



Sacred Fire: A Vision for a Deeper Human and Christian Maturity

Ronald Rolheiser

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"When one reaches the highest degree of human maturity, one has only one question left: How can I be helpful?"--TERESA OF aVILA

" "

Beloved author Ronald Rolheiser continues his search for an accessible and penetrating Christian spirituality in this highly anticipated follow-up to the contemporary classic, "The Holy Longing." With his trademark acuity, wit, and thoughtfulness, Rolheiser shows how identifying and embracing discipleship will lead to new heights of spiritual awareness and maturity. In this new book, Rolheiser takes us on a journey through the dark night of the senses and of the spirit. Here, we experience the full gamut of human life, pleasure and fervor, disillusionment and boredom. But, as Rolheiser explains, when we embrace the struggle and yearning to know God we can experience too a profound re-understanding to our daily lives.

"What lies beyond the essentials, the basics?" Rolheiser writes. "Where do we go once some of the basic questions in our lives have been answered, or at least brought to enough peace that our focus can shift away from ourselves to others? Where do we go once the basic questions in our lives are no longer the restless questions of youthful insecurity and loneliness? Who am I? Who loves me? How will my life turn out? Where do we go once the basic question in life becomes: How can I give my life away more purely, and more meaningfully? How do I live beyond my own heartaches, headaches, and obsessions so as to help make other peoples' lives more meaningful? The intent of this book is to try to address exactly those questions: How can we live less self-centered, more mature lives? What constitutes deep maturity and how do we reach that place? And, not unimportantly, what constitutes a more adult, Christian discipleship? What constitutes a truly mature following of Jesus?"

As the poet Rainer Maria Rilke suggests, "Live the questions now." In "Sacred Fire," Rolheiser's deeply affecting prose urges us on in pursuit of the most holy of all passions--a deep and lasting intimacy with God.

Sacred Fire: A Vision for a Deeper Human and Christian Maturity Details

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Matt says

I gained a lot from The Holy Longing, and while Rolheiser and I don't land in the same theological tribe, there is so much to gain from his writing and experience. This book is worth the read in particular if you're over 40 (which I barely am, but the content is towards the latter part of life). Chapter 7 on blessing others was challenging in a way that brings life!

Joy Matteson says

Everything that Ronald Rolheiser writes is filled with meaning, wisdom, and grace. I'm almost always challenged to take a new step of faith after reading one of his works. This is technically a followup to his classic work "A Holy Longing", but one could read this work without reading that one first--but both are simply awe-inspiring. The humility of the writer, combined with deep soul-searching about what constitutes Christian maturity in discipleship, is never harsh or demanding, but speaks softly and with clarity that marks the truth of the words on the page. My favorite quote, which is so timely in a world filled with ugly culture wars and mud-slinging: ""We are mature when we define ourselves by what we are for rather than by what we are against. The capacity to praise more than to criticize defines maturity. The crowning glory of maturity and discipleship, as we saw, is the capacity and willingness to bless others." Get your HANDS on it.

Edward says

Rolheiser has written one of the wiser commentaries that I've read on what it means to be a Christian. At the heart of his commentary is a passage in the middle of the book which tells the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus who fail to recognize Christ. It is not because of a lack of faith, but a lack of imagination. He sees Christ as potentially present in anyone's life, but it's difficult to recognize him because of our narrowness of vision. To make Christ meaningful involves an effort of the imagination. If we overcome the obstacles that stand in our way, then God, Christ, and an ensuring church enter our lives in a deeper way.

The author discusses four qualities of a Christian. He or she is a person who practices private prayer and private integrity, is committed to personal charity and public justice, is committed to public worship, and believes that these can be done with a "mellow and forgiving heart."

Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks facing a Christian, especially in the second half of life, is acquiring the ability to forgive. As the author puts it, "in the end, it is our greatest psychological, moral, and religious struggles. It is not easy to forgive." People reach adulthood with all kinds of grievances, and in both small and large ways have "been treated unjustly, violated, hurt, ignored, not properly honored, and unfairly cast aside. We all carry wounds, and with these wounds, we all carry anger, bitterness, and some unforgiveness."

I think Rolheiser is most insightful in mediating on the meaning of death.. Jesus Christ, the paradigm of Christianity, had an existence made up of both what he did and said in his life, and how he died, and the

focus of his followers is often on his life. Equally important is his death. In a sense Christ made a gift of his death, but it is so entangled with what he did with his life, that it's hard to see it for what it was. The question for the author is how individuals might live so their deaths are "gifts" to their families, and to the world. What we leave behind is either anger, regret, and bitterness, or forgiveness, the same choices that Christ made in the garden of Gethsemane.

The strange thing about death is that the essence of the dying person is only grasped on their demise. Their presence is finally understood in a much deeper way than when they were alive. But to enter into death, that "dark night of the spirit" and realize what is happening is not easy. "We are alone, mostly without preparation, without mentors, and without communal support." No wonder that most people put off the thought of death until it is thrust upon them. and in our society, obsessed with living, the journey into death is especially difficult. Rolheiser stresses, though, that there is much examination of what this dark journey means in the tradition of the great Christian mystic writers, beginning with the desert monks such as Evagrius and continuing with John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila, as well as the wisdom found in Buddhist and Hindu teachings.

The author's conclusion is that in some form the Christian rites of Ascension and Pentecost occur after every good death. "Ascension", originally referring to Christ's departure from earth, relates to the individual's death, and "Pentecost", originally the infusion of the Holy Spirit on Christ's despondent, followers, relates to the spirit and memory that the individual leaves on those left behind. If it is a good and nurturing one, lacking bitterness and regret, it will be, imaginatively, biblical blood and water - that is to say, a force that is alive and cleansing.

JasmineB says

Deep insights showing different perspectives, yet it speaks to you because it mirrors the truth

Simon says

Christian spiritual writer, Fr Ron Rolheiser, OMI, is seeking to cover the span of life in three main works. 'The Holy Longing' looked at how we began the Christian journey and the themes that we are initiated into when embracing a Christian lifestyle. In this book, 'Sacred Fire', Rolheiser looks at how we mature on the way. It is about giving our life away in service of family, Church, work and world. It looks at prayer, at witness, at celebration and loss, at ageing. In a final section, it looks towards another book he is writing about giving our death away. Those familiar with Rolheiser's style of personal anecdotes, stories, poems, quotes and exercises seasoned throughout the text, will feel home. An enriching read for anyone seeking to explore how the Christian life is a life we give away.

Audrey says

Picked this book to read on a contemplative retreat. What a perfect choice! Another Rolheiser gem!

Mary Ellen says

This book is a follow-up to Fr. Rolheiser's *The Holy Longing*. Those who found the first book rewarding - as I did - will no doubt be equally challenged and enriched by this book. I took a long time to read it, as each section demanded time for reflection and self-examination. Fr. Rolheiser's vision of "giving your death away" - based on John of the Cross's "dark night of the spirit" - is one of the most challenging things I've read by a contemporary spiritual author.

Time engaging this book will be time well spent.

Melissa says

How can I give my life away more purely, and more meaningfully? How do I live beyond my own heartaches, headaches, and obsessions so as to help make other peoples' lives more meaningful? These are some of the questions that Ronald Rolheiser attempts to answer in his new book *Sacred Fire*. You may know Ronald Rolheiser from his book *The Holy Longing*, which was written as a foundational book - a Spirituality 101 course. Or possibly you know him from his column in the *Catholic Herald* or one of his other books. Or maybe you don't know him at all. Either way, you should read this book!

Sacred Fire is the follow on book to *The Holy Longing*. Where *The Holy Longing* answered the basic questions, *Sacred Fire* goes a little deeper. He follows the concepts of St John of the Cross and tries to apply them to regular folks (instead of to priests).

This is a thought provoking, meditational book. I really enjoyed it and find that it has helped me a lot. I am sure I'll be referring back to it quite often.

I'm so excited to have an extra copy to give away! Not only do I have a copy of *Sacred Fire* to give but I also have a copy of *The Holy Longing*!! If you'd like to enter the drawing, visit my blog and leave a comment.
<http://melosbookshelf.blogspot.com>

Phyllis Fredericksen says

I used this book as a daily meditation and really liked it. Like Rohr, the author presents ways for a mature person to grow closer to God and to others. The last section discussed making your death a gift to others. Very thought provoking. Highly recommend this book and the author.

Christopher Bounds says

Rolheiser is an excellent speaker and conversationalist – I've been lucky enough to be at a conference where he was a keynote speaker – but his writing is engaging and challenging. This book certainly challenged me to

think about the spiritual life in maturity, and what it means to live 'beyond generativity'. He seems to have not only a refined understanding of scripture, but to be able to draw on Eastern and Western spiritual classics, which would be far out of my league. I will take a way a renewed interest in investigating centring prayer and in meditation — provided I find the time!

Annie says

Christian writer Ronald Rolheiser, in his new book *Sacred Fire: A Vision for a Deeper Human and Christian Maturity*, makes the point that spirituality and discipleship have stages and seasons and, accordingly, different challenges and tasks. (The developmentalist in me stood up and cheered! Seriously, I could not stop underlining this book.) He explains:

The first phase, essential discipleship, is the struggle to get our lives together.*
The second phase, mature discipleship, is the struggle to give our lives away.

In the first phase we struggle largely with external things, physical appetites, and our place in the world--who to be. In the second phase the struggle is more internal as we figure out how to be (and specifically how to focus away from ourselves and be generous--a la Erickson's stage of generativity). To illustrate his point he uses the parable of the prodigal son in a really interesting way:

"Someone once quipped that we spend the first half of our lives struggling with the sixth commandment (Thou shalt not commit adultery) and the second half of our lives struggling with the fifth commandment (Thou shalt not kill). That may be a simplification but it is a fertile image. Indeed the famous parable of the prodigal son and his older brother can serve as a paradigm for this: the prodigal son, illustrating the first half of life, is very much caught up in the fiery energies of youth and is, metaphorically, struggling with the devil; the older brother, illustrating the second half of life, struggling instead with resentment, anger, and jealousy, is metaphorically and in reality, wrestling with God" (page 6).

In my church (as with life, actually), there are a parade of milestones that happen in the first 20-30 years of your life--covenants and rites of passage that serve as religious training wheels and give a sense of spiritual momentum. After that flurry, I have found the next phase to be a different kind of challenging in the quest to sustain progression in what seems like a developmentally stagnant time.

Sacred Fire gave me a lot to think about, reframed some old assumptions, and generally reinvigorated my thinking about Christian spiritual progression.

*Rolheiser's earlier book, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* addresses this first phase

Margaret D'Anieri says

I'd give this six stars if I could - perhaps the best book I've ever read about what it means to live a good life as a middle-aged person; it has already changed my perspective and approach to daily love. It is a Christian

book, but I imagine would be helpful to many who don't claim to be people of faith.

Jackie St Hilaire says

When we act like God: we get to feel like God.

Fr. Ronald Rolheiser is a visionary and like most visionaries he is often challenged for his teachings. There are no frills on Fr. Rolheiser's stance on being a Christian. Either you are or you're not. You make the choice and he doesn't make it easy. It's not about theology, beliefs but about action.

Fr. Rolheiser talks like Jesus, what you see is what you get. No beating around the "bush".

Like Jesus he uses stories.

One of his most poignant stories is the rich young man who approaches Jesus and asks him what must I do to gain eternal life? Luke 18:18. Fr. Rolheiser uses this story to ask each one of us: "Do you want to be a good Christian or a great Christian?"

Bob Price says

Ronald Rolheiser may be the wisest man who has ever lived. Or not...but he has a lot of great things to say.

In *Sacred Fire*, Rolheiser continues the thoughts he began to develop in *Holy Fire* and promises to bring to a conclusion in the third volume in his work.

Sacred Fire deals mainly with the 'middle years' of spiritual development. He talks about our need to give away our lives and prepare to give away our deaths.

Whereas the earlier book was pro-scriptive in its scope, this book is more descriptive in its orientation. He talks about the big picture, the things that people will and do struggle with rather than giving 'spiritual practices' that we can easily examine our lives with.

The only weakness about this book is that he spends a great deal of time telling us what he's already told us in the first book and explaining what he is going to tell us in the third book. After a while, we want to know about the subject he promised to deal with. He does this, but I think if you compare this book to *the Two Towers* you will see the obvious weakness in being the middle part of a trilogy.

Not to say that you can't learn a great deal from this book and you will.

I highly recommend this book to pastors and to all interested in the spiritual life.

Grade: B+

Lisa says

This is the best book I've read so far on how to live as a mature disciple of Christ. Rolheiser is a Catholic priest with a wide view of all religion and takes an unswerving look at hard issues of aging, dying, and serving - all within the context of a mature spirituality. His interpretations of Biblical stories and parables were particularly useful. For instance, the image of Mary as a "ponderer" and his explications of all that entails provides me plenty of material to ponder. I will likely reread this. It's that good.
