

## Entitlement

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I never attended a non-religious school until the early 1960s, when I spent two summer quarters at Stanford University taking courses in their department of education.

The rest of my education was received in Catholic Schools – elementary (1940s), high school (late 1940s, early 1950s), and college (mid 1950s). But overlaid on this Catholic School education was an intense 24/7 nine-year period (1949-1957) devoted to the practice and training to live as a religious monk. The prescribed rule of conduct and the daily regimen for this education had first been set out in the 1680s by a priest from Rheims France named John Baptist De La Salle who founded a religious teaching order that came to be known as the Brothers of the Christian Schools.

In turn, his rule – as did that of most other religious orders – borrowed heavily from the Rule of St. Benedict, which was written in the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. In effect, all my teenage and college years of religious training were based on a regimen dating back at least 15 centuries.

In addition to receiving a traditional and classic education, living the life of a religious monk at such a young age provided me with some extraordinary learning opportunities – how to live with other males in a close knit community, how to meditate, how to study, how to set goals and apportion time efficiently, how to perform manual labor, how to make my bed, dress myself, take care of my clothing, etc., how to be silent, how to listen, how to sing Gregorian Chant in choir and perform liturgical services, and I learned how to set personal boundaries, to respect authority and tradition, to develop a code of personal discipline and the need for accountability.

On the other hand, I received no training in interacting with or being in the company of females, I learned almost nothing about the social graces associated with living outside a monastery, nor did I receive any education about human sexuality except the often repeated warnings about forming particular friendships with other monks. (While never explicitly stated, the fear was such exclusive friendships would lead to homosexuality).

However, the one attribute from my religious monastic experience that impacted me the most and stayed with me long after I had moved on from monastic life to a life with new careers and married responsibilities was that of entitlement. I felt entitled.

Entitlement is a two-edge sword. It can generate a sense of empowerment that is a powerful motivator to accomplish the seemingly impossible; it does not accept no as a final answer. I can do this! I will do this! I have to do this! I deserve this! I will work harder than others! I will overcome! In defeat are sown the seeds of victory! Si Se Puede!

The other edge: I am better than others! I have been chosen and called to do this! The work I undertake is more valuable than the work others choose! I am right when all others are wrong!

In my case the entitlement stemmed from the religious notion of being called to service: God has chosen me and I have responded. In fact, the Catholic Church makes just such a distinction in its explanation of the hierarchical importance of its members.

The clerical state: ordained priests, men and women of religious orders who have taken vows of poverty, chastity and obedience are placed in the highest status of church membership. They have responded to the call of dedicating their lives to the service of God and have pledged to live a life of celibacy.

The laity: non-clerical members of the church who have been baptized and follow its tenets and for the most part seek the married life.

Additionally, the Church ranks a life of celibacy higher than a life of marriage.

Throughout my monastic religious training, this hierarchical ranking of clerical - special - vs laity - ordinary - was reinforced in ways both obvious and subtle.

For example, the religious monastic state required the participant to leave the secular world and his/her family behind, to forsake the family name for a new name given by religious superiors; to wear a religious uniform that set one apart from those in the non-religious state who wear traditional clothing. Visiting family and relatives was infrequent, highly regulated and took place in a monitored environment. Even personal mail was censored.

Essentially, I learned that if I wanted to live in the highest-ranked church status, it was necessary to leave any previous life and live a new one that was deemed superior.

This sense of entitlement carried over into my religious teaching career. Because of my status, I expected to be treated with deference and respect not only by students but by their parents, relatives and the public-at-large. I was not to be contradicted and my classroom decisions were deemed to be final. Because of my higher church status, I deserved this special treatment.

However, much to my surprise, I found during the course of my brief postgraduate work at Stanford University, a sense of personal entitlement is found not only in religion but also in academia.

In my first class, taught by a visiting professor from McGill University, we were informed that because we had been accepted by Stanford, we were in a privileged academic category. His reasoning went something like this: Stanford accepted only the most qualified, the highest ranked and the most deserving applicants, therefore it was incumbent on him to treat us as such and he intended to do so.

If we deigned to attend his class on a more or less regular basis, we would automatically earn a C grade. Further, if we participated in the class, we would receive a B grade. In addition, those who turned in the prescribed “papers” would receive an A grade. Mind you! This was the early 1960s, many decades before any type of grade inflation was tolerated in academia.

In essence, this well-known and highly regarded professor was simply acknowledging the obvious – graduate students accepted into Stanford had already been judged to be the best and were entitled to receive special treatment - in his class this was his way of showing his respect for their privileged status.

Leaving religious life in 1965 at the age of 31-years to work with Cesar Chavez and his fledgling farmworker movement was cultural sea change – a fish without water!

