

Dear People Whom God Loves,

LOVE/WISDOM MERGE

In the letter to the Ephesians, we are reminded to live our lives not out of foolishness but out of wisdom.

I want to draw a very rough map of the wisdom/love journey. Remember that this is a map. A map is very helpful, but it doesn't tell us all about the journey. I find the map helpful, in part, because it helps me to understand why we humans have so much trouble getting along, why we cling so tightly to our narrow perspective, and why we get so angry at people who look at things differently than we do.

I will write briefly about growth in rational intelligence and about emotional growth. I will write mostly about the stages of moral growth and end with the merging of love and wisdom.

It is also important (this is particularly important when we come to the moral stages) not to think that we are superior to those we see as less developed than we are. Why is that true? Greater development may allow us to live better or do good things to make our world a better place. When we look deeply enough, we will realize that our growth is an unearned gift. Our growth is deeply influenced by our DNA. We didn't give that to ourselves. Our growth is also influenced by the family into which we are born. That was not our choice either. Well, what about the good choices that we have made? Those good choices are terribly important. But, again, what was behind those good choices? Would they not have been by the grace of God? When he saw a "destitute miserable person", St. Phillip Neri said, "There go I but for the grace of God." Another saint in the same situation said, "*there go I*". I believe that our appropriate response is to be grateful and not proud. This seems to be counterintuitive. It is what I now see.

To return to growth in rational intelligence and emotional growth. We can be well developed in one and not the other. In this case, we will likely live badly.

As we grow in rational intelligence, we can think more clearly, reason better, see connections and consequences. This is good and gives us power to do good. The problem comes when, at the same time, our emotional growth is low. Emotional growth is to have compassion, empathy, and connection to others. When this is lacking, we will use our intelligence to get what we want regardless of who we hurt along the way. A dangerous combination.

Let us look at the reverse combination: high emotional growth and low rational intelligent growth. In this case, our emotions are in charge and they flood us into harmful actions. We will tend to merge into other people, lose our independence, and cling. We will also drive others away from the relationships we so deeply want.

We turn now to the moral stages. Some preliminary thoughts. I will not write about these stages as growing higher because that only encourages our very human arrogance. I will instead write of this as growing deeper.

Also, being at a stage means that we see things from that stage and we will perceive that as the truth. We will confuse "our truth" with the truth. Of course, only God sees the whole truth. The best we can do as humans is always partial. The "truth" from a deeper stage than our own, even though it is closer to the truth, will seem wrong to us and we will usually fight for what we see. Fortunately, life has a way of jolting us so that we can get a glimpse of the deeper stage and begin the process of growing into that stage . . . unless, of course, we get too scared (and it is always scary) and dismiss the opportunity for growth.

Another reminder. Not only are individuals at a certain stage, so is the majority of any society. Interestingly, not only individuals but also societies will want to draw others into their stage, but they also will want to prevent people from going deeper. This is understandable. Why? Because people at a deeper stage are seen as wrong and are a threat to ourselves and to our society. It seems right to stop them.

The first two stages are called pre-rational because there is not much rational thinking involved. They are mostly life-preserving stages.

The next four stages are called rational because we are thinking about more than physical survival. There are other values involved that we want to preserve.

There is a stage (perhaps several stages) beyond these six. This is called post-rational. This stage is, at times, confused with the pre-rational. The knowledge here is not the result of reasoning. If we are convinced that there is no knowledge beyond what our rational mind can reach, this will seem as silly to us as the pre-rational.

The growth in all the stages is about seeing that more and more people are deserving of our care and empathy and about seeing that more and more people are deserving of human rights. The circle of people so deserving is meant to

grow until it embraces all human beings. This doesn't mean that people shouldn't be protected from destructive behavior, but to remember that those causing the destruction are still human. That will influence the way we protect our society. Also remember, we can't skip stages. We all must grow through them one stage at a time.

Finally, before we look at the stages, remember that as we grow deeper, we do not abandon the more superficial stages, but they are enfolded into the deeper stage. Also, at times of stress, we can revert, during that stress, to more superficial stages.

We turn now to stage one. We all start here. In this stage, it is all about me. No one else counts. I want what I want and I should have it. As a baby, it is all about me. That doesn't mean that the baby is bad. It just means that the journey is just beginning. It is good for the baby to be there . . . but tragic to grow up and still be there. That is why proper nurturing of the child is crucial.

Stage two. It is now not just me. There are other people too. However, I just see other people as useful to me. I can connect in this way. I will watch your back if you will watch mine. I will do for you, if you will do for me. We can see the growth here. It is not just me; there are other people too.

Stage three. I see myself as part of a group. This group may be large or small. This will be a group of people who are somewhat similar. It may be a group of people who think very much alike. It may be a religious group or a secular group. It may be a group who are similar because of economic status or social status. It may be a group who have similar objectives. You can think of others.

There are no written rules or laws. But there is peer pressure. If you don't adhere to the standard of the group, you will likely be ostracized...perhaps boldly, perhaps subtly.

This is still growth in depth. The circle of people who we think are deserving of empathy and rights is growing.

Stage Four. At this stage, we realize that to keep some reasonable order, to have some bonding among people and groups of various kinds, to be able to preserve certain values and to carry out the purpose of this large and disparate group, we need to have laws and rules. Without these laws and rules, this large

group (e.g. nations and churches) would not have much permanence. Again, remember that this deeper stage does not discard the more superficial stages, but enfolded them into the needs of the deeper stage.

Again, the circle of those we think are deserving of rights and care is widening. It now includes people who are different. People and groups that have various perspectives and values. This is difficult, and the best we can hope for is to do it reasonably well.

Stage Five. At this depth, we see that some rules and laws are not good. We see that they harm certain people and groups by not respecting their rights and/or by not responding to their legitimate need for care. We do not assume that all laws and rules are right and good. We will work for change. This will not be because of selfish wants but because we see it as unjust. At the same time, we will not pursue justice by treating others in an unjust manner or see them as enemies. This distinguishes action from this stage from action from a less deep stage.

Since one of the characteristics of a stage is to resist action from a deeper stage (because it is a threat to our less deep stage) we will try to resist and stop such action. Why? Because from the less deep stage, it seems wrong and harmful. This is not because we are bad. It is because we really believe that this is so. At whatever stage we are, we can do great harm and truly believe that we are doing good.

Stage Six At this stage, our concern for the rights and care of people extends to all the people of the world. We will realize that the fact of being human is the basis for rights and care. It doesn't mean that we see no value in the borders of the institution whether civil or religious. It does mean that those borders become much more porous and will not obscure the common humanity that we share. We can then start to get a glimpse of what Jesus meant when he said, "Love your enemies".

This stage is the last of the four rational stages. This means that it is as deep as we can understand by reason. Human reason is great; but let us remember that although it is great to be human, it also has its limitations.

We will now move beyond what reason can figure out. I have read about various deeper stages. I will put all of these together into one stage because I don't have any experience to do any better than that.

A word of caution. While Love is working in us through all six stages, I would say that the further stages, because they are beyond reason, are an even deeper gift than the others. Love can gift us with this wherever we might be in the moral growth stages.

Stage seven. This is the knowledge that reason cannot give us. This is the knowledge that only love can give us. Reason can tell us that believing in God is reasonable; but only by love can we know God...not, of course, perfectly.

We can get a glimpse of this from our own love. When we love someone dearly and deeply, don't we know them in a way that reason can't explain? If we are asked—*Why do you love me?*—there no explanation? We might say, *I love you because of this or that*, but aren't those reasons superficial? Wouldn't it be closer to the truth to say: *I don't know; I just do...?* There may be reasons that draw us into the beginnings of love, but when love is truly deep, the reasons disappear. This is a lame but good pointer to the truth that we can only know God by love. This is where love and wisdom merge and become one.

This is why science can't reach God because science as science is limited by the limitations of reason. Don't get me wrong. I think that science is wonderful. Indirectly, it can help us to know God. When we become aware of the awe of the evolution of the universe over 13½ billion years, when we see how life has burst forth, when we see how this evolution has brought forth us humans who can know and love, that awe can draw us to reach for the Great Love that is the source of it all. It doesn't prove God, but it can draw us into the journey. By the way, Love is God's name. The scriptures remind us that "God is Love". To be God means to be Love. That is so much more than to say: *God loves us*. Since God is Love, only by love can we know God.

Beyond the stages. Since God is Love, indeed infinite Love, it makes sense to me that since we die without having become perfect lovers, Love will not rest until God's beloved (that is all of us) become perfect lovers. Our doctrine of purgatory points to this belief. It is the process of being purified as Love is drawing us into the state of perfect loving . . . this state where we are all drawn into the Love and that Love flows through us, connects us all to one another and to Love. This state is called heaven. Pope John Paul II reminded us that heaven is not a place but a state of being.

That is the good news that Jesus told his disciples—and all of us who profess to follow him—to *preach not so much by words but by the way we live*. Remember, what St. Francis said, "Preach the Gospel at all times and every once in a while, say something."

Wow! What a journey!

I close with a personal note. I am not a professional theologian. What I have written bears that limitation and needs correction and expansion. It is the result of what I have read, what I prayed about, and what I have experienced over 86 years. It is my hope that it will help some of you.

Smile, God Loves You,
Father Clay