

## BURG Conference 2013

**By way of introduction:** Over the past three decades there has been an extraordinary exploration of what is meant by the words 'spirituality'. The ancient paths of Scripture, the traditions of both Christian and non-Christian spiritual paths, the insights of spiritual direction, the work of such people as Carl Jung, James Fowler and their contemporary disciples have all contributed to the world of retreat and the life of the Churches; so what now?

In his latest book, Franciscan friar Richard Rohr states that we can put too much emphasis on the *first half of life*. He states:

*In my opinion, the first-half-of-life task is no more than finding the starting gate. It is merely the warm-up act, not the full journey.*

*I believe that God gives us a soul, our deepest identity, our True Self, our unique blueprint....Our unique little bit of heaven is installed by the Manufacturer within the product, at the beginning! We are given a span of years to discover it, to choose it, and live our destiny to the full...All we can give back and all God wants from any of us is to humbly and proudly return the product that we have been given – which ourselves.*

This is similar to what Victor Frankl suggests – that we should not focus on what life can do for us but what we can do for life. We each have a vocation to fulfill. We have something to give to life which is uniquely ours to give. This is what it means to be made in the image of God. To be the likeness of God is to be a unique contributor to the beauty and dignity of creation.

But it will take a life time to discover this. As Rohr suggests in the first half of life success, security and "looking good" to ourselves and others are almost the only questions. But as we grow older we leave such self-referencing characteristics behind. In the second half of life we acquire an inner freedom which does not rely on the approval or otherwise of another person, institution or even our family. We discover what has been called 'the second simplicity'.

When we are a child we can be playfully simple because we know nothing else. Adulthood introduces us to the complexities and contradictions of life. Often people, who are not ready for this will lose their faith, stop going to church, break-up a long-term relationship, give in to regretful living or turn their faces to the wall. Such times have to be endured and not everyone comes out of them. But when we realize that we do not need to keep playing the tunes of our first half of life we can move into a second half simplicity which embraces a simple trust in spite of the difficulties rather than because we have solved them.

I wonder whether the content of a retreat needs to bear in mind the different needs of the first and second half of life and the forceful torrent of what goes between them when it is being prepared. Perhaps a series of retreats built around these three stages of life would be helpful.

*John Rackley*