**Background notes for lecture Tuesday November 23, 2021**

**“Toward a Post-pandemic Spirituality: Improving Personal Relationships with Family, Friends, Foes and Deceased Loved Ones”**

**James J. Bacik**

I.Psychological Research cf Ken Pargament professor emeritus BGSU

1. Positive effects of religious beliefs and practice on relationships
2. Encourages us to reframe interactions through a hopeful lens. For example, seeing a stressful situation as an opportunity to rely more on God.
3. Fostering community. Having shared beliefs, attending religious services. Maintaining a broad perspective open to development.
4. Rites of passage that help us cope with transitions: Baptism, First Communion, Weddings, Funerals.
5. Negative effects
6. Feeling punished by an angry God.
7. “Religious Deferral” put it all in God’s hands and not doing our part.
8. Thinking we can play God and make judgments about the state of another person’s soul.
9. Appropriating a religious tradition
10. Participating in worship.
11. Reading the Scriptures.
12. Learning from the Saints.
13. Listening to uplifting music.
14. Helping someone in need.
15. Read the psalms which encourage trusting God in difficult situations.
16. Respect the good help religious have provided for many centuries.
17. Covid has prompted a reevaluation of our relationships
18. During the pandemic which relationships have been most important and why. Put more effort into meaningful relationships.
19. Consider what to do about painful destructive relationships; end them or improve them.
20. Remember what we learned about relationships during the pandemic as we move into the post-pandemic era.

II. Insights from Martin Buber (1878-1965)

1. Philosophy of dialogue cf classic book: *I and Thou* (1923)
2. Relationship is the primary category for analyzing human existence. “In the beginning is relation.” “All real living is meeting.”
3. The really real is the “between,” the sphere created by personal interactions.
4. We are called to live a “life of dialogue,” participating in our world with passion and reverence, respecting the uniqueness of others.
5. Two approaches or fundamental attitudes
6. I-It: treating others in a detached and objective fashion, as objects to be used; the relationship lacks freedom and spontaneity, and is planned and calculated; tendency to stereotype and control.
7. I-Thou relationships: inherently involving; demand wholehearted personal presence and intense engagement; lifts us out of ourselves while setting aside our own needs, concerns and projects; treasures the uniqueness of the other; does not simply accept the other (Carl Rogers) but confirms them encouraging the development of their potential; in encountering another as Thou we get a glimpse of the Eternal Thou; we should treat even opponents as a Thou.
8. Advice
9. Let the other person surprise us.
10. Respect the uniqueness of the other.
11. Do not use the other or treat them as objects.
12. Treat others as a Thou even if they treat us as an It.
13. Find God in the enjoyment of others.
14. In touching physically try to imagine what the other person is feeling.
15. Recognize our destructive impulses to control and try to transform them rather than repress them.
16. Resist efforts to treat us as an It.
17. Beware of trying to create an “appearance” (creating a public image) or trying to impress others.
18. Do not impose ourselves on the other but confirm them in their own unique potential.

III. Christian Anthology cf Karl Rahner *Love of Jesus and Love of Neighbor*

1. History
2. The Enlightenment (17th and 18th centuries) ideals of personal freedom, human rights, power of reason and the scientific method produced a strong individualism that influenced Christian understanding of human existence.
3. Currents trends: globalization, Internet access, Covid pandemic that remind us we are essentially interdependent.
4. Themes
5. We are unique individuals who can find fulfillment only through healthy interactions with other persons.
6. We are social creatures, interdependent persons, members of communities (family, neighborhood, city, parish, nation and world) who must critically appropriate communal values and help communities live up to their highest ideals.
7. Love of neighbor
8. There is an essential unity between love of God and love of neighbor. To love our neighbor implies love of God even if we do not explicitly recognize this.
9. Love of neighbor is not one command among others but the central demand through which we find fulfillment and spread God’s kingdom in the world.
10. In love we bind ourselves as a whole person without reserve to another human being who is essentially mysterious in a “kiss of two eternities” which is possible for all human beings in the most ordinary circumstances due to the power of God’s love (Rahner’s *Love of Jesus* pp. 99-104). There is a Christian optimism about human relationships despite all the evil, selfishness and hatred that occurs.
11. At times, in the midst of ordinary life human beings do love one another without hope of a response, taking a risk without absolute assurance that it will work out. For example, saying a kind word to someone who needs a boost but may not appreciate it.
12. By taking the risk of loving a neighbor we follow the example of Christ and participate in his death and resurrection which is our way of loving God and preparing for eternal life with God.

IV. Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

1. Seven Themes
2. Life and Dignity of the Human Person
3. Call to Family, Community, and Participation
4. Rights and Responsibilities
5. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
6. The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
7. Solidarity
8. Care for God’s Creation
9. Family
10. Family is the most fundamental form of human community.
11. It is founded on marriage in which the mutual gift of love between husband and wife creates an environment in which children can develop their potential and prepare to make their contribution to society.
12. The family is a “small scale Church,” the “Domestic Church” which is a sign of the unity of the world and an instrument for spreading the reign of God in the world.
13. Further reflection: In the family we learn the values necessary for a healthy fulfilled life; acceptance of personal differences, patience with foibles, reconciling after disputes, sacrificing for the good of the group, religious formation in Christian teaching and practice, care for the less fortunate, care for our common home the earth, commitment to the cause of justice and peace.
14. By nature human beings are social creatures, God made us male and female and saw man needed a suitable partner.

V. Sociological Perspective

A. Robert Bellah *Habits of the Heart* (1985)

1. Recognizes the powerful force of individualism on American culture which promotes good such as personal freedom but is insufficient for promoting a full human life lived in communities and social institutions.

2. In family life self-fulfillment is more important than commitment, in friendships personal gain is more important than care for the other, developing a personal faith is more important than fidelity to a religious tradition.

3. Two types of individualism: Utilitarian represented by Benjamin Franklin which celebrates getting ahead by one’s own initiative; Expressive represented by Walt Whitman which celebrates delight in sensual pleasures (see *Leaves of Grass*, especially “Song of Myself”).

4. Biblical religion offers a broader vision of the fulfilled life which does not reject individualism but transforms it. In the Bible, God choose a people, Israel, to be a light to the nation . True religion is to care for the widows, aliens and orphans. Importance of shared rituals and worship in a common Temple.

5. Republican tradition represented by Jefferson urges citizens to practice civic virtue which serves justice and the common good.

6. Martin Luther King combined biblical religion (the prophets on justice and Jesus on liberation) with the Republican tradition (Declaration of Independence and Constitution) to energize the civil rights movement through communal non-violent actions (sit-ins, marches).

C. Sociologists and the pandemic

1. The pandemic has effected all of our relationships in unprecedented ways: virtual meetings; social distancing.
2. We have to balance personal rights and serving the common good. Various mandates. Aaron Rogers.
3. Minorities, poor persons, homeless were hurt disproportionately during the pandemic and will be after.
4. The public as a whole must be involved in constructing a healthier post-pandemic world.
5. Increased virtual interactions were often valuable during the pandemic but may, long-term, hurt personal relations that thrive on face to face contact.
6. Nicholas Christakis, author of *Appolo’s Arrow* The post-pandemic era starting in 2024 may be like the “roaring twenties” that followed the Spanish Flu. At first people may get more religious and more risk averse. The initial pandemic period will last into early 2022 requiring social distancing, some closures, many people still fearful of contact. When the general public feels safer, we may see the exuberant return to social activities. Social activities can have long term negative results on human behavior. *Appolo’s Arrow* was written before the wide use of vaccines and its timetable seems to be too extended.
7. Researchers at Johns Hopkins stress the importance of touch in human relationships which releases chemicals in the brain that produce feelings of well-being. Touch is especially important for the young people who are feeling lonelier during the pandemic even though they still have social media. The authors stress the importance of hugs and hope we can return to handshaking.
8. Advice to grandparents: be honest and explain reasons for separation; validate their feelings about missing contact; explain that vaccines allow for more contact; set expectations, some situations still require masks in public but vaccinated family can return to normal; continue to stay connected virtually when distance precludes personal meetings.

VI. Pastoral Advice cf *Spirituality in Transition* by J. Bacik

1. Spouses
2. Do your best to honor the marriage covenant, realizing that in some cases divorce is the fitting moral response and the best option.
3. Work together to help each other grow in various dimensions of life: intellectually (talk about a good TV program, both read the same book or attend a lecture and discuss it, share a new insight with your partner to see if it makes sense; imaginatively (visit a museum or try a new restaurant, learn a new skill which helps prevent dementia); emotionally find new ways to meet your partner’s need for intimacy and fear of being alone or for success and fear of failure; morally help someone in need, join a group working for justice or peace; spiritually go to Mass together and discuss the homily, pray together or separately read a spiritual book and share your insights, share a part of your spiritual journey with your spouse.
4. No matter how old, it is possible to deepen mutual love. Rahner said love is true to itself, only if it is prepared to give more tomorrow than today. Human beings are ultimately mysterious.
5. Locate where the power lies (financially, influential, friends) use the power not to control or manipulate or compete but to empower the partner and join them to work together for good.
6. Sexual relations should be: 1) Self-liberating which recognizes a legitimate self-interest; 2) Other enriching which is good for the partner; 3) Honest expressing genuine love; 4) Faithful, avoiding adultery or other romantic relationships; 5) Socially responsible not just safe sex but responsible sex; 6) Life serving which can take many forms; 7) Joyful which is a by-product of loving commitment (cf *Human Sexuality* by Anthony Kosnik).
7. Covid forced some married couples to spend more time together often with less opportunity for intimacy with children around. Research suggests that healthy marriages became even better and troubled marriages developed more problems.
8. Accept and manage diminishments that accompany growing older (reduced sexual drive, hearing loss, fear of falling, physical ailments, dementia, retirement that increases time together, children no longer a buffer, personal foibles) become more annoying.
9. Use the inevitable painful falling out of love experience as an opportunity to grow in a more realistic permanent being in love.
10. Family life
11. Be realistic about family life. Almost half of first marriages fail; less than half of children are living in a family with two married parents in their first marriage; all families experience conflict and miscommunication as did the Holy Family (Jesus remaining in Jerusalem Temple, Mary trying to halt the itinerate ministry of Jesus - Mark 3:21). All personal needs cannot be satisfied within the family.
12. Forgive family members for being human, limited persons with aggravating foibles and disturbing faults.
13. Learn to recognize and respect their virtues, good qualities, distinctive contributions to family life.
14. Try to eat some family meals together and have everyone participate in preparation and cleaning up.
15. Attend Sunday worship together, take turns leading prayers before meals, share stories of faith.
16. Enjoy leisure activities, vacations, picnics, school events and sports.
17. For young children: read often to them and ask questions about content; stress they are responsible for homework but be ready to help them; take them to an interesting place outside home (a park, zoo, game).
18. Invite older children to help compose a family calendar available on their phones or planning a family event.
19. Encourage boys and girls to follow an interest: for example, playing an instrument, participating in a sport, developing a hobby. The great impact of Title IX expanded sports opportunities for girls and women.
20. Constantly work to improve communication: try to express honestly and clearly thoughts and feelings, be an active listener, paying close attention (put aside distractions, phone down) and replaying what you heard; be cautious about offering advice; be attentive to the emotion behind the words; in conflict situations make sure opposing views are heard and possible solutions are examined, sometimes compromise is necessary and time outs are needed to control anger.
21. Parents should take time to attend to their own needs (sleep, exercise, time alone, leisure, prayer, friends, community service, parish).
22. Spouses should work on their marital relationship: date night, time away from children, exercising together, praying together, counselling if necessary.
23. Friends
24. Learn from Covid and the tradition how important our friends are. Aquinas said “There is nothing on the earth more to be prized than true friendship” and adds “Friendship is the source of the greatest pleasure, and without friends even the most agreeable pursuits become tedious”.
25. Distinguish erotic romantic relationship, falling in love from friendships that typically develop over time and require a certain amount of mutual effort, shared values and common concerns. Greek philosophy distinguishes 3 kinds of love: Agape (divine love); Eros (romantic sexual love); Philia (affectionate love for others, including friends).
26. Concentrate on doing good for our friends but accept the reality that motives are mixed. Aristotle distinguishes three reasons for loving our friends: useful for us; pleasurable for us; because they are virtuous in a particular attractive way.
27. Deepen and extend our caring for our friends: real empathy for their suffering; rejoice in their successes; celebrate their virtues. Be open to being influenced by the care offered by our friends. In a healthy friendship there is a mutual reciprocal caring.
28. Solidify trust through word and action that allows for intimate sharing, revealing embarrassing secrets, hidden motives and questionable opinions.
29. Recognize ways a friend is different and use it as a catalyst for self-examination. For example, my friend is much more open in sharing feelings, maybe I should do more of that. Do not force your own distinctive self on the friend but remember good example can help the friend.
30. Some friendships are not good for either party. Covid has provided an opportunity to sort our friendships. It may be a good time to sever mutually destructive ones. Charity should guide this process to avoid unnecessary harm and hurt.
31. Reintroduce, continue or expand shared activities which reflect shared values and solidify the relationship. Reconnecting after Covid may take a lot of effort and may be initially draining but psychologists suggest this is normal and it will get easier. Choose carefully (rather than being motivated by obligation) which friendships to work on first, perhaps the ones you miss the most or are the most fulfilling. Build a routine that ensures regular encounters (join a book club, get concert tickets together, join the parish knitting group, sign up for a golf league) If virtual encounters worked during the pandemic repeat them periodically. Find something new and exciting to do together to expand the friendship.
32. Recognize that there are degrees of friendship: best friends that we want to see often; good friends less often, casual friends now and then. Do not expect all friendships to be stimulating and fulfilling. Enjoy what is possible.
33. See friendship as a way of living Christ’s call to love our neighbor by making ourselves available and sacrificing for friends, thus building community, overcoming polarization and serving the common good.
34. Deceased loved ones
35. At Christmas we profess belief in the Communion of Saints which suggests that our deceased loved ones are with God enjoying eternal happiness where there are no more tears and all divisions are reconciled. Vatican II teaches a salvation optimism, all who follow their consciences are saved by the mercy of God.
36. Karl Rahner argued that they are now closer to us than when physically present.
37. Some may need to forgive a spouse for leaving them alone to cope with a difficult world.
38. We can honor them by trying harder to imitate their virtues.
39. Express gratitude to God for how they touched us on this earth.
40. Those who are regularly or periodically aware of the presence of loved one should be grateful for such a blessing.
41. Ask them to intercede for us in challenging situations.
42. Pray for forgiveness for ways we hurt or neglected them during our shared time on earth together.
43. Tell children and grandchildren about their life, accomplishments and virtues worth imitating.
44. Remember them on All Souls Day.
45. Say this prayer composed by Karl Rahner found in *Encounters with Silence p. 53:*

I should like to remember my dead to you, O Lord, those who once belonged to me and have now left me. The true procession of my life consists only of those bound together by real love, and this column grows ever shorter and more quiet, until one day I myself will have to break off from the line of march and leave without a word or wave of farewell never more to return. There are no others who can fill the vacancy when one of those whom I have really loved suddenly and unexpectedly departs and is with me no more. And this as death has trodden roughly through my life, everyone of the departed has taken a piece of my heart with him, and often enough my whole heart. My faith in you is nothing but the dark path in the night between the abandoned shack of my poor, dim earthly light and the brilliance of your eternity. And your silence in the time of my pilgrimage is nothing but the earthly manifestation of the eternal word of your love. You command us to abandon ourselves by the daring act of love which is faith, so that we may find our eternal home in your life. My loved ones are silent because they live just as we chatter so loudly to try to make ourselves forget that we are dying. My waning life is becoming more and more a life with the dead. I live more and more with those who have gone before me into the dark night where no man can work. By your life giving grace, O Lord, let it become ever more a life of faith in your light. Amen.