Our Life as a Gift

Building Self-Identity through Wonder

The rise of anxiety and chronic depression, especially among young people has led many to question why the modern self-identity seems so fragile. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor contrasts a modern version of self-identity, how one sees oneself, with an older view of the self, one more open to grace, nature, and the divine. In earlier times, people discovered who they were through family, community, faith, and shared history. The modern self, by contrast, builds walls of independence, separating identity from family, tradition, and the sense that life might be shaped by something greater than ourselves. The modern self-identity claims a radical independence.

Young people, especially, may think they have a self-made identity. Trying to claim independence isn't really a new phenomenon. However, as we mature, we should see that no one is really independent of their culture. Today's secular and technology-driven world creates its own issues. Social media tempts us to measure our worth by likes, clicks, and followers. What appears to be freedom — the power to define ourselves — often hides a deep insecurity. We become dependent on the approval of others to measure our own self-worth.

Psychiatrist and author Iain McGilchrist offers a similar insight. He argues that modern culture has come to be ruled by the left hemisphere of the brain — by analysis, control, and abstraction. We live by models and metrics, forgetting the living reality they were meant to represent. What Taylor calls the modern self, McGilchrist describes as the "left-hemisphere world," one that values mastery over meaning, efficiency over relationship, and control over wonder.

Taylor invites us to remember the moral and spiritual realities that give life its direction. McGilchrist calls for a "revolution in attention," an awakening to the world as gift, something to be received with gratitude rather than managed or consumed. The challenge of Taylor and McGilchrist is deeply personal: *Do I approach life as something to control, to measure, or to quantify, or as something to receive with wonder and humility?*

Reality is always larger than our ideas about it. Life is not a project we invent but a gift we are invited to live. Meaning, beauty, and love are not things we create; they are already woven into the fabric of existence by our Creator. Our sense of the sacred – our longing for connection, our intuition that life means more — these are the whispers of grace calling us to a greater identity.

The fragile, anxious self of our age is healed not through greater self-definition but through deeper belonging: to God, and through Him, to one another. When we receive the truth that we are beloved children of a generous Creator God, everything begins to change. We grow freer, more loving, and more at peace. And like St. Paul, we can begin to say with quiet confidence, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

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