

Bart Brenner - A FieldGuide

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As a result of recent readings (Rowan Williams, Jonathan Sacks, John Caputo, Peter Rollins, Elizabeth Boyden Howes, Walter Wink, Richard Rohr) I have been doing a lot of reflecting about who I am and how I got that way, as well as how I relate to the world around me. Here is one result of those musings.

Overview — According to one testing instrument I am an **I**nverted **i**Ntuitive **T**hinking **P**erceiver.

I am highly *intuitive*, meaning that I am always scanning my environment, picking up clues and cues — many of which I am unaware, even though my thoughts, feelings, and actions will be based on those clues and cues. I have learned to trust my intuition.

As a *perceiver* I am constantly collecting data from the situations and people around me. Usually I prefer to continue amassing the data, rather than acting upon that which has already been collected.

Being *introverted* I must process ‘stuff’ (thoughts, feelings, relational input) before acting upon it. In fact, until I have had time to process inwardly, I am not sure what my thoughts and feelings are. My *intuition* functions rapidly; my *introverted processing*, much more slowly.

Even though I have deep feelings, my *thinking* takes precedence. I have far more ready access to my *thoughts* than to my feelings. I tend to *organize* by *thoughts* and store by feelings. I have learned to be more extroverted in my thinking patterns. Extroverts have to get thoughts out before they know what they are thinking; *introverts* must process first and then offer complete thoughts. While I have learned to be somewhat more extroverted in my thought processes, I am still an *introverted thinker*.

Relational Specifics —

1. I place a high value on **friendship**

- a) I have few close friends, but those friendships tend to be ones that will continue to deepen. My intuition works overtime in gathering clues and cues about the deepening possibilities of friendships.
- b) When it seems that a particular friendship has reached its potential depth, I am willing to maintain it at that level, but don't then put in extra effort to take it deeper.

- c) The friendships that continue to deepen without seeming limitation are precious and few.

2. I place a high value on personal **integrity** (I have adapted the following from Henry Cloud, *Integrity*)

- a) I am able to connect with others and build trust. I believe that there is a delicate balance between trust being given and trust being earned or forfeited. I tend to give trust before it is earned and am willing to maintain (and/or re-establish) trust when circumstances tend toward trust being forfeited. I don't do well with those who have trouble giving or receiving trust.
- b) I am oriented toward reality. I try not to waste time trying to re-live the past or predicting the future. The 'here-and-now' is all I have to work with. I don't do well with those who are overly focused on either the past or the future.
- c) I embrace the negative. I continue to search out my negative, shadow side and integrate it with my conscious thoughts and actions. I don't do this perfectly, but attend to criticisms and negative feedback that come to me through my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. I don't do well with those who deny their shadow side, while living out of their reactivity.
- d) I am oriented toward increase. I tend to add 'good' to 'good' in order to get better. While it is sometimes necessary to undo or overcome the 'bad,' that can only be done by adding 'good' (not by adding more 'bad'). I don't do well with those whose focus is on eradicating the 'bad' (since they are most likely reacting against their unrecognized shadow).
- e) I have an understanding of the transcendent. My life is not lived only on the surface. I encounter transcendent qualities by entering more deeply into thoughts, feelings, and relationships — not by trying to get 'above' or 'beneath' them. I don't do well with those who aren't willing to dig more deeply into thoughts, feelings, and/or relationships.
- f) I continue to grow. I am committed to life-long learning, the process of exposing myself to new ideas and relationships in order that I might be in a continual process of transformation — that is, becoming more fully the human being that I can be. I don't do well with those whose growth (mental, emotional, spiritual) has stopped.

I place a high value on **loyalty**

- a) I am dependable and reliable
- b) When I commit to someone or something, I stick with them or it.

I place a high value on being **present**

- a) See 2a above
- b) At times my 'presence' is so focused that it blocks out all surrounding input
- c) Life is too precious to waste it on trying to un-do and then do-over past mistakes or to try to anticipate what is coming.

Extroverted Sensing Feeling Judgers frustrate me and are frustrated by me

When I am present to an individual or a group, I strive to be open to the possibilities of the moment. That open presence is my giving my all to the situation. Self-disclosure, for me, is a slow process that happens over time. That slowness is not a problem for me because I am in friendships for the long haul. If it seems as if I am not contributing, it may well be that I am still processing thoughts and feelings. Sometimes the resolution of that processing occurs after the immediate situation has passed.

Faith Journey Overview —

With some timidity over the course of my serving as a Presbyterian minister, maintaining some sense of integrity, it has taken me some 75 years to begin to move with a mildly revolutionary spirit. What have been the elements of my psychic migration, my faith journey, and my personal history that have driven / led me? What elements held me back? What choices did I make or not make? To what script(s) have I been playing?

I grew up in a family where faith was nominally important, but not overly stressed. I grew up in a family where learning was expected. While Mom and Dad were always church members, during most of my Junior and Senior High School years, their church attendance was very spotty. As expected, I became a church member (before I really understood what that might mean). Back as far as I can remember, it was assumed / expected that I would go to college. For some unknown reason, I started attending church regularly during my Senior year in High School. This was the prelude to my being very active in the United Christian Fellowship (UCF) throughout my four years at Bowling Green State University.

UCF was probably the most crucial part of my formation as an adult during those college years. In addition to finding my life mate, I was to experience a continuing process of faith formation (with an emphasis on intellectual development) through study groups, retreats, and conferences. It was during this time that ordained ministry became an option for me.

I don't remember when I first articulated the phrase *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith seeking understanding") as a focus for my life. It is clear, however, that this has been a consistent, insistent passion of my adult life. In truth, the organizing center of my continuing formation might better be characterized as *dubium quaerens intellectum* ("doubt in search of understanding").

I suspect that my love of science had conditioned my approach to issues of faith; likewise, having been introduced to a religious environment (a liberal/progressive pastor during my teen-age years and UCF during college) where questioning and questing were affirmed, conditioning my willingness to integrate faith and science. Scientific advances in understanding the origins and development of our universe have raised questions about our understandings of God, causing significant reformulations. And, if our understandings of God change, then all of our theological formulations must be re-considered. I find this to be an exciting (and necessary) challenge.

The one other factor in my continuing faith formation was an underlying mystical temperament. I am comfortable with mystery and not knowing, even though my intellectual make-up keeps searching for answers (or perhaps more accurately, for values). Carl Jung was asked whether he believed in God. His response, "I don't believe; I know." My mysticism has kept open a wide space for questioning and doubting, because at some level "I know."

To put all these insights together... *fides quaerens intellectum* was a mask for *dubium quaerens intellectum* which was, in truth, *dubium quaerens integritas* ("doubt in search of integrity"). For me, faith has always been strongly admixed with doubt; conversely, my doubting has always been confronted within the context of my faithing. The aspiration of this synthesis of my faithing and doubting has always been intellectual integrity as a foundation for the integrity of my life's practice. My life's practice is my faithing. Intellectual integrity is simply the measure of the quality of that putting faith into practice, of attempting to follow the Way of Yeshua, of living in / into the Commonwealth of Peace and Justice.

Have I arrived? Is my faith formation complete? Have I fully integrated the radical "good news" of Yeshua's life and teachings? No! However, it is clear that I have not been derailed by the disclosure of the radical nature of the beginnings of what has become the Christian faith. In fact, what discourages me and knocks me off track is any formulation of faith that dictates a non-willingness to change (or even be exposed to change). The challenge to confront new situations imbued with new information opens the possibility for new experiences and expanded life. I suspect this is some of what Yeshua meant when he said (or when John wrote the words as if coming from Yeshua's mouth), "I have come that they may have life, and life abundantly." While I am not 100% sure where the origins of this are in me, I am thankful for the gift of an inner insistence that continues to seek, question, and doubt.