a very important spiritual vessel and you'd better listen to her."

Both of these religious icons let that divine energy flow through them, he continued. "They were sensitive enough to say, 'This isn't me. This is God, and I'm just a humble vessel.'"

For most sensitive people, the struggle is just the opposite. We're so sensitive that we shut down divine power for fear we might be seen as egotistical and someone might say, 'Who do you think you are?' We're full of false humility, and because of that we're never going to do anything great," the priest said.

He contrasted the two spiritual icons with rock singer Mick Jagger. "He's a very powerful man, and he generates a lot of energy; but I'm not sure he realizes that it's godly power flowing through him. I think that he thinks it's Mick's power flowing through him. That's the difference between a Mother Teresa and a Mick Jagger. Some of our rocks stars channel powerful energy; they light up the stage and bring electricity into a room. But they identify with it. Mother Teresa brought electricity into a room, but she let it flow through her."

He said that conservatives understand the unfriendliness and danger inherent in energy. "They're afraid of energy because they sense what it can do. Energy can kill you, and it often does. Liberals tend to be naive in this. He remembered a major speaker who said, "The churches are way too up-tight about sex; who has ever been hurt by it anyway?"

While the churches indeed may be uptight about sex, Father Rolheiser declared, "It's naive to assert that nobody has been hurt by it. There are more murders, suicides and breakdowns over sex; virtually everybody on the planet has been hurt by it. Energy isn't friendly. We should read one line of Scripture and contemplate it. When Moses was up on the mountain, he begged to see the face of God, and God said, 'You can't; nobody can see my face and live.' That captures a lot. Divine energy is so powerful that it has to be filtered and handled very carefully." He cited Robert Moore's metaphor that "this is 2,000 volts inside of you, and you're trying to plug in a coffee maker," and commented, "If you're naive about plugging in that coffee maker, you're going to get killed, and probably a few people around you, too."

That's what cults do, he continued. They sense the power of this energy and say that they are simply going to connect. "They sense that energy, and they're trying to plug in their little coffee makers without proper filters and transformers. Energy is hard to turn on; it's even harder to turn off. We shouldn't be naive about that," Father Rolheiser observed.

Rooted in this divine energy, he said, are struggles with both inflation and depression; with grandiosity and its children; with our perpetual dis-ease, disquiet and restlessness; our struggle for faith to believe in God; and our struggle with our various energies and their "imperialism."

"If we lose touch with this energy, we become depressed; if we let it flow through us, we have a very high chance of inflation. That's going to be the constant tension in our lives," the priest explained. "If we don't let the energy flow into us, we're depressed; if we let it flow through us but don't handle it properly, it can kill us. Mother Teresa, John Paul II and Dag Hammarskjold were great examples of people who handled it well. They contained it and were never inflated; that's exactly what makes greatness."

He noted that Dr. Sigmund Freud once stated that "you can really understand people well sometimes by looking at where they're broken." Using rock stars Janis Joplin and Michael Jackson, Amy Winehouse and Whitney Houston as examples, he said, "They all channeled powerful energy, and all died young. None of them killed themselves; they were simply killed by energy."

Joplin reportedly described what being a rock star was like thusly: "You're in stage trying to make love to 15,000 people; and then you go home and try to sleep alone." Father Rolheiser interpreted the comment by observing that, "You drink in all this energy and you have no place to put it. Mother Teresa, John Paul II, Nelson Mandela and Dag Hammarskjold had an organizing vessel to take that energy and hold it so it didn't blow them apart."

Many of us, the priest said, haven't allowed enough godly energy to flow into us because we are fearful of people thinking we're egotistical. "So we're left feeling mediocre and enraged underneath. If we're not living out our fullness, underneath there's going to be a very angry god or goddess inside if us who is punishing us all the time. Then, to the extent we let it out, we suffer from that grandiosity. That's the root of our addictions. I don't think they came from Original Sin. If we're enraged or bored, those are two major symptoms that we're not acting out this godly energy wisely," he added.

Father Rolheiser said that Thomas Merton was literally dying before he entered the Trappist monastery of Gethsemane in Kentucky. "Merton was a brilliant, highly artistic, high-strung, young writer. But when he joined the Trappists, he had holes in his stomach from not eating properly, he was smoking heavily and wasn't holding a job anymore. In the monastery, after his first fervor in which he wrote *The Seven-Storey Mountain*, he found that you can't just turn this restlessness off like a water tap. He had some deep, restless years, and then he contained it. He's one of the really great people in the last century. So you can study this energy by looking at the people whom it kills and at the public people who have handled it well. This godly energy gave them life and greatness. Sometimes you don't have to look any further for it than your own father or mother."

Finally, the OST president spoke of today's Catholic understanding of Original Sin, recalling that the late Cardinal Avery Dulles, SJ, a conservative theologian, was asked at a conference to "say something about Original Sin." He declined, saying, "That particular doctrine is in the repair shop; when it comes out, I'll talk about it."

Until the late 1960s, Rome demanded that Catholics believe that because of Original Sin, each of us was born congenitally defective, and the Roman Curia censured Pierre Teilhard de Chardin for holding a different view. In the 1960s, Dutch theologians published an existential catechism with a different theology of Original Sin and also were censored by Rome.

Then two massively radical shifts took place, Father Rolheiser said. In 1969, the new Catholic sacramentary was published with a new rite of baptism. "In this sacramentary, the mention of Original Sin is minimal and also optional. We used to baptize babies to take away Original Sin, and today it's an optional part of the rite. It doesn't even have to be mentioned, and most priests don't even mention it."

Even more radical, he said, is a stunning statement in the new General Instruction for the Rite of Adult Initiation. An unbaptized person preparing for reception into the Church who has a terminal disease and will die before the initiation, he said, "You don't have to baptize him. How are they going to heaven? You don't have to be baptized to go to heaven."

In Protestant and Evangelical churches, the priest said, the dogmas and pastoral practices vary, but generally, like the Roman Catholic Church, they de-emphasize Original Sin, both in terms of its influence on human nature and why baptism is needed.

"Today, we've lost the concept of Original Sin as a cultural symbol. Former Christian cultures had it as a cultural symbol; today, to the extent that the culture handles it at all, it replaces Original Sin with the literature of addictions, dysfunction, grandiosity and so on. It's not bad literature, and we have to have it somewhere; but if people ask me where we've failed our children the most, it's in not equipping our children symbolically to handle frustration. My mother and dad gave me those tools; they may have been pretty primitive, but they worked."

He recalled the Catholic Marian prayer "Hail, Holy Queen," recited at the end of every Rosary, and said that some people today consider it morbid since it says in part, "To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve, to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears." But he noted that his parents, who were very happy people, recited that prayer daily. "They were very happy people, but their idea was, 'Life isn't always happy; and when it isn't, that's the way the world works.' See, they were equipped, religiously and culturally, to handle it; today, oftentimes we aren't. And to the extent that we are, it's because there are 12-step programs, the spirituality of imperfection and people like Robert Moore who talk about grandiosity and so on who give us some kind of symbolic tool to handle what Original Sin used to handle."

Finally, he explained the Catholic Church's view of Original Sin today. "Theologically, there's been a major return to Teilhard de Chardin," the OST president explained. "Sometimes, you're 50 or 60 years ahead of your time. I believe Teilhard was. He was a great paleontologist who wrote 34 major volumes of science. In his entire career, he was never allowed to publish theologically inside the Catholic Church, so his writings were private. He got into trouble exactly on this point. Some 70 years ago, he said that Original Sin is not a story to be taken literally; it's a symbolic container that has three major functions that are theological and anthropological.

"Basically, Original Sin teaches us that there is evil in the world and it's not God's fault; it wasn't put there by God. God made a perfect world, and the Adam and Eve story teaches us that. Second, everything we receive in this life is gift. You can't self-assert and you can't save yourself; you can't give yourself life, or love, or anything. Everything comes from God. Third, we and this planet have no future outside of Christ. Everybody, outside of Christ, is looking at death, including the planet. Everybody in this room has a limited number of days; so has the Earth, and so has the universe. The second principle of thermodynamics, the Big Bang and so on is that this planet is mortal. So, outside of some divine intervention, which Teilhard saw in the person of Jesus, the reality of Christ, there's no place to go."

Teilhard said that the Original Sin story is a great archetypal story. "You can tell little kids the story of Adam and Eve, and they get it. 'Once upon a time, the world was perfect and then this couple was tempted by death.' And look at the powerful archetypes inside the story -- why you commit the sin, and the consequences; you can write whole psychology books with that; you can teach deep truths to little kids and to everybody else. It also equips them to handle frustration in their lives. These are symbolic tools to look at an imperfect human being, the struggling person you are in a struggling world, and you can look at the news at night and you're not mystified at all. In fact, you're grateful that it isn't worse, given what's out there. My nieces and nephews are wonderful people, but they don't have a wonderful meta-narrative like this, so often they're not equipped to handle the frustration in their lives, or to watch the news and say, 'Well, it makes sense.'"

We also have various sociological, psychological concepts to explain our deep struggles in life, he said. However, the bottom line is that "our struggle for nobility and our struggle against sin are part of the same energy. Original sin and all its consequences complicate this, but they are not the main player. The main player in our struggle is not Adam and Eve, although they're very important; it's our grandiosity, which is the highest thing inside of us; it's the image and likeness of God. So when we're born, there's a god or goddess inside if you and it's not going to make easy peace with this planet. You're going to struggle -- and as Robert Moore puts it, mostly between depression and inflation."