



SIEBENQUELL

A Meditation:

A laden ship is coming



SOURCE: R. MÖNNERJAHN 2013

In the 14th century, Johannes Tauler, observed boats and small ships on a daily basis while staying at the monastery of St. Nicolaus, which lay on an island in the middle of the Rhine just outside of Strassburg. The ships supplied the monastery on the island. The monks stood at the pier in expectation and received goods as well as guests. The ships were of great importance to them, because they conveyed everything which the residents of the Island monastery did not possess or which they could not produce on their own, but which they still needed in order to live.

These observations inspired the mystic Johannes Tauler and thus an image of Advent was created in him – an image of yearning and expectation – but one which was often interpreted in a too one-sided fashion.

For the fact that this ship, loaded to the brim, is important for our yearning is quickly noted. But what about the significance of our yearning for this ship? For when this ship, loaded to the brim, sails into a port in which there are no yearning hearts, then no one will appear on the pier; no one will be there to receive the goods and the guests.

It may be true that this ship comes from God, that its sails are love and its mast the Holy Spirit and that Christ himself is on board. But this God, who carries all things, also has prepared the landing, and he did it by placing yearning within our hearts, indeed, he placed this yearning into our crib.

Look at us, the children of humanity, with our constant restlessness. We often believe, that something in us is out of sync with the rhythm of life. We are constantly restless, dissatisfied, frustrated and full of yearning. When we experience satisfaction, we shortly thereafter experience a new yearning. In other words: there is a fundamental discomfort in us, an unquenchable fire, which makes it impossible for us to every come to total satisfaction within this world. This yearning lays deep within us, in the deepest recesses of our soul. Thus, we are driven people, restless from birth and only partially capable to experiencing satisfaction.

At the heart of all great literature, poetry, philosophy and religion, it is a matter of naming and analysing this yearning. Yearning makes us curious, it moves the soul. We love stories of longing and love, of desire for foreign lands and tortuous yearning, of boundless ambition and tragic loss. In the end, we encounter this unquenchable fire, which cannot be tamed, in all things. We are born to it. It is a comprehensive pain that lays at the center of human experience. It is the deepest power that drives everything else. This restlessness is universal. Yearning spares no one. Yet, it takes on different moods and faces. Sometimes it comes to us as pain, disaffection, disillusionment and yearning. At other times, its touch does not touch as a pain, but as a deep energy, more important than anything else within us, and which drives us to live, beauty, creativity and to a future beyond the limits of our present time. Thus, there are many reasons why people await the ship which is loaded to the brim.

Yet, what are we to do with this yearning? Shall we resist it? Shall we quarrel with it, because it is so wearisome and grueling? Shall we kill it off? Or will we become wanderers without a goal, indeed, the accursed? The way in which we deal with our yearning, with the painful and the hopeful forms it takes, is our spirituality. Here we face our deepest question: Do we still set out to the pier of the ship? Can yearning still set us in motion?

Spirituality is something vital and inalienable, something that lay at the centre of our lives. It is not an option for human beings that happen to be so inclined. It is not supernatural, esoteric or even something we can choose. None of us has a choice. Everyone must have a spirituality, and, indeed, of us has one, either a life-giving one or a destructive one. Everyone experiences the yearning for that, which God's ship bears, but no one is forced to head off to the pier.

Spirituality does not mean that we reasonably undertake certain spiritual activities, such as going to Church, saying prayers or trying meditation. It is much more foundational than that. Long before we do anything that is explicitly religious, we already need to contend with the fire that burns within us. The way we channel this fire constitutes our spirituality. Thus, we all have a spirituality, if we like it or not, whether we are religious or not. Spirituality is more a matter of whether we can sleep at night than of mass attendance. It is a matter of whether we are integrated, total human beings or whether we are falling apart. It is a matter of being in community or in isolation, of being in harmony with creation or totally alienated from it. This inner yearning allows us to act; and if we act, the choices we take will either lead to a greater integration or a greater disintegration of our personalities, to a strengthening or a weakening in of our relationship to God, to others and to creation. Will we become more healed or more torn, more whole or more dissipated?

1. A laden ship is coming
fully laden to the brim.
It bears God's son full of grace
the Father's eternal word

2. The ship floats quietly forward,
It carries a precious load.
Love is its sail
the Holy Spirit its mast

3. The anchor clings to the earth,
the ship is then on dock.
The word would become flesh for us
the Son is sent to us.

A laden ship is coming. It comes often, over and over again and it comes gladly to the port of our lives. And as long as there are people that deal well with their yearning, there will be people who appear at the docks.

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