



# *“Normal”*

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Things are heating up, and everything is happening all at once; everything is in motion. I for one take refuge in the Lord. Not refuge from the world, but refuge *within* the world. Not a turning away from the events, but entering into them head on, at their source. For only the Lord alone can help us balance all the conflicting and intense issues that are surfacing.

One of the more common “contradictions” that is emerging can be summed up like this: nothing will ever be the same, so it’s very important that we get back to “normal” as quickly as possible!

But what is normal? 1) What things *used* to be like; or 2) what things *should* be like?

Many speak of retribution as justice, but few about repentance, the first step in any spiritual enterprise. Many speak of pride in America, but few about humility before our neighbors. Many speak of rebuilding the economy, but few about dismantling our sense of privilege. Many speak of returning to our former civil liberties, but few about the civic responsibility that are part of those liberties. The air is thick with cognitive dissonance, and it is important that we learn to discern reality from image, truth from falsity. There is no room for reality, only the semblance of what we know as “normal.”

What is normal when it comes to racial profiling and prejudice? White people feel that progress has been made; that things are finally more *normal*, as they should be. People of color feel that things are pretty much the same, still “*normal*” after all these years. In our natural state of being, we call good that which favors us and our inclinations; and we call evil anything that opposes our will. This sense of self, our proprium, which is so sure about what is good and what is bad, leads to all sorts of spiritual abnormalities. The desire for wealth and power; the fear of death and loss; the tendency to rationalize and justify ourselves, and project our shadow side onto others.

We must break this “habit of the self,” for it is the primary obstacle between us and a state of peace, joy, and freedom. We know of many who laid down their life for their friends, even for strangers. The Lord has told us that there is no higher love. Is there a way in which we too can practice this ultimate gift of life? Can we lay down *our* natural lives, all that which seems so important, good, and worthy for *us*, and focus instead on what is needed for the common good? Can we lay down our proprium for the Lord; false self for true? I don’t want to deny my feelings, but neither do I want my feelings to define who I am. It’s normal to want revenge. But it’s also normal, from a Christian perspective, to extend forgiveness.

In the statement of faith from our confirmation service, it says: “We worship the Lord God, our Savior Jesus Christ. He is Creator, Redeemer, and Regenerator, who brings us into being, frees us from evils, and, as we struggle to overcome them as sins against him and do good, gives us the full humanity for which we were created.” Real religion is about the development of the self into a just, loving and wise being. It is a process that is ongoing and often difficult; it requires choice and commitment. This is what the Lord requires of us (Micha 6). Speaking spiritually, this is our normal state, the state in which we are at our best, most real, most alive, most ourselves.

“Normally,” Christianity is not about such rigorous work, this struggle to overcome our merely natural, proprium-centered lives. Normally, one is baptized, and that’s it. You’re one of the good guys, and the infidels are not hard to find after that. (Of course, this is not the kind of Christianity practiced by many, but it is the kind of Christianity that exists at the level of culture and media, the kind that is raised up at times like these, often by the religious right, to distinguish ourselves as those who have already arrived from those who choose to walk a different path. It’s the kind we need to be aware of and careful of, as we continue to work our way back to the light.)

The real, inner challenge before us as individuals is to respond to these events from a spiritual center. That means being active, not passive; attentive, not negligent; committed, not indifferent; fair and balanced, not biased and partial; open, not closed; it means defining normal in new ways, not

retreating to a world that no longer exists. (“New occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient good uncouth; he must ever on and upward, who would be abreast of truth.”)

Our true normal state, the state we were created to achieve, is described in the beatitudes. Poverty of spirit; compassion for those who suffer; meekness, and humility; merciful, peacemaking, pure in heart (that is, motive); able to endure suffering with patience and forgiveness.

*Hell: boring and uncreative; the same old thing; “normal” as a state: STATIC*

*Heaven: alive and creative; open to new things; “normal” as a process: CHANGING*

*Can we be changed? Can we see the need for ongoing change as being “normal”?*

God is always with us; and God is always working in us, calling us forward, through diverse ways, to meet the challenge of spiritual growth; to seize our spiritual birthright; to become the angelic beings we were created to be, and in which our highest happiness lies. Doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God.