

**A RELIGION OF ONE'S OWN**  
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I discovered in writing this that it had a pendulum quality to it. A back and forth, up and down secular-to-sacred quality that I wanted to express physically. In its perfect form I imagined swinging on a swing, but I couldn't without Buttita shooting me. I could imagine attaching a swing to one of these beams, throwing it over one of the beams, but I couldn't envision a way to keep the kids off of it. So instead I would advertise that we have these choir risers that we are trying to get rid of, and give them a swan song moment of use.

This back and forth, up and down, secular to traditionally sacred is not an image Thomas Moore uses in his book *A Religion of One's Own*, it just seemed a good metaphor for what prompts the book, maybe how you feel about your spiritual life, and an advertisement for our upcoming adult ed course.

In many cases like our author Moore, is a Catholic who entered the monastery at the age of thirteen, we are inclined to think of our spiritual lives first with a traditional religious outlook. Thinking Church, and piety. The backswing in my little imagery is our instinct to view our spiritual lives in traditionally religious ways. Although traditional religion is riddled with old ideas, it also has patterns and truths that have been cultivated for eons.

But, as Moore acknowledges—and we all see—the world is changing pretty fast, and taking religion with it. It is hard to miss how much people, likely you included, have grown past the traditional ideas. Traditional religion as we have known it in the west can seem antiquated. Moore accurately assesses that in many ways traditional religion is going the way of bookstores, print newspapers, and landlines.

In such an environment Moore, the author of a similar and wildly popular book *The Care of the Soul*, asks what many of us do, should I simply try to live without a formal, or traditional spirituality? This is the easiest option. We now have infinite distractions and comforts never envisioned before.

I mean, hardly any of us are sure what we believe anymore anyway, and really how helpful is church in getting me to where I want to be, wherever that is. But, the trouble is, a rejection of all that I have heard I should believe, and all the hypocrisy, and sexism, and all that is worth running away from, is not a place that feeds me.

Maybe I should in my own way, we often ask ourselves personally and collectively, should I resist the hollowness of change and try to keep my religion traditional, but maybe in a new way. Okay, maybe science has opened me up to some creative mystery, and curiosity, sure, but after all the comforts of technology and brilliance of science, it doesn't help your soul much does it.

And damn it, I got a soul too. Or, it at least feels that way, and courting and serving our souls, my soul, to live out of "the invisible radiant depth" that I can sometimes taste in life, and seems to drive others.

I think about Martin Luther King and, even the new Pope. Those images, standing out in nature, calls to us. Feeds us. I mean after all are not all the world religions in their own clumsy way talking about the real stuff. Aren't they? But when I think of it, most of my experiences of soul, of being touched have had nothing to do with Church.

I mean Science is our chief authority, the final verifier, I know this. I basically accept this. This is not a new news story. The emptying of the churches and the move away from religion is 500 years old. And, yet I still miss God, whatever that means, if there even is one.

Edward Munch's painting *The Scream*, painted around the turn of the last century, captures the crazy that can exist when surrounded simply by the modern existential reality we all face.

The trouble with all my liberation is that most common response from the secular world to my problems is that I should take this or that pill. It hardly feels like the modern world has no time or response to my deepest longings. And even as liberal as I am, I don't want to be defined by what attempts to get in touch with soul and live in spirit I don't believe in. What dare I even call sacred. A hint, a peak beyond the veil. I guess that is what I really want. I don't need creeds. Hell, I can't make up my mind about anything anyway. But I do want to be a person who cultivates my soul.

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But if religion is the creative response to those longings and that mystery, it is foolish to ignore it, isn't it. Despite the fact that it can feel old fashioned. I think I want to, well, think both more and less. I want to, I certainly want to court my soul, and expand my service, so that the actions I take out in the world are, oh, I don't care much about the words.

I want to know the religions better, or at least the best part of them. I want to retain the best of Christianity, or Judaism, but also get the best of Cosmos. I love that show, and the wonders of acupuncture and the internet really is its own miracle isn't it. Although I don't really want Moore wants to reverse the missionary urge. Instead of converting others I'd like to help them find their own path.

Hell, I don't want to be described as a sheep. I have heard just enough of those, but I need some patterns that fit me, I need a religion of my own. I want to find a comfortable place where I can be soulful without being rigid or foolish. I want to be modern but in touch with what is eternal.

I love what Moore says about a lived religion. "When you're religious in a deep way, you sense the sacred in things." He describes it as a faint and mysterious pulse. Both in the

world and in yourself you catch a sight of the numinous, a hint of something more than human. In developing a religion of one's own, it's important to cultivate an eye for the numinous, a sacred light within things or an aura around them.

Moore believes that we can get a lot of that by, in crass terms, getting the best of both worlds. He believes we can all create a Religion of Our Own. This book is to me a clumsy, cluttered, beautiful recipe manual for the attitudes and even acts one, and we could all, do to be involved in the act of creating a religion of our own.

And if this book is a recipe book, I just want to share a few of the definitions he throws out there he is working with. Little spoonful tastes.

*Soul is the invisible, mysterious, and softly radiant element that infuses your being and makes you human. Like plasma in your veins it gives you a sense of meaning, feeling, connection, and depth.*

It warms my heart just to hear that description.

Moore suggests that one of the first personal religious acts, interesting enough for us UUs, is our very own Thoreau's act of strolling out into the woods by Walden and building his simple Cathedral of a home.

I recently had my own religious act of walking with my Mom in the middle of the night, shuffling from the bed, foregoing her walker for the sake of simplicity, and sort of dancing across the floor to get her to the bathroom.

But the best image of a personally religious experience might be that of the astronaut Edgar Mitchell who looked out of his tiny window, surrounded and strapped in and dependent upon all this technology, looking at his own home planet he described as a "blue jewel-like home planet." He said he had a glimpse of divinity.

I have taken this fine spiritual cookbook by beginning to craft our Spiritual Retreat upon it next year.

Yes, Moore's proposal is that we adopt a salad-bar-type style of religion. Build a canon of your own sacred literature. Build a practice of exploring what of all the world religious traditions, and the classics of literature and poetry and art is for you. A binding practice that leads you to read, contemplate or meditate with those words or art to a deep place, and then walk away with a message. Maybe you read it off that sacred shelf twenty minutes a day.

Maybe words are not your thing. Be like Emerson who forgoes the traditional lit for the sacredness found in watching, as he mentions in his famous divinity school address, "the blowing clover and the falling rain." Make for yourself and or your family a sacred outdoor

space, or a sacred annual adventure. Stand in awe of the way nature meets your mind in the way Georgia O'Keefe did with her painting.

There are mystic possibilities in the ordinary, in lots of ways.

The goal of most personal religious acts, or at least some portion of most personal religious acts, would be to go small to think big. To lose one's association with ego. You don't need a magnificent ceremony or a priest to get in touch with the numinous, as helpful as those can be sometimes.

A modern functional spirituality is not first and foremost a solved with a silver bullet like revelation, although those insights are welcome. Spiritualism for us is probably more like the way a pearl grows, layer by layer, around an imperfect center. Calligraphy, flower decorating, being an astronaut looking at our planet from afar are all experiences that can take us there.

In our adult ed class that begins in November as we close out our World Religions Seminar we will explore this and more. I have purchased a handful of books for those who wish to read Moore's work, in prep for our series of classes.

Go from this room peaceful, sure, but the peace of the water just before it bursts into a boil. Go from this space, but not without carrying some invisible truth with you. Sear into your heart a piece of what will become the new you. Walk away from this community today in touch with something whether you do or not others call holy.

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However, if all you feel is hungry, that's ok too, then just walk very quickly through these doors and get to the front of the line.

**Amen**