

DEVELOPING YOUR OWN SPIRITUALITY

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UNIT TWO SESSION THREE: The three pillars



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*What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! In form and moving, how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust!*¹



*'For most of my life I have been a Rationalist ... my name appearing regularly with that of Bertrand Russell as a derider of religion ... All things, I held, are theoretically discoverable by reason, and when the universe had ceased to be mysterious, God would go to the scrapheap of man's discarded superstitions ... Then came the war, and the existence of evil made its impact upon me as a positive and obtrusive fact. All my life it has been staring me in the face; now it hit me ...' (Cyril Joad) goes on to say that he had been taught to believe that the evil in man was due to economic circumstances or other such explanations, that if certain things were only removed, good would prevail and virtue reign. 'I have come flatly to disbelieve all this', he said. 'I see now that evil is endemic in man, and the Christian doctrine of original sin expresses a deep and essential insight into human nature. Reject it and you fall victim, as so many of us whose minds have developed in an atmosphere of left-wing politics and rationalist philosophy have fallen victim, to a shallow optimism in regard to human nature which causes you to think that the millennium is just around the corner waiting to be introduced by a society of adequately psychoanalyzed, prosperous Communists ...'*²



*Knowledge of God without that of our misery, equals pride. Knowledge of our misery without that of God equals despair. Knowledge of Jesus Christ strikes the balance since in him we find both God and our misery.*³



*In the image of God he created them ...*⁴



*For our sake God made the sinless one into sin, so that in him we might become the goodness of God.*⁵



¹ *Hamlet*, Act 2, Scene 2.

² Cyril Joad cited by Karl Menninger, "The Common Enemy", in W.A. Sadler (Ed.), *Personality and Religion*, Harper & Row, 1970, 240-242.

³ Blaise Pascal cited by B. Bro, *The Little Way*, Christian Classics, 1980, 64.

⁴ Genesis 1:27.

⁵ 2Corinthians 5:21.

THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN DIMENSION: GUIDING PRINCIPLE

**** All human beings have within their nature a twofold potential – we are all capable of being in the world for good or ill.***

**** No human being can ever exercise absolute control of either the forces of good or evil in their lives***



An emerging view of the human

We have begun to look more closely at what it means to be a human being. We have, in effect, begun to develop a *formation anthropology*. Since our course is about *human* life formation – and presumably we are all keen to grow in our *humanity* – it makes sense to be quite deliberate in responding to the question: What is *human*? We all, of necessity, respond to this question at least implicitly every day.

All of us have some view of what it means to be human – ie everyone has a formation anthropology, at least implicitly. This view of what it means to be human will be manifest in the things we value, how we spend our time, the way we respond to the various demands of life and how we generally behave towards ourselves and others. We can know more about an individual's formation anthropology by attending carefully to their behaviour rather than simply listening to the words which purport to express their beliefs.

In developing our formation anthropology so far in this course, we have spoken particularly of:

- *spirit* as the ultimate ground in which, and through which our lives unfold – all human life formation is ultimately *spiritual* formation;⁶
- and the deepest manifestation of *spirit* is *freedom* as an essential human potential – it is at the core of the human life formation process; life is an inside-out-process, one of emergence into ever-increasing freedom;⁷ we have used the summary expression: “formation is liberation;” freedom is, ultimately, the ability to be who and what I must be;
- we emphasized *relationships* as of the essence of this spiritual formation towards greater freedom – human life formation is formation *through* and *of* and *in* relationships with God (however you name God), with yourself, with other people and with the events and things of your world;⁸

⁶ Cf Unit One, Sessions One and Three.

⁷ Cf Unit One, Session Three.

⁸ Cf Unit One, Session Two.

- and those *relationships* form and are formed in a *full field of formation* in which context human beings become what they are – human life formation is a process of constant, never-ending interaction of five different polarities;⁹
- we emphasized *transcendence* – from the Latin roots, *trans* meaning “across,” and *scandere* meaning “to climb” – as the critical movement characterizing human life formation; we are all always tending towards “the beyond” and “the more than,” enough is never enough; this is a primary manifestation of *spirit* and *freedom*;¹⁰
- and the concomitant pattern of *dying-responding-re-emerging* that marks all human life formation – life is a never-ending “parting of the ways;”¹¹ to evade the dying is to die, to live the dying is to live;
- and how this pattern reveals life as *gift* – it reminds us that human life formation is ultimately a *graced movement*, a *graced emergence* in which our role is one of *facilitation* not mastery; two major signs of human authenticity are grace and freedom;¹²
- and we have used two metaphors to highlight various aspects of the human person:
 - *forms of the self* – *apparent, current, core, foundational*, all grounded in the *Eternal Form*;¹³
 - *structural self* – *sociohistorical, bodily, functional, transcendent*.¹⁴

All of the above have us constantly in the presence of life as a mystery to be lived rather than a problem to be solved. By “mystery” we mean *inexhaustible intelligibility*. A developing spirituality brings with it a deepening appreciation for mystery – the human mystery, the mystery that I am and that you are, the mystery that nature is and that unfolding life daily lays before me, all dim reflections and manifestations of the Great Mystery.

As we stand before the mystery that life is, in any and all its manifestations, we ask questions and develop thought constructs so that we might be more in awe of the truth of who and what we are in this world. The purpose is not to find a “definition” or a “set of answers.” That will only feed the illusion that we can control what we have defined. Nor is the purpose to avoid the questioning and the searching that must go on throughout life. To be human is to be a question to myself and to keep on expressing myself as a question in the world.¹⁵ The more deeply human I become the more of a question I am to myself and the world. This

⁹ Cf Unit One, Session Four.

¹⁰ Cf Unit One, Session Seven.

¹¹ Cf Unit Two, Session One.

¹² Cf Unit Two, Session One.

¹³ Cf Unit One, Session Seven;

¹⁴ Cf Unit Two, Session Two.

¹⁵ “In the word question, there is a beautiful word - quest. I love that word. We are all partners in a quest. The essential questions have no answers. You are my question, and I am yours - and then there is dialogue. The moment we have answers, there is no dialogue. Questions unite people. Answers divide them.” (Elie Wiesel, Tanner Lecture on Human Values at Snow College, 22 May 2006.)

is how it is with mystery – the more you know the more you know you do not know. Rilke was right: we must *live the questions*.

The questioning and searching, however, is done in a way that is open to the grace that lies at the heart of the mystery, for life is gracious, despite what may appear in a given set of circumstances. We live with the assumption and expectation that all is, in the end, gift. The very questioning and searching is in fact a manifestation of the *transcendent self* that I am. I am made for grace. My being is like a lode stone that points me towards grace and I cannot help but seek it.

My questioning and searching also implies a certain abandonment or surrender to life as process, to what we have called “the formation mystery.” Increasing silence and reverence about the human mystery will progressively overtake us as we open more and more to our transcendent possibilities, as our intimacy with the Great Mystery beyond the mystery grows. In that we begin to sense our full potential as human beings.¹⁶

Our potential for good or ill

Sooner or later our reflections on human life formation must bring us face to face with the troubling issue of good and evil and our part in them. Even the most cursory glance at history tells of much good and much evil. Is there one among us who could say, “My life has been entirely good, I have never been responsible for anything bad and I am never likely to be”? Or, is there any human being in the world about whom we could say, “That person is and has always been entirely and irredeemably bad”? We know ourselves and others to be a strange mix of good and bad. That is the way it is. It is our nature and no one who shares in that nature is exempt from the mix. This is poignantly expressed by Les Carlyon in his book on Gallipoli:

*Like the attack at Helles on August 6, the assault on Lone Pine was a diversion. As with the Helles attack, the casualties were high: more than 2,000 Australians, about 7,000 Turks. But Lone Pine was also that rare thing. On both sides it was an epic of savagery and sacrifice that leaves one wondering again at man's capacity to harbour, within the same brain and the same body, so much that is brutal and so much that is sublime.*¹⁷

We also know ourselves to be part of an existence that is similarly ambiguous. That existence is sometimes experienced as harmonious, predictable and very attractive. Sometimes, however it is experienced as dissonant,

¹⁶ There are two quite delightful and liberating qualities emerge in people who have grown into a deep intimacy with the Great Mystery. Their inclination to judge others has all but disappeared and their inclination to be acquisitive has similar all but disappeared. Life becomes much more focused and much more simple as we grow into the Great Mystery. This movement beyond definitions and answers shifts us gradually into a consciousness where judgments are out of place and possessions a burden.

¹⁷ Les Carlyon, *Gallipoli*, Macmillan, 2001, 357.

unpredictable and decidedly unattractive. “Shit happens,” as Forest Gump said. We humans will never be able to develop any system or ideology – not any institutional structure, not any political process, not any economic system, not any religious structure, not any system or organization at all – that is not shot through with this ambiguity.¹⁸ Whatever framework and structure we give to our lives – corporately and individually – must take into account our potential for both good and ill.

Isaiah Berlin is a leading historian of ideas. He is quoted at length here because he is very clear in articulating some of the practical matters of fact involved in the foregoing. Berlin writes:

The notion of the perfect whole, the ultimate solution, in which all good things coexist, seems to me to be not merely unattainable – that is a truism – but conceptually incoherent; I do not know what is meant by a harmony of this kind. Some among the Great Goods cannot live together. That is a conceptual truth. We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss. Happy are those who live under a discipline which they accept without question, who freely obey the orders of leaders, spiritual or temporal, whose word is fully accepted as unbreakable law; or those who have, by their own methods, arrived at clear and unshakeable convictions about what to do and what to be that brook no possible doubt. I can only say that those who rest on such comfortable beds of dogma are victims of forms of self-induced myopia, blinkers that may make for contentment, but not for understanding of what it is to be human.

Berlin is reminding us of something we all know from experience: There is no respite from searching, there can be no point at which we say we have “arrived” or attained a level of achievement beyond which there can be no improvement. There is no “final solution.” Life is a constant parting of the ways, leaving “this” behind in order to move towards “that.” Every choice implies a dying. We are inevitably haunted by “the more than,” “the beyond.” We are also inevitably haunted by the awful limits and peculiar fragility of each and every human enterprise. We may anaesthetize ourselves against this reality in various ways – with ideologies, dogmas, addictions of one kind or another, and so on – but these can hardly be held up as ideals are realistic ways to be adult human beings. Berlin goes on:

So much for the theoretical objection, a fatal one, it seems to me, to the notion of the perfect state as the proper goal of our endeavors. But there is in addition a more practical socio-psychological obstacle to this, an obstacle that may be

¹⁸ Sir Winston Churchill’s comment about democracy – frequently misquoted – is apropos: “It has been said that Democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” (From a speech in the House of Commons, November 1947.) John F Kennedy sounded a similar note when he said: “Democracy is never a final achievement. It is a call to untiring effort, to continual sacrifice and to the willingness, if necessary, to die in its defense.” (Speech in San Jose, Costa Rica, March 19, 1963.)

put to those whose simple faith, by which humanity has been nourished for so long, is resistant to philosophical arguments of any kind. It is true that some problems can be solved, some ills cured, in both the individual and social life. We can save men from hunger or misery or injustice, we can rescue men from slavery or imprisonment, and do good – all men have a basic sense of good and evil, no matter what cultures they belong to; but any study of society shows that every solution creates a new situation which breeds its own new needs and problems, new demands. The children have obtained what their parents and grandparents longed for – greater freedom, greater material welfare, a juster society; but the old ills are forgotten, and the children face new problems, brought about by the very solutions of the old ones, and these, even if they can in turn be solved, generate new situations, and with them new requirements – and so on, for ever – and unpredictably.

Are we “better off” generally than our grandparents? Are our children generally “better off” than we were at their age? And what do we mean by “better off”? We might be inclined to say, for example, that young people are much “better off” now than young people were say fifty years ago. If that is the case, how do we account for the increasing incidence of drug and alcohol abuse/addiction among them and the alarming suicide rates?¹⁹

When we do in fact move on, when we “progress” – and what an ambiguous concept that is – we bring our transcendent and fragile selves with us and so continue to seek the “more than”, to climb over the current boundaries and push forward to something “better” or at least different, too often in clumsy and even self-defeating ways. And, of course, we remain part of an existence that resists solutions. There is no solution to life. Yes, we can develop relative, limited, “for the time being” solutions, but these are always subject to the rider that life carries, “until further notice.” It is not surprising that both the fact and the metaphor of journey and pilgrimage pervade the human family’s experience. Berlin continues:

We cannot legislate for the unknown consequences of consequences of consequences. Marxists tell us that once the fight is won and true history has begun, the new problems that may arise will generate their own solutions, which can be peacefully realized by the united powers of harmonious, classless society. This seems to me a piece of metaphysical optimism for which there is

¹⁹ And it is not a satisfactory argument to say that young people committed suicide fifty years ago, that we just did not know about it. As a young person growing up in country NSW, I was aware of young people dying and I was aware of old people dying and I was aware of the occasional adult who hanged or shot himself or cut his own throat. I do not believe anything was withheld from us in that regard. Not once did I come across any of my adolescent peers committing suicide. Yet, there probably would not be a child in year 12 in Australia who does not know – or at least know of – someone his/her age who has committed suicide or at least attempted it. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 1998 more than 40,000 males and females between the ages of 15 and 24 attempted suicide. That is a rate of more than 100 per day. What is happening? I suggest one thing that needs closer examination: Much of what we identify as “progress” is technological and technological progress is not necessarily human progress. In the stunning technological progress we may have actually lost something precious in human terms?

no evidence in historical experience. In a society in which the same goals are universally accepted, problems can be only of means, all soluble by technological methods. That is a society in which the inner life of man, the moral and spiritual and aesthetic imagination, no longer speaks at all. Is it for this that men and women should be destroyed or societies enslaved? Utopias have their value – nothing so wonderfully expands the imaginative horizons of human potentialities – but as guides to conduct they can prove literally fatal. Heraclitus was right, things cannot stand still.

The romantic attitude to life, one that does not simply dream dreams but confuses the dreams with the concrete possibilities of human beings, is destructive. Such an attitude will inevitably endeavour to reduce people to bland conformity because it cannot possibly live with the actual possibilities of the unique person. Human beings are necessarily boundary-breakers, pilgrims, explorers. Conformity within any “final solution” can only be achieved at the cost of our humanity. What is more, even the dream of Utopia flies in the face of the harsh and inevitable realities of human selfishness, greed and other such universal characteristics. Berlin sums up:

So I conclude that the very notion of a final solution is not only impracticable but, if I am right, and some values cannot but clash, incoherent also. The possibility of a final solution even if we forget the terrible sense that these words acquired in Hitler's day – turns out to be an illusion; and a very dangerous one. For if one really believes that such a solution is possible, then surely no cost would be too high to obtain it: to make mankind just and happy and creative and harmonious for ever – what could be too high a price to pay for that? To make such an omelette, there is surely no limit to the number of eggs that should be broken – that was the faith of Lenin, of Trotsky, of Mao, for all I know of Pol Pot. Since I know the only true path to the ultimate solution of the problems of society, I know which way to drive the human caravan; and since you are ignorant of what I know, you cannot be allowed to have liberty of choice even within the narrowest limits, if the goal is to be reached. You declare that a given policy will make you happier, or freer, or give you room to breathe; but I know that you are mistaken, I know what you need, what all men need; and if there is resistance based on ignorance or malevolence, then it must be broken and hundreds of thousands may have to perish to make millions happy for all time. What choice have we, who have the knowledge, but to be willing to sacrifice them all?

Some armed prophets seek to save mankind, and some only their own race because of its superior attributes, but whichever the motive, the millions slaughtered in wars or revolutions – gas chambers, gulag, genocide, all the monstrosities for which our century will be remembered – are the price men must pay for the felicity of future generations. If your desire to save mankind is

serious, you must harden your heart, and not reckon the cost. The answer to this was given more than a century ago by the Russian radical Alexander Herzen. In his essay "From the Other Shore," which is in effect an obituary notice of the revolutions of 1848, he said that a new form of human sacrifice had arisen in his time – of living human beings on the altars of abstractions – nation, church, party, class, progress, the forces of history – these have all been invoked in his day and in ours: if these demand the slaughter of living human beings, they must be satisfied. These are his words:

If progress is the goal, for whom are we working? Who is this Moloch who, as the toilers approach him, instead of rewarding them, draws back; and as a consolation to the exhausted and doomed multitudes, shouting 'morituri te salutant', can only give the ... mocking answer that after their death all will be beautiful on earth. Do you truly wish to condemn the human beings alive today to the sad role .. of wretched galley slaves who, up to their knees in mud, drag a barge ... with ... 'progress in the future' upon its flag? ... a goal which is infinitely remote is no goal, only a deception; a goal must be closer – at the very least the labourer's wage, or pleasure in work performed.

The one thing that we may be sure of is the reality of the sacrifice, the dying and the dead. But the ideal for the sake of which they die remains unrealized. The eggs are broken, and the habit of breaking them grows, but the omelette remains invisible. Sacrifices for short-term goals, coercion, if men's plight is desperate enough and truly requires such measures, may be justified. But holocausts for the sake of distant goals, that is a cruel mockery of all that men hold dear, now and at all times.²⁰

Isaiah Berlin here describes well the complexity and ambiguity of existence, and the tragic consequences of not paying due attention to that in our political and social structures. We long for a better world, as if we knew in our beings that is what we are made for, yet our very efforts to achieve that better world fall over themselves and we so easily crush one another in the falling. There is, as it were, a fault line that runs right through our existence, our very nature as human beings. Alexander Solzhenitsyn expresses it with the force of one who has discovered it personally:

It was granted me to carry away from my prison years on my bent back, which nearly broke beneath its load, this essential experience: how a human being becomes evil and how good. In the intoxication of youthful successes I had felt myself to be infallible, and I was therefore cruel. In the surfeit of power I was a murderer, and an oppressor. In my most evil moments I was convinced that I

²⁰ Isaiah Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal" in Henry Hardy, ed, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, Alfred A Knopf, 1991, 13-16. "The crooked timber of humanity" is Emmanuel Kant's expression.

*was doing good, and I was well supplied with systematic arguments. And it was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either – but right through every human heart.*²¹

The romantics and idealists among us persist on speaking about, and perhaps working for, an ideal world that is unattainable here and now except in imagination and dream. The romantics are derided by a second group, cynics, because the cynics have come to terms with what they believe to be the hard facts – it is a jungle out there, full of two kinds of people, winners and losers, therefore, master or be mastered. Others work for a better world within the constraints of what is possible and not infrequently are forced to make sacrifices and compromises in this commitment, they must live constantly with the incompleteness and the shortfalls of existence as we know it. They know, for example, that sometimes compassion is the only realistic response – the most *human* response – to the situation that is forced upon us.

Berlin, however, goes on to raise a more sinister dimension to this ambivalent situation in which we find ourselves. The thirst for the better world – the utopia or ideal political system or the ascendancy of a certain “superior” culture or ideology and so on – has led people to some of the most horrible violence and destructive behavior. Using our terms, we could say that the *transcendence* dynamic which calls us beyond ourselves, is, in this instance, subverted and placed at the service of an egotistical project.²² That kind of ego-dominated behavior – as distinct from mystery-centred behavior – always deals death in the end. Listen to the observations of the English film director, the late Stanley Kubrick:

*Film director Stanley Kubrick observed in a an interview in 1972, one year after "Clockwork Orange": 'One of the most dangerous fallacies which has influenced a great deal of political and philosophical thinking is that man is essentially good, and that it is society which makes him bad Rousseau transformed original sin from man to society and this view has importantly contributed to what I believe has become a crucially incorrect premise on which to base moral and political philosophy.'*²³

From a purely human point of view we can and must acknowledge that the human person is capable of the most wonderful deeds and expressions of truth and goodness, that this emerges from something deep within our very nature. And no

²¹ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago (Parts III & IV)*, Harper & Row, 1976, 615.

²² Recall Aldous Huxley “downward transcendence” and even “horizontal transcendence” in “Appendix to *The Devils of Loudun*.”

²³ Cited by Bernard Weinraub in a January 4, 1972, *New York Times* article entitled, “Kubrick Tells What Makes *Clockwork Orange* Tick”. Note also Cyril Joad’s observations in the epigraph by Karl Menninger. Recall also Aldous Huxley’s essay, “Appendix” to *The Devils of Loudun* in *Readings for Christian Spirituality, Volume I*, 162-168.

one in their right mind would suggest we should not continually work for better ways of living together in society – better political structures, better laws, better economic systems, better medical care, more sustainable agriculture, a more just and compassionate society, and so on.

On the other hand, we also can and must acknowledge our ineradicable tendency to fall short and to cause others to fall short. More embarrassingly, we must acknowledge that the human person – each of us – is capable of the most horrible deeds – whether by act or omission. This capacity for evil also seems to emerge from deep within our very nature.²⁴ “Better” can never mean “ultimate” or “final.”

Even the new-born baby participates in this flawed nature. The natural potential for good may be enhanced if that baby is raised within a more or less loving and life-giving environment – though not necessarily. The potential for evil may be exacerbated if that child is raised within an abusive environment – though not necessarily. In both instances we must allow for human freedom and transcendence. Sometimes a human being raised in awful circumstances emerges as a very fine and loving person, and sometimes a human being emerges from a more or less loving family and does dastardly things.

Each of us knows this twofold potential in our own beings. No amount of loving and quality parenting can save us from ourselves and our proclivity as human beings to fall short of the practically good and true; no amount of bad parenting will necessarily mean that we cannot become inspiring examples of humanity, perhaps precisely because of the pain and darkness we must face in our lives. Likewise, no social or political or cultural structures can guarantee human goodness and truth, and no depth of wickedness in those same structures will necessarily develop wicked people. Nothing that is merely human can provide the liberation we seek and for which we constantly struggle.



²⁴ A powerful example of this is found in a recent book: Siba Shakib, *Afghanistan, Where God Only Comes to Weep*, Century, 2002. On the one hand it describes the most horrible cruelties perpetrated by human beings on other human beings, on the other hand, it describes the resilience of the human spirit and the unbelievable potential we have to transcend within the darkest of dark times. The Jewish philosopher, Abraham Heschel observes that we should not use the term “brutal” or “brutes” to describe the wickedness of human behaviour because brutes simply do not behave this way. Wickedness of this kind is uniquely human and when human beings descend to this kind of behaviour, they actually bring themselves lower than brutes. See Heschel’s brilliant little book, *What is Man?*

CHRISTIAN ARTICULATION: GUIDING PRINCIPLE

*** *Human beings are “made in the image and likeness of God”, “fallen” and “redeemed” in Christ.***



The three pillars

Whatever else a Christian formation anthropology says, it must take full and consistent account of the three truths that each human being is:

- “made in the image and likeness of God,”
- “fallen” and
- “redeemed in Christ”.²⁵

These truths stand together like pillars holding up the edifice of all human life formation. Diminish or omit one of those pillars and the edifice topples or, at least, lurches badly. It is up to scholars to pursue an ongoing conversation in which each of these truths is understood and articulated more clearly in the light of changing formation fields. We always stand in danger of losing the necessary tension between these truths when – in a given set of circumstances – we become fascinated by one of them and continue to focus on that one and pay little or no attention to the others. In this way we can even come to a point where we might actually deny one of the truths – in practice if not in theory.

It would probably be fair to say that in those generations of Counter Reformation Catholicism in the West leading into the middle of the 20th century, too little attention was paid to the truth that the human being is “made in the image and likeness of God” and too much attention was paid to the truth that the human being is “fallen.”²⁶ Such an imbalance – apart from distorting the truth of our “fallenness” – gives rise to an unhealthy emphasis on *us* and *what we must/must not do* and too little emphasis on *God* and what *God has done and wants to do for us*. Such a warped emphasis tends to forget *being* and becomes obsessed with *doing* and *having*. It also tends towards *moralism*, with its crippling emphasis on sin and guilt and negative reinforcement, moving away from the mystical heart of our faith found in communion with God in Christ, with its emphasis on the great liberating act of God in and through the Incarnation and the infinite desire of God to love us into freedom.

²⁵ These statements of the truths are put in inverted commas to indicate that their meaning is complex and needs to be very carefully articulated.

²⁶ This also seems to have been the case in the Reformed Tradition where the anthropology was fairly pessimistic. Consider the implications of Luther’s image for the action of grace in our lives: fresh clean snow covering a dung hill. This is also related to the “continuity” and “discontinuity” question we discussed briefly in the previous Session.

“Made in the image and likeness of God”

Sacred Scripture has no doubts about how we came to be:

*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over cattle and over all the earth. God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.*²⁷

Aelred Squire says that the writings of the Fathers of the undivided Church²⁸ suggest they heard this news of Divine Revelation as a sort of “lost memory”, an “Ah ha! experience”, as if it was telling them something they already intuited somewhere in the bowels of their beings.²⁹

Apart from human beings, no other part of creation is said to be “in his image.” No other parts of creation are envisaged, in this revelation, as being co-creators and stewards of creation. We carry around in our beings the memory of our origins, the divine spark waits, as it were, the breath of God that will fan it to become a fire in our souls. Before anything else, Christian life formation acknowledges that human beings proceed from and manifest the Great Mystery beyond the mystery, revealed to us in the Jewish Scriptures as the Lord of the Exodus and Covenant, revealed to us in the Christian Scriptures as the eternally loving and creating Father of Jesus who is the Christ.

Thus, “relationship is written into the very nature of human beings. As the Bible sees human beings, you cannot think about them, without recognizing that they are, as it were, made for relationship.”³⁰ Also evident in this revelation about the human being, is the implication that this special creation of God enjoys the gift of freedom. Listen to the Tradition speak in support and expression of Divine

²⁷ Genesis 1:26-27. This is not the place to attempt an exegesis of this text. Refer to any authoritative Scripture commentary.

²⁸ Following Aelred Squire, the expression – “the undivided Church” – refers to the Church before the divisions between East and West became entrenched through the schism of the 11th century. This divide has had a disastrous effect in the West in “an increasingly divided theology which promotes the attempt to lead ‘a spiritual life’ no longer necessarily integral to the concerns of the professional theologian and hence often at variance with his theoretical convictions” (Aelred Squire, *Asking the Fathers*, SPCK, 1973, 16). Needless to say, this problem at the heart of Western theologian had serious ramifications for the lives of the faithful at large. When the study of systematic theology gains precedence of the study of spirituality, when the community forgets that systematic theology is actually a sub-branch of spirituality, then the community is vulnerable to reducing the faith to an ideology – particularly the ideology of moralism.

²⁹ Cf Aelred Squire, *op cit*, 15. We must not forget that, in the revelation contained in the Sacred Scriptures about the creation of the human being, we have a description of the nature of *the human being* – not God. It is a dangerous and unwarranted leap to assume that what is said here of the human being is actually also a description of God. Aelred Squire says it nicely: “In the mystery of man God guards his own mystery. To this sense that God is utterly beyond our conceiving, the doctrine of the Fathers is faithful, as the word of Scripture requires. Like Job we may enter into relationship with God through his intervention in history, but then it is God the incomprehensible we meet, God the breaker of the heart’s idols and the confounder of edifying talk. He is what he is.” (Aelred Squire, *op cit*, 21.)

³⁰ Aelred Squire, *op cit*, 20. Our word *religion* – from the Latin *ligare* meaning *to tie* or *to bind* – points to the original relationship that is part of our very beings – the relationship with the Creator God. Clearly implicit in the biblical understanding is a further set of relationships arising from this primordial relationship – with ourselves, other people and with the created world.

Revelation:

*The human being is an animal who has received the vocation to become God.*³¹

*The glory of God is a living human being; and the life of the human being is the vision of God.*³²

*God made human beings free, having from the beginning their own autonomy and their own soul that they might use the counsel of God freely and not under constraint from him.*³³

(St Irenaeus goes on to speak vividly of the way God continues to create us with our free cooperation): *How shall you be God who have not yet been a human being? Or how shall you be perfect when you have scarcely been created? How shall you be immortal when in your human nature you have not obeyed your creator? For it is necessary in the first place to keep to your position as a human being, and only then to receive a share in the glory of God. For it is not you who makes God, but God who makes you. If, then, you are God's workmanship, await the hand of your maker, which does everything at its proper time, opportunely however, in relation to you who are being made. Offer him a supple and docile heart, and keep the form which the artist has given you, having in itself the water which comes from him, and for want of which, in hardening yourself, you would resist the imprint of his fingers.*³⁴

*Human beings are creatures endowed with reason and intelligence, and they have been made in the likeness of the undefiled nature of God. ... This likeness to the ruler of all things also extended to the human power of self-determination: human beings could choose whatever pleased them and they were not enslaved to any external necessity. ... All of God's creatures are good, and nothing He has made may be despised: He made all things very good (Gen 1:31).*³⁵

Now there is one point made which I fear may cause offence unless it is explained. If I am not mistaken, there are some standing here who will be somewhat irritated by what I have to say. Do you remember that when I attributed to the soul a threefold likeness to the Word, I said it would be more

³¹ St Basil of Caesarea (330-79) quoted by St Gregory Nazianzen (329-89) in his eulogy for Basil. Cited by Olivier Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, New City Press, 1995, 76.

³² St Irenaeus (130-200), *Against the Heresies*, 4,20,7.

³³ St Irenaeus, *op cit*, 4,37,1.

³⁴ St Irenaeus, *op cit*, 4,39,2.

³⁵ St Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginité*, cited by Jean Daniélou and Herbert Musurillo, eds, *From Glory to Glory*, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961, 112-13.

accurate to say it was impressed into the soul? Now this may seem to conflict with some passages in the Scriptures, as, for example, that one in the Psalms: 'Although a man is held in honor, he has no understanding; he is compared to foolish beasts and has become like them' (Ps 48:21); and again: 'They changed their glory into the likeness of a calf who eats hay' (Ps 105:20), and what has been said plainly by the Person of God: 'You thought, wicked man, that I was like you' (Ps 49:21). There are many other passages which seem to state that God's likeness in man was utterly destroyed by sin. What shall we say to that? (Rom 8:31) Are we to deny that these attributes exist in God at all, and say that we must look for others in which to find this likeness? Or can we say that they do exist in the soul, but not necessarily, and therefore they are not inseparable from it? Far from it. They do exist both in God and in the soul, and do so always. And we need have no regrets for anything we have said; it is all supported by unquestionable and absolute truth.³⁶

For Sacred Scripture teaches that human beings were created "to the image of God," are capable of knowing and loving their Creator, and were appointed by the Creator as master of all earthly creatures (cf. Gn 1:26, Wis 2:23) that they might subdue them and use them to God's glory (cf. Sir 17:3-10). "What is man that you should care for him? You have made him little less than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet" (Ps 8:5-7). But God did not create human beings as solitaries, for from the beginning "male and female he created them" (Gn 1:27). Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion. For by their innermost nature human beings are social beings, and unless they relate themselves to others they can neither live nor develop their potential. Therefore, as we read elsewhere in Holy Scripture, God saw "all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gn 1:31).³⁷

In the depths of our consciences, we detect a law which we do not impose upon ourselves, but which holds us to obedience. Always summoning us to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to our heart: do this, shun that. For we have in our heart a law written by God; to obey it is our very dignity; according to it we will be judged (cf. Rm 2:15-16). Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a person. There we are alone with God, whose voice echoes in our depths (Cf. Pius XII, Radio Address on the Correct Formation of a Christian Conscience in the Young (March 23, 1952): AAS (1952), 271.) In a wonderful manner, conscience reveals that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbor (cf. Mt 22:37-40; Gal 5:14). In fidelity to conscience, Christians are joined with the rest of

³⁶ St Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, 82:2, in Cistercian Publications, 1980, 171-72.

³⁷ *Gaudium et Spes* ("Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World"), 12.

the human family in the search for truth, and for the genuine solution to the numerous problems which arise in the life of individuals from social relationships. Hence, the more right conscience holds sway, the more persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and strive to be guided by the objective norms of morality. Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity. The same cannot be said for those who care but little for truth and goodness, or for a conscience which by degrees grows practically sightless as a result of habitual sin.

Only in freedom can human beings direct themselves toward goodness. Our contemporaries make much of this freedom and pursue it eagerly, and rightly to be sure. Often, however, they foster it perversely as a license for doing whatever pleases them, even if it is evil. For its part, authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within the human being. For God has willed that human beings remain "under the control of their own decisions" (cf. Sir 15:14) so that they can seek their Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to him. Hence, our dignity demands that we act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure. Human beings achieve such dignity when, emancipating themselves from all captivity to passion, they pursue their goal in a spontaneous choice of what is good, and procure for themselves through effective and skillful action, apt helps to that end. Since our freedom has been damaged by sin, only by the aid of God's grace can we bring such a relationship with God into full flower. Before the judgment seat of God each of us must render an account of our own life, whether we have done good or evil (cf. 2 Cor 5:10).³⁸

“Fallen”

The Book of Genesis tells of the “falling” of the first human beings in a story that is surely one of the most remarkable in all of literature. The story is multi-layered and this is not the place to attempt an exegesis or even a lengthy discussion of the content. Perhaps there are particular keys that can assist us with our inquiry. The first is the appeal of the serpent: “You will be like gods”; the second is the question from God: “Where are you?”³⁹

The first reminds us of our best possibilities. We are transcendent selves; the company of God does not seem inappropriate to us. Yet this very exalted sense of our dignity and possibilities, so often has us over-reaching ourselves.⁴⁰ In the

³⁸ *Op cit*, 16 & 17.

³⁹ Cf Genesis 3:1-24.

⁴⁰ Ancient Greek mythology recognized this in the famous inscription over the Temple of Apollo in Delphi: *Gnothi Sauton* (“Know Thyself”). The implication was that, if human beings did not take care to acknowledge that they were not gods, they would come to believe that they were gods and thus fall prey to the tragic vice of “hubris”

biblical story this tragic flaw is recognized. Our best possibilities so easily become the source of our worst actualities. The sins of the best are the worst. The Genesis story suggests there is something in our very origins that causes us to fall short of what might be – indeed what *ought* to be. We all experience this daily. We might call this fact of our life our “*fallenness*.” It is perhaps nowhere more evident than in our sincerest and best efforts to be loving. The sheer goodness and generosity and honesty of a genuine loving relationship reminds us of the inadequacies and incompleteness of it all.

The question – “Where are you?” – rings in the ears of every human being. Life/Reality – under the character of Truth, Goodness, Beauty, Unity – repeatedly asks us that question, if we dare to listen. And, if the truth be told, we do not dare to listen most of the time. We keep moving at pace through our days, we devise strategies and tactics to avoid the depths, we play games and tell outright lies to evade the truth of who and what we are. And our culture conspires with us to this end. Things like stillness, silence and solitude, prayer and reflection, our culture knows little or nothing about. And much of it may even be perpetrated under the rubrics of “doing good” or “being religious.” For the most part, this question will embarrass us for we are seldom where we are. We are all masters of self-deceit – that is one talent we can all claim without risk of arrogance.⁴¹ Who among us could claim to be simply 100% who he or she most deeply is? Who *can* fulfill his or her deepest and best possibilities perfectly?

Falling short seems to be part of our human nature. There is something in our very makeup that stands between us and complete authenticity, complete identification with ourselves, complete attainment of our best possibilities. And this fault line is worked out in our language and behaviors, where division rather than unity are more often the reality. In other words, our nature is to be in relationship and that same nature is beset with this “fallenness.” Our relationships manifests this state of things: We keep falling short. Welcome to the human race! Life is a homeward journey. We are pilgrims, always pilgrims.

We could understand the whole work of spirituality as summed up in this, working with and under grace to redeem relationships – with God, with ourselves, with other people and with the world. A disconnectedness seems to haunt us. How blessed it is to meet those in whom there is some who has moved beyond the need to play games that hide the disconnectedness.

A subset of this disconnectedness is found in our self-alienation. We are not even in communion with ourselves. Perhaps the fig leaves spoken of in the story of

(arrogance).

⁴¹ Thomas Merton says we are “all shadowed by an illusory self”. See his brilliant little essay, “Things in Their Identity” in *Seeds of Contemplation*, Anthony Clarke, 1961, 23-28. Hence the repeated emphasis on self-knowledge throughout the Tradition. For example, St Gregory of Nyssa (330-95) writes: “Our greatest protection is self-knowledge, and to avoid the delusion that we are seeing ourselves when we are in reality looking at something else. This is what happens to those who do not scrutinize themselves. . . . those who do not know themselves stray from the flock of sheep and pastures with the goats, that have been placed on the left.” *Commentary on the Canticle*, Sermon I, cited by Daniélou and Herbert Musurillo, *op cit*, 159-60.

The Fall, are a pathetic symbol of this self-alienation. Unable to face ourselves we are unable to face others.

The Fathers of the Church borrowed a metaphor from Plato to describe this experience. They referred to human existence as being “in the land of unlikeness.”⁴² St Augustine, who had some rather unfortunate interpretations of the biblical story of The Fall – interpretations which even more unfortunately were uncritically taken up by subsequent theologians – also had some very beautiful and poignant things to say about this situation. For example:

When first I knew you, you took me up (cf Ps 26:10), so that I might see that there was something to see, but that I was not yet one able to see it. You beat back my feeble sight, sending down your beams most powerfully upon me, and I trembled with love and awe. I found myself to be far from you in a region of unlikeness, as though I heard your voice from on high: ‘I am the food of grown men. Grow, and you shall feed upon me. You will not change me into yourself, as you change food into your flesh, but you will be changed into me.’ I knew that ‘you have corrected man for iniquity and you have made my soul to waste away like a spider,’ (Ps 38:12) and I said, ‘Is truth nothing, because it is diffused neither through finite nor infinite space?’ From afar you cried to me, ‘I am who am’ (Ex 3:14). I heard as one hears in his heart; there was no further place for doubt, for it would be easier for me to doubt that I live than that there is no truth, which is ‘clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made’ (Rom 1:20).⁴³

(In Book 10 of the *Confessions* St Augustine writes in a manner that, in places at least, must place this text amongst the most profoundly insightful of all texts of all time. The following paragraph is probably one of the better known pieces of St Augustine): *Too late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new, too late have I loved you! Behold you were within me, while I was outside: it was there that I sought you, and, a deformed creature, rushed headlong upon these things of beauty which you have made. You were with me but I was not with you. They kept me far from you, those fair things which, if they were not in you, would not exist at all. You have called to me, and have cried out, and have shattered my deafness. You have blazed forth with light, and have shone upon me, and you have put my blindness to flight! You have sent forth fragrance, and I have drawn in my breath, and I pant after you. I have tasted you, and I hunger and thirst after you. You have touched me, and I have burned for your peace.⁴⁴*

⁴² Cf Aelred Squire, *op cit*, 27-35.

⁴³ St Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 7, Chapter 10.

⁴⁴ *Op cit*, Book 10, Chapter 27.

“Redeemed in Christ”

Human beings, in response to the experience of “fallenness,” have universally longed for, and variously sought, redemption. Typically, for example, the theme of redemption is more or less implicitly or explicitly at the heart of every human story – each myth, legend, movie, play, opera, novel, and so on. We naturally cry out for deliverance from this world of conflict and ambivalence. It is a situation that demands mercy and compassion. We need to be made whole. It is a sense of “return” that we desire, as if we intuit another order of things but it is *this* order of things we are forced to live with and we know it is not right. We need to be reconciled with “God,” with ourselves, with other people, with creation.

On the basis of Divine Revelation, we believe that God accomplished the redemption that we all seek and need, in Jesus of Nazareth whom we call the Christ.⁴⁵ This is not a myth, though it may give rise to myths and may bear some familiar themes found in myths.⁴⁶ It is as if the myths of the human family about redemption imply a sound intuition of what must be, though the mode of redemption – as in the typical Hollywood movie – does not always imply a sound intuition. As Christians we believe that God is enfleshed in this historical human being and that this historical human being acted historically in a way that transcends history and culture: he broke the bonds that hold us in and through his own death on the cross. In the Tradition we refer to this as the Paschal Mystery.⁴⁷

That library of books we call the Christian Scriptures tells of this liberating action of God in and through Jesus. Each of the four Gospels is constructed with the description of Jesus’ death as the great climax. St Paul, when he mentions Jesus, does not speak of his life but his death – because his death is the definitive action of God in human history. The empty tomb proves that. The empty tomb says that Friday was a *good* Friday. The primitive creedal formula put on the lips of St Peter speaks of this new testimony:

Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God by the miracles and portents and signs which God worked through him when he was among you as you know. ... You took and had (him) crucified and killed by men outside the Law. But God raised him to life, freeing him from the pangs of Hades. ... God raised this man Jesus to life, and of that we are all witnesses. Now

⁴⁵ The meaning of “redemption” and exactly how it is accomplished is the work of that branch of theology we call soteriology. This is not the place to attempt a serious discussion of the topic. Suffice it to say that, within the Christian tradition, we have perceived the roots of our “bondage” in some way connected with the reality of death – though not necessarily with death as such. Somewhere in our relation with death we discover the source of our disconnectedness and alienation, the substance of that from which we need to be liberated.

⁴⁶ This is where the writings of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell can be misleading. See Michael Whelan, “Counterfeit Elements in Christian Spirituality” in *Readings for Christian Spirituality, Volume I*, 16-32; Owen Jones, “Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth” in *op cit*, 33-41.

⁴⁷ The word *Paschal* comes from the Greek word *pascha* which in turn is derived from the Hebrew *pesach*. *Pesach* refers to the annual commemoration of Israel’s first Passover in Egypt. Thus, *Paschal Mystery* refers to Jesus’ Passover, which is for the human family a saving death and resurrection. At Easter we celebrate this Paschal Mystery in a special way, but it is the heart of the Church’s life and Liturgy throughout the year.

*raised to the heights by God's right hand, he has received from the Father the Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit.*⁴⁸

The redemption/liberation wrought by Jesus' death is manifest in the Kingdom. The Kingdom ushered in by Jesus – though yet to be realized in its fullness – is the world in which God's will is utterly and perfectly manifest in all things. We could think of the Kingdom as being the situation in which the whole of creation is set free to be what it is made to be in the wisdom and love of God. That Kingdom is already among us, the freedom is already somewhat available to us, but not yet in its fullness.

Consider the following texts which reflect the authentic Tradition in its understanding of what God made available to us in and through Jesus Christ:

*Acknowledge whence you have existence, breath, and understanding. Acknowledge whence you have what is most important of all, your knowledge of God, your hope of the kingdom of heaven, your contemplation of glory which in this life is of course through a glass darkly but hereafter will be more perfect and clearer. Acknowledge that you have been made a son of God, a co-heir with Christ. Acknowledge, and now I speak with daring, that you have been made divine.*⁴⁹

By the baptism of regeneration grace confers two benefits on us, one of which infinitely surpasses the other. It gives the first immediately, for in the water itself it renews us and causes the image of God to shine in us. ... As for the other, it awaits our collaboration to produce it: it is the likeness of God. When our spirit begins to experience the deep sensation of savouring the goodness of the Holy Spirit, then we should know that grace is beginning to overpaint the image with the likeness. Painters begin by sketching the outline of a portrait in a single colour, then they gradually add the lustre of one colour to the other until they copy their model, right down to the very hairs of its head. In just such a way, the grace of God in baptism begins by making the image once again what it was when man first came into existence. Then when grace sees us aspiring with our whole will to the beauty of the likeness, and standing naked and at peace in his studio, then he adds the lustre of one virtue after another, and, by raising the soul's beauty from splendour to splendour, makes it an unmistakable likeness. Our spiritual sensitivity shows us that we are in the process of being formed to the likeness. But we shall know its perfection only by illumination. ... Indeed no one can attain to spiritual love unless he is brought to certainty by the light of the Holy Spirit ... And only the

⁴⁸ Acts 2:22-36.

⁴⁹ St Gregory of Nazianzen, *Orations*, 14,23-24.

*enlightenment of love, when it is added, shows that the image has completely attained the beauty of the likeness.*⁵⁰

*The countless lamps which are all burning were all lit at the same fire, that is to say they were all lighted and are all shining through the action of one and the same substance. Thus Christians shine brilliantly through the action of the divine fire, the Son of God. Their lamps that have been lit are in the depth of their heart and they shine in his presence during the time they spend on earth, just as he himself shines brilliantly. Does not the Spirit say, 'God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness'? (Psalm 45:7). He was called Anointed (Christos) in order that we might receive the unction of the same oil with which he was anointed, and might thereby become 'christs' also, being of the same nature as he and forming a single body with him. It is written likewise: 'He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin' (Hebrews 2:11).*⁵¹



⁵⁰ Diadochus of Photike, *Gnostic Chapters*, 89.

⁵¹ Pseudo-Macarius, *Great Letter*. This text comes from the 4th century.

Snippets for meditation

(1) *“Khing, the master carver, made a bell stand of precious wood. When it was finished, all who saw it were astounded. They said it must be the work of spirits. The Prince of Lu said to the master carver: “What is your secret?” Khing replied: “I am only a workman: I have no secret. There is only this: When I began to think about the work you commanded I guarded my spirit, did not expend it on trifles, that were not to the point. I fasted in order to set my heart at rest. After three days fasting, I had forgotten gain and success. After five days I had forgotten praise or criticism. After seven days I had forgotten my body with all its limbs. By this time all thought of your Highness and of the court had faded away. All that might distract me from the work had vanished. I was collected in the single thought of the bell stand. Then I went to the forest to see the trees in their own natural state. When the right tree appeared before my eyes, the bell stand also appeared in it, clearly, beyond doubt. All I had to do was to put forth my hand and begin. If I had not met this particular tree there would have been no bell stand at all. What happened? My own collected thought encountered the hidden potential in the wood; From this live encounter came the work which you ascribe to the spirits.”*⁵²



(2) (In the late eighties, the Irish teacher, Brian Keenan was kidnapped and held prisoner in Beirut for four and a half years. He wrote of his experience in *Evil Cradling*. The following is an excerpt from the end of that account. It is presented here as witness to the wonderful depths of the human person exposed by the horrible depths of the human person. It is worth noting that Brian Keenan moved in the direction of the human potential for good when he could easily have moved in the direction of the human potential for evil by become filled with resentment and hate:) *“It comes as all things that change a life must come: without warning. An afternoon visit, suddenly there are many men in the room. A guard kneels down, lifting me by the arm with the command ‘Stand, Brian, stand.’ I stand, wondering, not really expecting this to be the moment. I am unchained and led from the room and into another. On the floor is a mattress and I am made to sit on it and am chained again. (29I) Slowly something is dawning on me. To move me to another room and rechain me is a separation that means something though I cannot allow myself to believe what it might be. Grasping hold of something and then having it instantaneously*

⁵² Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, New Directions, 110-11.

taken away had hurled many of us in the past into that abyss we all knew too well. But I sit in defiant silence. A man kneels in front of me, his hand gentle on my shoulder. It is the voice of one of the chiefs. Quietly he says 'Brian, you go home.' I am silent and unshaken. 'Home, you mean another place?' I ask, for I have heard these words before.

"Again the hand at my shoulder and the voice. 'You go home, family, Dublin.' The sound of the word Dublin suggests that something is imminent. I am still amazingly calm. I ask, 'What about my friend?' There is silence, voices mumble in Arabic. All of them leave the room. Ten minutes later two men return, they ask whether I want anything. That phrase I have heard ten thousand times before. 'I want to speak with my friend John. I want to speak with him now. I will not go without speaking.' My voice is rising in panic, realizing 'My God, it is over.'

"They recognize my insistence, the loudness of my voice, the determination in it. A man kneels again in front of me, quietly he asks 'What do you want?' I answer, my voice slow, loud enough so that I hope John will hear. 'I want to speak with John, I will not go from this room until I speak with him.' The figure still squats in silence in front of me. After some minutes he leaves. I am given tea. I sit, the door is left wide open.

"I know they have gone into the kitchen and are there talking. After half an hour two men come into the room. 'Brian,' a voice says. I sit silent, 'You douche, take shower.' I sit silent, wondering is this an order or an offer. Again I say to them 'Take me to John, I want to say goodbye.' My voice is more angry now than determined but it's a quiet anger. Again the chief kneels down in front of my blindfolded face. His hand is at my shoulder but not this time in a pat of affection; squeezing and gripping hard again. 'After douche, after some hours you talk with your friend.' I nod, not knowing whether to believe and accept or to face the pointlessness of argument.

"I am left for those hours to think. I begin to believe what I have been told and suddenly there is something in me I cannot resolve. I know it is over and within hours or days I will not be wearing a blindfold. I will be unfettered. But I feel it build in me, the weight of my imprisonment. For how much freedom can there be for a man when (292) he leaves one half of himself chained to the wall? I begin to try to order my thinking to see beyond the consequences of any action I can take. I can argue and fight and insist on staying until my friend is released. But if I don't go, how will my family and friends receive it? Perhaps even now they are sitting waiting for the final confirmation. Has their suffering been so little over the past four and a half years that I can refuse this, and thrust them back into their anguish? I think one moment that I am thinking only of myself and then that I am not. I am trying desperately to find a balance in my compassion. I weigh the scales and I move back

and forth and I am caught in indecision. My hands stretched out to the man in the room next door and to my family far away. Which has the greater hold and where is the greater pull on me?

“My mind flashes back over four and a half years, those memories percolating through my history and that of my friends. I am in a delirium of contradictory desire that will not resolve itself. Only I can make this choice and I am incapable. Great love has weakened me. I am again on that raft in an ocean, tossed by the turbulent tides of affection. I try to work out what I should do for I must choose and in what I choose make myself. I remember every moment of my time alone, my time with John and with those other captives. And I remember how we first met, our relationship, the kinds of needs I had of John and he of me. And how we sought always to give and take, thinking always of the other. And as I review it all, all that wonder, I see his face stare at mine. I had watched this man grow, become full and in his fullness enrich me. And I know that if in my defiance I walk back into that room and have myself chained, refusing to go home, I will have diminished him, for he is a bigger man than to succumb to the needs that isolation breeds. I cannot do this, I cannot belittle him. I know that in going free I will free him. He will not surrender, he has gone beyond it. I know that the deep bond our captivity has given us will be shattered if I return. Our respect for each other demands of each that we take our freedom when it comes. And so I took it, feeling that my arm had been wrenched off my shoulder and was suddenly missing. I walked blindfold into the shower. I stood indifferent to its warm embrace, and soaped down my body. I was numb. They allowed me to take as long as I wished. But I had no wish to stand, only to be gone.”⁵³



(3) *“Men go forth to marvel at the mountain heights, at huge waves in the sea, at the broad expanse of flowing rivers, at the wide reaches of the ocean, and at the circuits of the stars, but themselves they pass by.”⁵⁴*



(4) *“Purify yourself and you will see heaven in yourself. In yourself you will see angels and their brightness, and you will see their Master with them and in them. ... The spiritual homeland of the person who has been purified is within. The sun that shines there is the light of the Trinity. The air breathed by the entering thoughts is the Holy Spirit the Comforter. With the person dwells the angels. Their life, their joy, their cause for celebration is Christ the light of the Father’s light. Such a person rejoices every hour in the contemplation of his soul, and marvels at the*

⁵³ Brian Keenan, *An Evil Cradling*, Hutchison, 1992, 290-91.

⁵⁴ St Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 10, Chapter 8.

beauty that appears, a hundred times brighter than the brightness of the sun. ... That is the kingdom of God hidden within us, according to the words of the Lord."⁵⁵



(5) *"She reminded me of an extraordinary woman, likewise either all body or all soul: Saint Teresa. One day the nuns of her convent saw she voraciously gorging herself with a roast partridge. The simple-hearted nuns were scandalized, but Saint Teresa laughed. 'At prayer-time, pray,' she said, 'at partridge-time, partridge!' She gave herself completely to each of her acts, nourishing her body and her soul with equal voracity."*⁵⁶



(6) *"Mind then and sense, thus distinguished from each other, had remained within their own boundaries, and bore in themselves the magnificence of the Creator-Word, silent praisers and thrilling heralds of His mighty work. Not yet was there any mingling of both, nor any mixture of these opposites, tokens of a greater wisdom and generosity in the creation of natures; nor as yet were the whole riches of goodness made known. Now the Creator-Word, determining to exhibit this, and to produce a single living being out of both (the invisible and the visible creation, I mean) fashions Man; and taking a body from already existing matter, and placing in it a Breath taken from Himself (which the Word knew to be an intelligent soul, and the image of God), as a sort of second world, great in littleness, He placed him on the earth, a new Angel, a mingled worshipper, fully initiated into the visible creation, but only partially into the intellectual; king of all upon earth, but subject to the King above; earthly and heavenly; temporal and yet immortal; visible and yet intellectual; halfway between greatness and lowliness; in one person combining spirit and flesh; spirit because of the favour bestowed on him, flesh on account of the height to which he had been raised; the one that he might continue to live and glorify his benefactor, the other that he might suffer, and by suffering be put in remembrance, and be corrected if he became proud in his greatness; a living creature, trained here and then moved elsewhere; and to complete the mystery, deified by its inclination to God for to this, I think, tends that light of Truth which here we possess but in measure; that we should both see and experience the Splendour of God, which is worthy of Him Who made us, and will dissolve us, and remake us after a loftier fashion."*⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Isaac of Nineveh, *Ascetic Treatises*, 43. Isaac was a 7th century Syrian bishop.

⁵⁶ Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, Faber, 1965/1989, 371.

⁵⁷ St Gregory of Nazianzus, *Second Oration on Easter*, vii. Gregory was born about AD 330, at Arianzus, near Nazianzus, in Cappadocia, Asia Minor [now in Turkey]. Like his friend Basil, he was the son of a wealthy aristocratic family. He died there about AD 389, in Arianzus. He was bishop of Nazianzus, wrote some particularly beautiful texts on the Christian and is regarded as one of the great Fathers of the universal Church.



(7) *“The story of Cain and Abel ... belongs to the biblical primeval history, ie, its intent is to sketch the image of man, to present something generally valid about his nature. This postparadisial man was a murderer of his brother from the start. He is a murderer not only when he forgets himself and sinks into the realm of the sub-human, ie, when he shows himself as a felon in the criminal sense of the word, but also at the alter where he rises to worship. He envies his brother for God’s friendly regard of him; he envies him his share in God. That is certainly the most frightful denial of brotherhood. Even more, he disregards God’s question about his brother. He throws off the question, where is your brother Abel, with an impudent pun: Shall I shepherd the shepherd? Now the narrative shows that this is the cause of man’s awful homelessness and unrest. Man was taken from the earth, the earth was the motherly base of his life; but now this solidarity between man and earth is destroyed. Man has become homeless on the earth.”*⁵⁸



(8) *“My own thesis is that the aesthetics of evil are more effective when the transgressions of social and psychological norms within the story are echoed or mimicked by transgressions of the reader’s expectations. The best horror fiction sets up resonances that continue to disturb us even after the monster has been destroyed, the vampire has copped a fatal dose of sunlight and normality has – to all intents and purposes – been restored. We delight in works that produce such resonances because we feel evil to be complex and elusive, and we know it is very hard to confront it directly with our understanding – either in society or within ourselves. We want to be taken close to it in the safe world of structured fictions, but we also want to be reminded that all liberating endings re ultimately a sham – because evil is incommensurable, and it never really goes away.”*⁵⁹



(9) *“I discovered something which I had never confronted before, that there were immense forces of darkness and hatred within my own heart. At particular moments of fatigue or stress, I saw forces of hate rising up inside me, and the capacity to hurt someone who was weak and was provoking me! That, I think, was what caused me the most pain: to discover who I really am, and to realize that maybe I did not want to know who I really was! I did not want to admit all the garbage inside me. And then I had to decide whether I would just continue to pretend that I was okay and throw myself into hyperactivity, projects where I could forget all the garbage and*

⁵⁸ Gerhard von Rad, *God at Work in Israel*, trans. John H Marks, Abingdon, 1980, 183.

⁵⁹ Tony Stephens, “The Attraction of Evil” in *The University of Sydney Gazette*, 1 (April 2002), 9.

prove to others how good I was. Elitism is the sickness of us all. We all want to be on the winning team. That is the heart of apartheid and every form of racism. The important thing is to become conscious of those forces in us and to work at being liberated from them and to discover that the worst enemy is inside our own hearts not outside!”⁶⁰



(10) *“The true image of God is the person who does good.”⁶¹*



(11) *The world has not changed, it is always wonderful and horrible, iniquitous and filled with beauty.”⁶²*



(12) *“Comedy is tragedy plus time.”⁶³*



(13) *““We must weakly carry our cross’ Thérèse remarked. Yes, if we love mercy, we must consent to leading our lives and carrying our cross deplorably badly. Only then do we know that we haven’t been cheating, we know that we’ve reached the light at the last. Yes, says God, this is all I ask of you and you will be my disciple.”⁶⁴*



⁶⁰ Jean Vanier, *From Brokenness to Community*, Paulist Press, 1992, 19.

⁶¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 2:19. See also Origen’s *Homily on Leviticus*, 4:3.

⁶² Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, Faber, 1965/1989, 476-477.

⁶³ American comedienne, Carol Burnett.

⁶⁴ Bernard Bro, *The Little Way*, Christian Classics, 1980, 82.

(14) “What am I? I am myself a word spoken by God. Can God speak a word that does not have any meaning?”

“Yet, am I sure that the meaning of my life is the meaning God intends for it? Does God impose a meaning on my life from the outside, through event, custom, routine, law, system, impact with others in society? Or am I called to create from within, with him, with his grace, a meaning which reflects his truth and makes me his ‘word’ spoken freely in my personal situation? My true identity lies hidden in God’s call to my freedom and my response to him. This means I must use my freedom in order to love, with full responsibility and authenticity, not merely receiving a form imposed on me by external forces, or forming my own life according to an approved social pattern, but directing my love to the personal reality of my brother or sister, and embracing God’s will in its naked, often impenetrable mystery (see Romans 11:33-36). I cannot discover my meaning if I try to evade the dread which comes from first experiencing my meaninglessness!”⁶⁵



⁶⁵ Thomas Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*, Herder and Herder, 1969, 84.

Suggestions for further study

- Cinema, *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) (Dir: Frank Darabont with Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman)
- , *The War of the Roses* (1989) (Dir: Danny De Vito with Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner)
- , *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989) (Dir: Woody Allen with Caroline Aaron and Alan Alda)
- Keenan, Brian, *An Evil Cradling*, Hutchison, 1992.
- Squire, Aelred, *Asking the Fathers*, SPCK, 1973 – especially chapters 2, 3 & 4.
- Van Kaam, Adrian, *The Transcendent Self*, Dimension 1979.
- , "Introspection & Transcendent Self-Presence" in *Readings for Christian Spirituality, Volume I*, 103-112.
- Whelan, Michael, *The Call To Be*, Society of St Paul, 1986 – especially chapters 1 & 2.
- , *Without God All Things Are Lawful*, Society of St Paul, 1995 – especially chapters 6 & 12.



Suggested exercises

1. Pay attention to your reactions when you catch yourself falling short of what you think you ought to be. Gently focus on that in a non-judgmental way, with some open questions. What are you thinking and feeling? How much compassion is there? What does this suggest about your relationship with God?
2. Go to the Snippets for Meditation or some art of the text above and read it slowly and reflectively. Listen carefully for any reactions within yourself. Be prepared to stop and stay quietly with what thoughts and feelings emerge. You might find it useful to using writing as a means to promote your listening.
3. Next time you are at a celebration of the Eucharist, observe the people going forward and reaching out for the Bread of Life. Sit with that; let it speak to you. What is evoked within you?

