

Recognizing the Divine in Others: More with Dr. Stephen Post

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Announcer:

Greetings and welcome to Mind Matters News. This week we're wrapping up our discussion with Dr. Stephen Post on his upcoming book, *Pure Unlimited Love: Science and the Seven Paths to Inner Peace*. Here's your guest host for today, Dr. Michael Egnor. Enjoy.

Michael Egnor:

One thing that I think we kind of leave out in this, not out of malice or anything, but I think that God has to play a role in this. That is that as long as we are trying to make ourselves happy, trying to spread love using all sorts of philosophical perspective and techniques, those are all good. But as a Christian, I believe the way, the truth and the life is Jesus Christ. And I think, personally, I think that's the only way out of this mess, or he's the only way out of this mess and he's the only way out of any mess. How do you feel about religion, about Christianity in light of what's happening in our world today?

Stephen Post:

Right. Well, I've been an Episcopalian all my life. I have a friend who's an orthoped with a Navy background, and he says that the Catholic Church to the Episcopal church is like the Navy to the Coast Guard. That's a little bit over the top. But I do go to mass on Sundays, early on Sundays, and I'm Eucharistic in my orientation. I went to the University of Chicago Divinity School as well as a psychology program, but it was a mix and studied world religions, including Christianity, but also all the eastern religions, Hinduism and Buddhism and the like. And in Hinduism they teach that the supreme being is a combination really of three elements, first, love, second, freedom, and third, creativity. And so the universe comes into being in a kind of a Big Bang format, and we are here on this earth to honor those qualities in one another.

So I was at Geriatric Hospital in Mount Vernon, Ohio. I spent many years in Ohio. It was a psychiatric hospital and they had a whole unit for individuals who had gotten older, they were now elderly, they also had down syndrome. And individuals with Down syndrome who get into their 50s almost ubiquitously show a decline from these hard-earned gains over the course of a lifetime. They can no longer work in these simple menial jobs, their behavior deteriorates.

So Joe Foley, the famous neurologist and I, we were great friends. We went to this hospital and these individuals in the unit were completely out of control, totally chaotic. And then into the unit walked a group of four or five nurses aides, and they all happened to be Hindus, Mike. And they lived in Mount Vernon, Ohio, you might wonder why, well they were committed to what they were doing. They had a small apartment and they would come into this hospital every day, and as soon as they came in, the people in it would calm down. They just calmed down.

And Joe, who'd been the head of the American Neurological Association, the Neurology Society and so forth, we took two of them out to lunch at a pizza place in Gambier, Ohio where Kenyon College is located. And we asked them, "So you are so diligent and so kind and caring with these very challenging individuals, how do you do it? Why is it that they calm down so beautifully?" And those nurses aides said to us, "Namaste." And in India, that's a greeting. It's a little deeper than how are you. It means, "I honor the divine in you, namu myōhō renge kyō. The divine is the lotus that comes out of the mud."

And when we realize that every person has within them that divine capacity of "spiritual resilience" then we can honor them. It's like a Dostoevsky novel of people who are hopelessly evil, it would seem, but then there's always a resurrection of a sort, sometimes at the very end of life. This is the great story about Ivan Ilyich by Tolstoy, who is a perfect son of a gun, nasty to his wife, to his kids, doesn't have a warmth in him at all but then he has a near death experience, if you want to call it that. And as he comes out of this, his son's hand is on his hand. And for the first time in years, Ivan Ilyich feels love for his son, compassionate love. And then he sees his wife in the distance and he feels love for her as well. And then he can actually put his feet up and he can lie down and he dies. But he dies in what they called the *Ars Moriendi*, the Art of Dying in the Medieval period.

And that was all because of a breaking in of divine presence. Even toward the end, hopefully these things happen a little earlier on. You don't have to wait until you're at death's door. But I think we always have to be optimistic. And these nurse aides were fantastic. They set the sample, the standard for everybody in that unit. How do you really approach a person with a kind voice? How do you try to communicate with them even though they may not have spoken for a long time? But if you ask the right sorts of questions with the right kind of structure, you can oftentimes let them rediscover some of their continuing self-identity. So for me, yeah, having some sense of the divinity in every human being is extremely important. And that's where unlimited love, pure unlimited love comes in, because I think that when we have that foundation, which is a matter of faith and experience too, then we can behave in ways that are highly inspiring for others.

Michael Egnor:

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn reflected deeply on the 20th century, particularly obviously on communism and on the ills of the world. And he felt that it all came down to a single fact, and the fact was that we had forgotten God. And if one sets God aside, all havoc breaks loose. And I must say just... And when I was younger, I was not a particularly religious person, but culture was much more Christian when I was younger. In school, we would have Christmas pageants and sing Christmas carols, religious Christmas carols. I remember as a very young child praying in school, I prayed before the Supreme Court said we couldn't. We've lost a lot of that. And I think Solzhenitsyn kind of got the diagnosis right, and I think that's driving a lot of our problems.

The other thing he said that I think is tremendously profound, and I think about a lot because I am involved politically and ideologically and so on, but Solzhenitsyn said that, "The line between good and evil goes through every human heart." That is that you don't look for evil out there as much as you should look forward in yourself. There's a wonderful story, I believe it's true, that G.K. Chesterton entered an essay contest. And the question in the essay contest was, "What's wrong with the world?" And it was like a thousand word limit, people wrote all these essays, they got thousands of things, and he won the contest. And he only wrote two words. He said, "I am." So when I think a lot myself about what's wrong with the world, and believe me, I think about that a lot, I always try to remind myself that I am, meaning that I'm part of the problem and I try to keep my part of the problem as small as possible.

Stephen Post:

Well, a couple of things. One thing to say is that a week and a half ago I was with Solzhenitsyn's son, Ignat Solzhenitsyn, who is a famous pianist, and he teaches at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. He played *The Sheep Gently Grazing*, Bach's great piece. And I was seated next to Jane Goodall, who I'd known for many, many years. This was at the awarding of the Templeton Prize to a fellow known as the Green Patriarch, the Archbishop of Constantinople, sort of the Pope of all the Orthodox churches. And it was very, very beautiful.

Jane commented when she was introducing the Green Patriarch that she grew up in Cambridge, England. And the most treasured thing about her experience as a child was that she grew up in a Christian family. Now, a lot of people wouldn't know that about Jane Goodall. They know her wonderful work about non-human primates, that they're not just all swashbuckling nasty killers. She changed our whole attitude to the so-called ape within. But I think that so many of these individuals who do phenomenal things are deeply immersed in their Christian origins.

So in the book, by the way, the fourth chapter is, May You Raise Kind Children, and that includes spirituality and religion. It includes a lot of different practical interventions that my institute funded. \$4 million, we funded all of the great Renaissance scholars 35 years ago who were studying how to raise kind children. And I will say that having a structure, a grand narrative of how the divine works in the world is very important. And when parents are struggling and they have children, they'll oftentimes go back to the church of their origins because they find that there's so much value in there. They need, in fact, the support of a spiritual community to create those kind children. And those children will be healthier and happier mentally and physically over the course of their lifetimes in general. So that's really an important thing to me.

But then I also believe that we need to, and I point this out, there's a chapter called May You Cherish the Gift of Nature, we need to really re-center ourselves on nature, not to be worshiped in and of itself, but as a gift of the divine creativity. All the awe, all the wonder of nature is something for us to connect with and to flourish with. There's a chapter, May You Honor the Spirit of Freedom, and there I quote Solzhenitsyn. I also quote Dostoevsky in *The Grand Inquisitor* because I don't think we can fully understand freedom, Mike, if we just think of in terms of a dog trying to chew through a leash-

Michael Egnor:

Sure, sure.

Stephen Post:

... in some sort of purely Darwinian sense. I'm a believer that freedom is something that we have within us at a spiritual level. Well, the Hindus would say that that's one of the three key aspects of the divine. I think Christianity would agree with that. So that we treasure, we cherish our freedom, not because we are purely material beings, but because there is something within us that is part and parcel and connected with this divinity in the universe, so I believe in that.

My four times over grandfather, John McLean was an evangelical Methodist. He was born in New Jersey, and then in the second Great Awakening before the Civil War, he went out to Cincinnati and he eventually became a Supreme Court justice. So if you go to the Capitol Rotunda, there's his robe beautifully situated in their little museum area. And he was a founder of the Republican Party. He was one of the two founders of the Republican Party. Three, I'm sorry, three. And he was one of only two Republicans on the Supreme Court when *Dred Scott* was decided.

And he coined the term, which became famous in the Civil War, "Once free, always free," or otherwise stated, if you put one toe in free territory, you're free forever. So he was in the dissent. The two Republicans were in the dissent, the seven Democrats were all slave owners, and they of course had the majority and they sent *Dred Scott* back to his owner. And in my growing up, the narrative of John McLean...

In fact, I was invited back to Cincinnati about 10 years ago to give a talk to the Cincinnati Women's Club about John McLean and what he meant to me. I grew up on anti-slavery. Martin Luther King was a Republican. I don't know if people realize that. And John McLean, there's a book out now called *Lincoln and his mentors* and John McLean figures prominently because he was in Cincinnati near the Kentucky

border, and he knew Lincoln very well and was a mentor for him as a youth and also for Grant. Grant and Lincoln were complete abolitionists. I mean, Lincoln had a hard time owning up to that because of the political pressure. So he didn't really do that until a little after the Battle of Antietam with the Emancipation Proclamation.

But I'm honored to think that John McLean, who was an evangelical abolitionist, that he had a lot of influence and built the Republican Party in the year when Lincoln was nominated for the Republican candidacy for President, his main competition was John McLean, but John McLean was 74 there, and his health was failing, so he wanted to step back and he loved Lincoln and he wanted Lincoln to go forward. So Lincoln loved this guy, and when Lincoln gave his first inaugural, it was raining out on the Rotunda area. And the person standing under him in those wonderful pictures by Brady is my great, great, great-grandfather, John McLean. And he caught pneumonia in the cold rain, and they didn't have antibiotics to speak of at the time at all. So he eventually two weeks later, went home to Cincinnati and he died there fairly quickly.

But I think we need to realize that the political parties in our culture, there's no perfection. But it was the Republican Party, and I'm not trying to be partisan here... I knew Bobby Kennedy pretty well, and in fact, I had the experience of being out there in California when he was assassinated in that hotel. But that was then and now is today, and I think we have to step back and be more truthful about the legacies of our politics and be open-minded about people who view things positively, certainly on the Republican side, they're not to be demonized. There's too much demonization going on now. And even in medical schools. I love my faculty. I never talk politics. I never want to because I know that it will be so acrimonious. I'm shocked. I'm from Ohio pretty much, and it's sort of a half-and-half, and you can have these open debates and be respectful. This idea, again, exacerbated by the internet, that you have to kill anybody who doesn't hold your own party line. I think that's just terrifying. And we cannot have a country that lives in that domain.

Michael Egnor:

Well, do you think we will have a country that is... Where do you think we're heading?

Stephen Post:

Well, I have a CD in my car. I still have a car that plays CDs, by the way, hard to find.

Michael Egnor:

We can edit that out if you'd like?

Stephen Post:

No, no, no, no.

Michael Egnor:

Okay.

Stephen Post:

I love CDs. And so I'm always looking for used Cars that have CDs in them, they're harder and are to find. I'm driving a Jeep Compass now because it has an old one from 2014. It really matters to me for some reason. But I have a beautiful CD of Lincoln's speeches performed by great actress, like Jason Robards and so forth. And when he said, "With malice toward none, let us not be enemies," he was speaking

truths that we need to hear again and listen to more carefully because we did wind up in a civil war. And I'm not sure that Fort Sumter as an initiating event was categorically different than what's happening in say, Portland, Oregon and some other places.

And Portland is a pretty... It's not too far from Seattle, of course. And I went to Reed College and Steve Jobs slept on my floor when it was raining out. And we read the Autobiography of the Yogi. I was still going to an Episcopal church in Portland. Steve wasn't, and he was not someone that everybody got along with. I got along with him well. He was only there for a year, and then he went off to India to an ashram. And I didn't hear from him or communicate with him until 2008 when I came here from Cleveland, from Case Western. And a friend of mine was at our graduation, our high school graduation up in New Hampshire, Pierre Roulon Miller. And I asked him, "You must know Steve Jobs," because he was in the Palo Alto area. And I said, you have his email. And he gave me his email. It was steve@apple.com.

So he said, "You can email him, but don't ever tell him who told you his email number." So I did email him and I said, "Do you remember that you used to sleep on my floor and it was raining out," and it rains a lot in Oregon. And he actually responded. And he said, "Yes, he did, and thank you very much." He was in the process of dying at that time. But Oregon is Oregon and it's an unusual place. It has great beauty and great institutions, and yet somehow or another, it's become a hotbed for real anarchism. It's anarchy, it's all it is.

Michael Egnor:

Right.

Stephen Post:

And it's very dangerous, and people feel they cannot safely go downtown or enjoy the city at all. And I think this is something to be truly worried about.

Michael Egnor:

Yeah, yeah, for sure. Well, we certainly could use a lot of love, and that's what your book is all about. Personally, I think we also need Christ.

Stephen Post:

Yes, I'm for that. I'm for that. I'm with you on that.

Michael Egnor:

Well, it's been fascinating, and of course this topic could go on forever, meaning we can talk about medical things, because obviously there's so much happening in medical ethics regarding euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, abortion, the transgender stuff.

Stephen Post:

Many things.

Michael Egnor:

Those are deep topics.

Stephen Post:

Very.

Michael Egnor:

But perhaps we should deal with them in different podcasts.

Stephen Post:

Yeah, I'd be happy to. I'd be happy to.

So it's always great to be with you, Mike, and I'm going to give you a hard copy of this book as soon as I get one. It should be out in a couple of weeks.

Michael Egnor:

I thank you so much. I look forward to it very, very much.

Stephen Post:

Okay. It will be signed with warmth.

Michael Egnor:

With love, with love.

Stephen Post:

Okay.

Michael Egnor:

So thank you very much. I've been speaking with my close friend and colleague, Dr. Stephen Post. And Stephen's new book, which I very much want to read is Pure Unlimited Love: Science and the Seven Paths to Inner Peace. So thank you, Steve, and we will speak again shortly. Thank you.

Stephen Post:

And you're right, you got to have inner peace before we can have peace in the world.

Michael Egnor:

Without question, without question. Thank you so much. This is Mike Egnor for Mind Matters News. Thank you for listening.

Announcer:

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