

# Only soul can negotiate life with depth, meaning



REV. DAVID STRONG

Mates. I find them exciting reading.

His books have been at the top of the New York Times best selling list for the past two months. A long article about him appeared in a daily paper last week. Raised a Catholic on Detroit's east side, Moore has something to tell us about the soul. His books are about the individual soul, how we feed the soul, how our society ignores the soul. Yet his books also provide us insights into social values and social problems.

Our congregation is hosting homeless people this week. The women, children and men whom I have talked with might be consid-

ered different from you and me. Yet Moore helps us see a connection between these people and our own condition. The homelessness we see on our city streets is a reflection of a deeper homelessness we feel in our hearts.

"The trash on our streets, the abandoning of old buildings and the construction of cheap housing reflect our souls which, dimly, also reflect our anger at the world. Our trash," says Moore, "is a reminder — not yet healed by imagination — of the past we have neglected."

These are meanings for us to ponder. Moore believes that our soul is connected with everything that we encounter. Places and things have soul when they are part of our memory. Things of the past may have meaning and beauty even though they have lost their practical function. Our mania with antiques has the quality of a search for roots in the past. For Moore, everything, including everything thought to be negative, is food for the soul.

What is the soul? We would like to have a neat definition. Yet,

this desire for definitions is itself a symptom of our lack of soul. Soul is impossible to define. It is close to imagination, to music, beauty, to the meaning of a special tree or hillside. Soul is an attachment of the heart. Soul is not so much about change as about depth. Soul grows through deep observation and acceptance.

"Fulfilling work, rewarding relationships, personal power and relief from symptoms are all gifts of the soul. They are particularly elusive in our time because we don't believe in the soul . . . (from the introduction to 'Care of the Soul')"

Moore's most recent book is "Soul Mates." Have you ever felt a particularly strong attraction to another person? We need to honor the mystery of such experiences and sort out what they mean to the soul. Psychology and morality may well fail to lead us through such important encounters in our lives. Only our soul can negotiate life with depth and ultimate meaning so that we honor the depth of our personhood and the personhood of others.

The writings of Moore face us

with the question: Can we have religion or morality without soul? Is America looking for the "quick fix?" Have we depersonalized and objectified faith to such an extent that, for example, there is no deep learning from negative experience? Is confessing your sins enough to do the job? Moore thinks not.

For Moore, even depression and body illness may contribute to a person if they are examined by the soul. He is very critical of religions that seek to rid us of our encounter with trouble or pain. Such a religion keeps us from discovering meaning in the dark night of the soul. I have discovered that his observations are true.

Ponder the question. What is sacred in everyday life? The question challenges our unexamined assumption that everything is secular, without the aura of God's creative love. For example, ecology is not an earth science. It is a question concerning our home, our soul's response to the home in which we live.

A friend of mine went into the hospital for a very serious illness.

In the process he lost about 100 pounds. He told me that as he went through these life threatening troubles he felt that he was surrounded by an aura of prayer. This is a tough, down-to-earth man. I am heartened by his witness of soul. He has grown from his trying experience.

Finally, I like the insight of Thomas Moore that soul is nurtured by the simple decision to

pay attention. Soul grows through small things, such as flowers, birds and quiet walks that feed us tidbits of meaning. Soul cultivating is a great adventure. Moore's writings are good guides in this adventure.

The Rev. David Strong is pastor of Central United Methodist Church in Detroit. If you have a question or comment, call him at 853-2047, mailbox number 1878.

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