

DEVELOPING YOUR OWN SPIRITUALITY

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at Aquinas Academy

UNIT TWO **SESSION FOUR:** **The person as thinking I**



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Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is this tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Sapere aude! "Have courage to use your own reason!" – that is the motto of the enlightenment.¹



The current historical pulsation is to exalt informative thinking at the expense of more foundational formative thinking. This exaltation hides a preconscious flight from the demands of transcendent and pneumatic formation. Exclusive exaltation is used as a deformative safety directive, directing daily life away from formative dwelling.²



Be still and know that I am God.³



That I may come to know him and the power of his resurrection and partake of his sufferings by being moulded to the pattern of his death.⁴



¹ Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" in Isaac Kramnick, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, Penguin Books, 1995, 1.

² Adrian van Kaam, "Glossary," in *Studies in Formative Spirituality*, I, 1 (Feb 1980), 153.

³ Psalm 46:10.

⁴ Philippians 3:10.

THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN DIMENSION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**** All human life formation is affected – for better or worse – by both the process and the content of our thinking.***



Ways of thinking

Throughout this Course we have been endeavoring to think in a certain way about human and Christian life formation. That thinking has been specific in both its process and its content. It is a process of thinking that assumes:

- That life is an ongoing conversation – there is always more to understand and know and none of us ever can claim to have settled the major questions of human and Christian life formation;
- That we are transcendent beings – we are always moving, seeking the “more than,” never settled, always where we have never been before;
- That all of reality is evocative – reality is constantly inviting us ever more deeply into the mystery, urging us to be touched and shaped by engaging the “more than;”
- That life is more than a problem to be solved – it is, in the end, a mystery to be lived, even if there are many problems to be solved;
- That we are not the masters of the universe – we are participators in a mystery, dependent and interdependent beings who find their fulfillment in and through relationships;
- That the most fruitful way of living is by graced emergence – we facilitate the unfolding of our lives; our primary stance is one of obedience rather than ego-mastery;
- That thinking involves the whole person – thinking is not just a function of the rational mind or the intellect, but a personal process that includes the body.

This way of thinking is marked by “waiting upon,” “active listening” and a radical desire to submit to the True and the Good, the Beautiful and the One, being manifested in every person, event and thing. It is rightly called *foundational thinking* because it is constantly opening itself to the foundational principles and the deepest structures of being.

Foundational thinking is distinct from *issues thinking*. The latter focuses on particularities and individual issues, and addresses each as, in some way, a problem to be solved. Issues thinking is appropriate to many aspects of daily living. Each day presents us with a whole series of practical things to be done and immediate problems to be solved.

Foundational thinking supports issues thinking by giving it roots, context and

perspective. In a healthy life formation process, foundational thinking predominates and provides the ground out of which the issues thinking can emerge. Without foundational thinking as its ground, issues thinking tends:

- to lose contact with the bigger picture;
- to lead people to de-contextualize issues, and thus
- to become excessively pragmatic, functionalistic and perhaps even fixated on this or that issue;
- to generate the sense that life is episodic and disconnected rather than continuous and inter-connected;
- to lead to a very limited grasp of what is true and real and perhaps
- to a fair amount of frustration, anger and perhaps
- to the assumption that “winning” is the aim of the encounter.

Foundational thinking keeps us available to the bigger picture and the Great Mystery.⁵ It engages life as inexhaustible intelligibility. Foundational thinking is intent on facilitating an awareness of what is true and appropriate in the given situation. “Winning” is not the point, the truth is. The ultimate intent is not control but participation, not mastery but surrender.

A desired outcome from this whole Course would be a well-grounded capacity for foundational thinking about all those issues pertaining to human life formation. Supporting this capacity for foundational thinking is the content of this Course – especially in the form of *constructs* and *principles*.

The capacity for foundational thinking can also be promoted by frequently asking the open question: What is happening? The ability to listen and be attentive is obviously essential.

We will devote two Sessions to discussing the topic of thinking. In this first Session we will briefly consider the following three facets:

- The complexities of the *person as thinking* – there are a variety of ways of thinking; we will acknowledge some of them;
- The *Enlightenment* and its legacy of thinking – this is a two-edged sword, giving us much to be grateful for and much to be concerned about;

⁵ It is important to recognize this distinction between *foundational thinking* and *issues thinking* when we are working for renewal within the Church. There are certainly many issues to be addressed, many problems to be solved. But if all we can bring to that challenge is *issues thinking*, we will tend to promote division rather than unity, confrontations rather than conversations, ideological struggles rather than relationship-building encounters. *Foundational thinking* keeps asking open questions like: What is happening here – in me? – in others? – in the situation? – in the issue itself? Where does this issue fit in the wider context? What are the implications and who is involved and who will be affected and how? What are the Gospel principles here? What is the deeper human ground? How am I embodying those Gospel principles and awareness of the human ground in my manner now? And so on.

- The *negative effects* of the Enlightenment’s over-prizing of one way of thinking – there are clearly deformative effects of the Enlightenment’s fascination (obsession?) with “*reason*”.

The complexities of the person as thinking: Four examples

a. A Photograph

There is a well-known photograph of a rocky mountain landscape partially covered in snow. Some people look at the photograph and see just that – a rocky mountain landscape partially covered in snow. Other people look at the photograph and see the face of a bearded man looking back at them. Once you have seen “the bearded man,” you are inclined to wonder why others still see only a rocky mountain landscape partially covered in snow. Below is a copy of the photograph. What do you see?



b. A Radio Play

Here is another example indicating the various ways we think – or do not think:

At 8 pm, October 30, 1938, about six million people across the United States heard the following announcement on their radios: “The Columbia Broadcasting System and its affiliated stations present Orson Welles and the Mercury Theater of the Air in The War of the Worlds, by H. G. Wells.”

The announcement was followed by a weather report and dance music. Suddenly the dance music was interrupted with a “flash” news story. “A series of gas explosions has just been noted on the planet Mars,” said the announcement. The broadcast went on to report that a meteor had landed near Princeton, New Jersey, killing fifteen hundred persons. Before many minutes, however, the announcer explained that it wasn’t a meteor, but a metal cylinder from which poured Martian creatures with death rays to attack the earth.

The program lasted one hour. At the half-hour, two announcements were made indicating that what people were hearing was only a fictitious story. The same sort of an announcement was made at the program’s conclusion. And at least 60 per cent of all stations carrying the program interrupted the play to say it was fiction.

But at their radios that night, there were about a million people who missed these announcements. Only the word “invasion” caught their ears, and it gripped them with fear. Twenty families on a single block in Newark, New Jersey, rushed from their homes to escape what they thought was a gas raid. Their faces were covered with wet towels and handkerchiefs. A San Francisco man phoned authorities: “My Gad, where can I volunteer my services?” he said. “We’ve got to stop this awful thing.” In Mount Vernon, New York, a man who was considered a hopeless invalid heard the broadcast. With the news of “invasion” he rushed from his home, climbed into an automobile and disappeared. Warnings and farewells were phoned by mistaken listeners to their friends and relatives all over the country. Telephone lines to radio stations, newspapers, hospitals and police stations were kept busy with people asking about the invasion.

In New York, at one point during the program, Orson Welles and his actors looked up from their microphones to see the studio control room filling up with police. Before long Welles and his colleagues realized that they had caused a panic of national proportions.

The “invasion from Mars” radio program has been a favorite subject of study for psychologists. At the time, America’s nerves were jittery. Munich had occurred only a month before the broadcast date. News flashes about the European crisis were common. The Mercury Theater’s simulated flashes with the word “invasion” fell into the pattern of the times, and a million, people thought war had suddenly been thrust upon them.

Psychologists have used the incident as a case history of how people can panic in a time of crisis. The “Invasion from Mars” can be looked at from another viewpoint. The incident is a case history illustrating how poorly millions of Americans listen. Admittedly, the times were ripe for such panic, and the Mercury Theater broadcast was extremely realistic. But it should be noted that the nation’s radio sets were being tuned by people who are notoriously bad listeners. The program’s announcements carried the information that would have prevented panic. The context of the broadcast itself contained clues that the program was not true. Subsequent -research by Princeton University showed that many people who did not panic had put their minds at ease y by carefully listening to the story’s context. However, the fact remains that about one-sixth of the radio listeners did not use their listening ability in a critical fashion to discover what was really happening.⁶

c. Different ways of talking suggest different ways of thinking

Thirdly, here is a much more mundane and common example of the different ways people think. It is found in the different ways they talk. Socio-linguist, Deborah Tannen, maintains she has discerned two distinct ways that people engage each other. One way tends to be typical of males while the other tends to be typical of females. She writes:

Women and men are both often frustrated by the other’s way of responding to their expression of troubles. And they are further hurt by the other’s frustration. If women resent men’s tendency to offer solutions to problems, men complain about women’s refusal to take action to solve the problems they complain about. Since many men see themselves as problem solvers, a complaint or a trouble is a challenge to their ability to think of a solution, just as a woman presenting a broken bicycle or stalling car poses a challenge to their ingenuity in fixing it. But, whereas many women appreciate help in fixing mechanical equipment, few are inclined to appreciate help in ‘fixing’ emotional troubles.⁷

The author goes on to make a useful distinction between “report-talk” and

⁶ Adapted from *The Missing ‘L’ in Learning – Listening* by Ralph G Nichols. Source unknown.

⁷ Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, Random House, 1990, 51-52.

“rapport-talk.”⁸ The former is about information and who has that information, the latter is about establishing and maintaining relationships. In the former, clear thinking, logical analysis and verbal dexterity are prized, in the latter it is much more important to be simply heard and appreciated. The two ways of speaking might, of course, be mixed together by the one person!

d. Different starting points leading to different ways of thinking

John Thornhill gives us a very instructive example of what we have reflected on above. It is taken from the records of a nineteenth-century British explorer who attempted to discover the words for numerals in the languages of central Africa. The following is the conversation with one man from that region:

‘Listen, O my brother! In the tongue of the shores (Swahili) we say 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 – ‘

‘Hi! Hi!’ replies the wild man, ‘We say fingers.’

‘By no means, that’s not it. This white man wants to know how thou speakest 1, 2, 3?’

‘One, two, three what? Sheep, or goats, or women?’

‘By no means, only 1, 2, 3 sheep in thine own tongue, the tongue of the Wapoka.’

‘Hi! Hi! What wants the white man with the Wapoka?’⁹

These examples, which focus on seeing and hearing and speaking, are instructive. Thinking is not a straightforward, simple exercise as our common use of the word in daily conversation might suggest. Different people will think differently about the one reality and therefore perceive that one reality differently and then behave differently with regard to that one reality.

While the examples given are somewhat trivial, the implications may be far from trivial. Psychologists and educationists, among other researchers in recent times, have begun to take these differences very seriously.¹⁰ They do, for example,

⁸ Cf Deborah Tannen, *op cit*, 76-77.

⁹ John Thornhill, *Modernity: Christianity’s Estranged Child Reconstructed*, William B Eerdmans, 2000, 17. We could note in passing the “invention” of our calendar. In about the year 500AD, a certain monk by the name of Dyonisius Exiguus (Denis the Insignificant or the Short) was asked by Pope Symmachus to create a calendar which would apply to the Church in the West. As the primary reference point for that calendar, Denis the Insignificant was to take the date of the birth of Jesus. Denis did as he was asked and thus we have our calendar today. There were, however, two problems: firstly, Denis almost certainly got Jesus’ birth date wrong by about four years – according to Denis’ calendar, Jesus probably was born about 4BC – and secondly, Denis had no notion of zero, so he began counting the years from the number one. Zero did not become part of Western thinking until the 12th century, when it was learned from the Arabs.

¹⁰ Cf For example, Anthony Gregorc is one of a number of educationists who have developed delineators to highlight the different ways that people learn. See Anthony Gregorc, *An Adult’s*

have immense implications for how we construct our schooling systems, to say nothing of the way we generally communicate with and behave towards each other. They also have immense implications for international relations, where cross-cultural conversations and negotiations are taking place.

The Enlightenment and its legacy of thinking

The so-called Enlightenment is one of those periods of world history in which the human family comes to a radically new self-awareness, a new way of being conscious. This new self-awareness or consciousness is summed up in Kant's phrase: *Sapere aude!* (See the epigraph). As Kant intimates in his essay, this new-found confidence in human reason has immense repercussions for society and culture.

Historically we can generally locate the Enlightenment roughly in 17th and 18th century Europe – more specifically, in England, France and Germany. There are at least four significant areas of discovery – all interconnected – that introduced radical new dynamics into people's lives, giving birth to new ways of thinking:

- scientific discoveries – especially in astronomy;
- geographical discoveries – an expanding sense of the world through exploration and travel;
- philosophical discoveries – a willingness to question the taken-for-granted world;
- social discoveries – a questioning of, and a general reaction against, a simplistic worldview and social order dominated by wealth and privilege, ignorance and naïve religious faith.

Part of the agenda – for at least some of the thinkers – was quite explicitly to lift what they saw as the “darkness” that fell on Europe with the Christian triumph over the virtues of classical antiquity. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) described the Enlightenment as “man's release from his ... inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another” (see the epigraph).

Some of the people associated with the Enlightenment include:¹¹

Guide to Style, Gregorc Associates, 1982. In the last thirty or forty years, we have become very aware of different ways of delineating the differences in human beings. Two very popular forms of this, for example, are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Enneagram. Unfortunately, too often these delineators become ends in themselves and assume a disproportionate place in the life formation process that eventually obstructs further formation. Taken as limited instruments to promote early formation possibilities they each have their usefulness.

¹¹ Some of those whom we will mention pre-date the 18th century. They are men of the Renaissance (14th – 16th centuries) rather than the Enlightenment. The Renaissance or “re-birth” is so-called because it was seen as a recovery of art and humanistic thinking along the lines of the classical world of Greece and Rome. Copernicus, Galileo, Bacon and Descartes are specifically included because they are part of the kind of scientific and philosophical thinking that finally

- Nicolas Copernicus (1473-1543). [Polish astronomer; initiated heliocentrism (sun-as-centre) thus forever radically altering the way we think of the universe and our place in it. We can think of this as an “assault” on the consciousness of the people of that era: The focus had to shift from “the earth-as-centre” (ie *we* are centre ... often leading to simplistic social constructions) to “the sun-as-centre” (re-situating the human within a much bigger universe – or, more precisely, *universes* – and thus demanding a restructuring of self-awareness and new possibilities of social constructions).]
- Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). [Italian astronomer and natural philosopher. He was censured by the Holy Office for his adherence to the new astronomy.¹² We see here the beginnings of an unfortunate reaction that pitted science against faith. That way of thinking endures in some circles to this day.]
- Francis Bacon (1561-1626). [English philosopher, legalist and political figure. He argued that “human knowledge and human power meet in one,” that we can use reason to discover the principles that govern nature and thus exert power over nature to the benefit of society. Bacon said we should “put nature to the rack,” thus restoring the control lost at the Fall. Bacon saw humanity standing at the dawn of a new civilization, one controlled by science for our welfare and God’s glory.]
- René Descartes (1596-1650). [French mathematician and philosopher. In an

blossomed in the 18th century and had such a huge impact. They might be said to have laid the foundations for the Enlightenment. Richard Tarnas makes a useful summary comment about the Renaissance: “The phenomenon of the Renaissance lay as much in the sheer diversity of its expressions as in their unprecedented quality. Within the span of a single generation, Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael produced their masterworks, Columbus discovered the New World, Luther rebelled against the Catholic Church and began the Reformation, and Copernicus hypothesized a heliocentric universe and commenced the Scientific Revolution.” (Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that Have Shaped Our World View*, Ballantine Books, 1991, 224.) Tarnas might also have included Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, representatives of a re-birth of Christianity at this time. One of the shifts in consciousness that was given impetus in the Renaissance was towards a greater focus on the things of this world and the human being in particular. This was in contrast to a more other-world consciousness that had tended to dominate until that time.

¹² Cardinal Barberini – later to become Pope Urban VIII – was one of many who wrote to congratulate Galileo. Cardinal Robert Bellarmine – Jesuit scholar, senior theologian in the Curia and later canonised – opposed Galileo, albeit gently and moderately, arguing that what he was presenting was only hypothetical and that one was not allowed to interpret the Scriptures in ways that contradicted the Fathers. Bellarmine – and those Church authorities who subsequently condemned Galileo in 1616 and 1633 and forbade him to teach the Copernican “theory” – overlooked an important teaching, espoused by both Augustine and Aquinas: The Bible was never intended to teach science as such and therefore its authority must never be invoked to settle disputes in that field. It is worth noting also, that the opposition to Galileo’s teaching was not only based on a simplistic interpretation of Scripture, but also strongly influenced by the philosophy of Aristotle, which espoused an earth-centred view of the universe.

era of profound skepticism, he looked for an incontrovertible basis for certain knowledge. He began by doubting everything (systematic doubt) and came to his *cogito ergo sum* (“I think therefore I am”), a certainty which can be clearly and distinctly conceived. He went on to develop his theory of knowledge based on this principle of “clear and distinct ideas.” Descartes thought of the human self as like “a pilot in a boat” – hence the expression, “Cartesian dualism.” Descartes’ influence on the Continent paralleled Bacon’s influence in England.¹³

- John Locke (1632-1704). [English philosopher and medical doctor. Like Bacon, he emphasized sensory experience as the source of all knowledge – the so-called empirical method – thus limiting the human capacity for knowledge to that which could be tested by concrete experience. His basic epistemological assumption could be stated: There is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses. This set philosophical reflection on a course which eventually precluded any valid assertions about God, human freedom or other positions that transcended concrete experience. Locke was condemned by Oxford University in 1704 for his *Essay on Human Understanding*.]
- Isaac Newton (1642-1727). [English physicist and natural philosopher. Newton’s physics gave impetus the notion of a mechanistic universe.]
- François Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694-1778). [French philosopher. Like Galileo and Descartes, and his contemporary, Diderot, he was educated by the Jesuits. He was a Deist and argued for a rational religion or nature-based religion, rather than a bible-based religion.]
- David Hume (1711-1776). [Scottish philosopher and historian.]
- Jean Le Rond d’Alembert (1717-1783). French mathematician, philosopher and principal editor of the *Encyclopédie* (1750-1765).
- Denis Diderot (1713-1784). [French philosopher. Together with D’Alembert, Diderot edited the first encyclopedia. Diderot followed Locke’s empiricism and opposed metaphysics and the claims of revealed religion. He thought free will a delusion.]

¹³ Tarnas observes: “... between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries , the West saw the emergence of a newly self-conscious and autonomous human being – curious about the world, confident in his own judgments, skeptical of orthodoxies, rebellious against authority, responsible for his own beliefs and actions, enamored of the classical past but even more committed to a greater future, proud of his humanity, conscious of his distinctness from nature, aware of his artistic powers as individual creator, assured of his intellectual capacity to comprehend and control nature, and altogether less dependent on an omnipotent God. This emergence of the modern mind, rooted in the rebellion against the medieval Church and the ancient authorities, and yet dependent upon and developing from both these matrices, took the three distinct and dialectically related forms of the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Scientific Revolution. These collectively ended the cultural hegemony of the Catholic Church in Europe and established the more individualistic, skeptical, and secular spirit of the modern age ” (Tarnas, op cit, 282.)

- Auguste Comte (1798-1857). [French social philosopher; often called the father of modern systematic sociology; best known for his “law of the three stages” which says that society and all disciplines of thought must pass through three stages of development: firstly, religious, then metaphysical and finally the “positive” or scientific stage.]

These thinkers promoted a strong emphasis on empirically-based reason and the human ability to discover and utilize the principles/forces of nature. In France the seventeen-volume *Encyclopédie* is one of the great symbols of this time.¹⁴ Mozart’s operas also epitomize the Enlightenment. *The Marriage of Figaro* (1786), highlights individualism and lauds self-made assertive people who achieve their place in the social order through hard work, skill and talent, as opposed to aristocrats who are simply born to privilege. *The Magic Flute* (1791) features secular priests presiding over temples of Wisdom, Reason and Nature, claims the triumph of light over darkness, and reason, tolerance and love over passion, hate and revenge.

It is not difficult to see how such a climate of thinking gave birth to the hard sciences and technological progress that have exploded in a stunning array of inventions in the latter part of the 20th century. Not surprisingly, this process forced radical changes in the religious, social, political and economic orders. The world would never be the same again, for better or worse, because human beings had begun to think differently.¹⁵

The ambivalent legacy of the Enlightenment¹⁶

Along with the amazing advances in science and technology, the Enlightenment emphasis on reason – especially empirically-based reason – has had some unforeseen side effects. Perhaps Enlightenment thinking – for better or worse – is nowhere better symbolized than in the thinking of those men the French

¹⁴ The French authors dedicated this work to Francis Bacon, John Locke and Isaac Newton. Thomas Jefferson, profoundly influenced by John Locke and the Enlightenment thinking said of these three Englishmen: “The three greatest men that have ever lived, without any exception.”

¹⁵ For an excellent discussion of the influence of this new awakening on religion, see Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century*, Cambridge University Press, 1975/1995.

¹⁶ Romanticism is a reaction against the reductionism of Enlightenment rationalism. Romanticism in music and literature, in particular, highlights the deeper longings and desires of the human person; it attempts to find a place for the instinctive, the emotional, the aesthetic and the symbolic, all domains of human existence that tend to be left behind by an over-emphasis on reason. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), was more of a romantic than a typical Enlightenment philosophe. He rejected revealed religion but held there was something to experience and nature that hard rationalism could not discover. See “romanticism” in the Index of John Thornhill, *op cit.*

philosopher, Paul Ricoeur, has spoken of as “the masters of suspicion” – Karl Marx (1818-1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1940).

While each of these “masters of suspicion” is very much a product of the Enlightenment, each in his own way has contributed to an undermining or “deconstruction” of the Enlightenment culture. Their thinking has introduced into our consciousness “a hermeneutics of suspicion,” says Ricoeur.¹⁷ And we bring this suspicion to every aspect of life – including the unbounded confidence in human reason and the expectation of unending progress, so dear to the Enlightenment.¹⁸

This hermeneutics of suspicion”, together with our experience of life, has forced us to become aware of some serious ambivalences in the Enlightenment legacy. In other words, a new consciousness is emerging in our lifetimes, one that is less willing to uncritically accept the confident convictions, conclusions, analyses and expectations of the rationalistic Enlightenment mindset. There is in that mindset a certain naivete, even conceit. For example:

- The empirical approach engendered by the Enlightenment, is necessarily reductionistic, breaking the objects of our research down into smaller and smaller pieces, necessitating more and more specialized research. A fragmentation and disconnectedness is a direct result of this reductionistic thinking; a sense of the unified whole is lost in the concentration on the parts.
- The costs – hitherto unimagined – of our technological and scientific inventions are a cause for serious concern; we could emphasize in particular the cost to the environment of our technology-based lifestyles and the cost to world stability of the array of sophisticated weaponry modern science has delivered.
- The blessings of modern medicine have brought with them many ambiguities, such as the burdens to national budgets of medical costs, the complex ethical dilemmas that arise because we now have so much control over our biology, the challenges brought about simply because we can now

¹⁷ It is one of the irony of history that the Enlightenment thinking emerged from a growing skepticism. Perhaps that is one of the dynamics that presages a new consciousness: We become distrusting of the old way of thinking, eventually dismissing it and eventually developing a whole new way of knowing and naming reality. Post-modernity would seem to fit that description as a transition phase in the West at least.

¹⁸ Scientific researchers in various disciplines have become aware of the illusion of so-called “objective research.” For example, researchers speak of “The Rosenthal Effect” – the phenomenon where the expectations of the researchers in a study influence the outcome; “The Hawthorne Effect” – the human subjects under observation tend to alter their behavior when they know they are being observed. Quantum physics is very aware that the researcher is an integral part of the research – no research is free of subjectivity therefore. Quantum physics has also caused a serious re-think of the Newtonian view of the world with its (apparently) common sense understanding of cause and effect.

live much longer and stay alive when we would normally have died in bygone days¹⁹, and so on.

a. The ambivalence of reductionistic thinking

The scientific method proceeds by way of reduction. It typically does not look at unified wholes but parts, and parts of parts, and so on. This leads to the specialization of knowledge. We live in a world of specialists. This has led to some remarkable advancements. It also engenders the sense of the disparateness of knowledge and even a sense of disconnectedness and fragmentation. And the sense of disconnectedness and fragmentation applies not only to the various parts seeming to be disconnected from each other; it applies to our experience of society and to our very beings. This type of thinking contributes to our sense of being disconnected from our own experiences, from others and from any coherent sense of an ultimate reality.

The modern mind has no ground anymore. Life is episodic, always shifting. A symbol is the young person, with the mobile phone, texting his or her friends to see where the next event is going to happen. Children of the Enlightenment find it difficult to believe in any meta-narrative, any “story” that gives a total context and purpose for living. We struggle to find shared values. The sense of continuity with something worthwhile in the past unfolding towards something worthwhile in the future, has faded. We are in danger of losing any coherent and viable sense of the person and community.²⁰

b. The ambivalence of scientific progress

We have gratitude for discoveries such as lens implants, keyhole surgery, miracle drugs and advanced dental care, libraries on disk, computers in the hand and email on demand, non-stick frying pans, microwave ovens and plastic bags, global positioning systems to guide us to an address in an unfamiliar suburb and passenger jets that can carry us more or less comfortably and swiftly to the other side of the world, without a pilot if necessary, mobile telephones with in-built cameras, emails and immediate news from the latest trouble spot anywhere in the world.

We also have an increasing disillusionment and concern about the cost of many of these inventions – the cost to us as a community, in terms of the quality of

¹⁹ The cry for the legalisation of euthanasia seems to be a particularly macabre and desperate reaction to this particular development. The myth of rationalism will inevitably see sickness and suffering as a problem to be solved rather than a mystery to be lived. Euthanasia – like suicide – is perhaps the most tragic form of death-denial.

²⁰ David Tacey’s book, *Re-Enchantment: The New Australian Spirituality* (Harper Collins, 200) is instructive in this regard. See also Hugh Mackay, *Reinventing Australia: The Mind and Mood o Australia in the 90s*, Angus and Robertson, 1993. Mackay describes his most recent book – *Advance Australia Where: How we’ve changed, why we’ve changed, what will happen next* (Hachette Livre, 2007) – as “Reinventing Australia 15 years on.”

our relationships, and the cost to our environment. Those who uncritically sing the praises of science often omit to tell the stories, for example, of the nuclear attacks on Nagasaki and Hiroshima and the fire-bombings of Tokyo and Dresden, the use of Agent Orange and napalm in Vietnam and the tens of millions of land mines in many “trouble spots” around the world, the effects of the failed nuclear reactor in Chernobyl. The proliferation of the refrigerator and the motor vehicle together may, in the end, make our planet uninhabitable.²¹

Human beings are “fallen” beings.²² Part of our “fallenness” is our genius for self-deception and our consequent capacity for repeatedly behaving in ways that are destructive, all the while telling ourselves we are doing just fine. Clearly, there does seem to be a dawning realization throughout the world, that we cannot go on living the way we have been living. People are beginning to think differently about themselves and their place in the world.

We might well ask whether the technological advancements have contributed anything substantial to our humanity as such. Are we actually better human beings because of the scientific and technological discoveries? To ask this question is not to denigrate science. It is rather to appropriately situate science and technology in our lives: Science is a good servant but a bad master. Again we are reminded that science is about useful things rather than ultimate things. We could also ask whether sciences has changed our priorities and values for the better. For example, it may well be that the stunning technological and scientific developments of recent generations has helped to shape our thinking towards giving priority to the question “*Can* we do it?” over the question, “*Should/may* we do it?”

Human progress is not the same as technological progress

Few people now are willing to uncritically identify scientific and technological progress with human progress as such. To the contrary, we are becoming aware that scientific and technological progress may in fact be accompanied by a sort of human regress. Increasingly people are becoming aware of the fact that the most important features of human life formation may remain essentially unaddressed by science and technology. The kind of thinking science and technology demand and promote – typically reductionistic, empirically-based and utilitarian – diminishes the possibility of effectively engaging questions about what ultimately matters, questions about the depth dimension of existence.²³ This depth dimension then tends to be either denied or simply ignored.

²¹ And to say that science will find a way through our out of this threatening situation is, I believe, an unacceptable response. Science will and must play some part in the response. But we human agents must also make some serious decisions about the way we think and ultimately about the way we live.

²² See Unit Two, Session Three, “The Three Pillars”.

²³ John Thornhill’s book, already cited, takes up this tension. Put simply, we could say that the Enlightenment, with its heavy emphasis on reason and its empirical, reductionistic methodology,

This has given rise to a growing chorus of voices demanding, among other things, a whole new way of thinking about what it means to be human and how we might best build human societies and how we must create a sustainable future for the human family in this world. Fewer and fewer people are looking simply to science and technology for the keys to such momentous issues. In this regard, the emergence of so-called New Age experiences and schools of thought, along with a general acceptance of the need for spirituality, is noteworthy.



engendered a mindset that no longer had the ability to deal with anything that could not be empirically – or at least mathematically – verified. We might even say that that mindset no longer had the inclination or desire to think metaphysically. Not surprisingly, therefore, philosophy in the middle of the 20th century was seriously debating whether or not it was even possible to have a metaphysic. David Tacey's *The Spirituality Revolution* (Harper Collins, 2003), also has some excellent material relevant to this theme of the loss of a sense of the transcendence in Enlightenment thinking. Tacey argues that there are significant signs in our culture that suggest a counter movement today.

CHRISTIAN ARTICULATION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

** Reason is a God-given gift which can facilitate or obstruct our Christian life formation.*

** The way we think has a profound effect on the way we hear and interpret the Gospel and behave as followers of the Way.*



The schools of the twelfth century

In the foregoing we have hardly scratched the surface of our topic. Hopefully, the little scratches we may have produced will lead to a deeper appreciation of the mysterious nature of the person as thinking, and beyond that to a deeper appreciation of the mystery of the human person as such, “made in the image and likeness” of the Great Mystery, “fallen,” redeemed in Jesus Christ.

In what is to follow, we will similarly scratch the surface, hopefully with positive results. The danger of this, of course, is the danger of a little knowledge – it may lead us to produce simplistic responses to complex questions. This does not have to happen though. The opportunity is that it will, at the very least, give us pause for thought when the topic is a matter for discussion and it may even lead us to read more and gain greater freedom in our lives.

Before we consider the experience of the Christian Church in the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment world, it will be helpful for us to go back a further five or six centuries before the Enlightenment. We will find there some of the seeds that grew to mature plants in the time of the post-Enlightenment period and leading into our own times.²⁴

The 12th century was a time of great ferment in Europe generally and within the Church specifically. In particular, the 12th century saw the amazing and wonderful development of the schools, forerunners to our modern day universities. These schools became places of rational disputation in which the taken for granted ways of thinking that had endured through the previous millennium, were called into question.

Like all major transition phases, it was a time of progress amidst ambivalence. We can see it, on the one hand as the playing out of a most healthy tension and struggle that opened up new ways of thinking about being human and being followers of the Way. On the other hand, we can see it as a time in which the rational and the abstract gained and unhealthy ascendancy within Christianity.

²⁴ John Thornhill was perceptive in calling his book, *Modernity: Christianity's Estranged Child*. The relationship between the Christian tradition and the tradition of the Enlightenment is actually a complex one. To describe it simply in terms of “opposition” is misleading. It shares the ambivalences about which we have spoken above.

Because that unhealthy ascendance pertained until at least the middle of the 20th century, it is worth a closer look. One author makes a helpful summary statement:

*The twelfth century saw the birth of a more scientific theology which was to reach its highest point in the thirteenth. De facto if not de jure, the new science leaned more to reason and dialectic, than to faith, the Word of God, truth received without discussion as coming from the Truth. ... Theology henceforward claimed to be a science, and according to the Aristotelian ideal took on a speculative and even deductive character. Like all sciences it was disinterested; it was no longer concerned with nourishing the spiritual life, as the monastic theologians would have it do. The Scriptures were read, studied and taught with the view of the mind rather than the heart acquiring knowledge, and theological activity assumed a more purely intellectual character, less contemplative, less dependent on the atmosphere created by the liturgy.*²⁵

The 12th century was a time during which approaches to the spiritual life tended to become detached from lived experience. The immediacy of the Gospel, accessed particularly through liturgy, the day-to-day routines of living – particularly monastic living – and such exercises as *lectio*, tended to be replaced by an abstract and increasingly detached-from-life theological project which made the Gospel increasingly remote.²⁶ The focus of the spiritual life tended to shift from covenant, intimacy and communion, towards rules, techniques and abstract ideas. Theology replaced spirituality as the primary field of study in the Christian life.

It is not uncommon, even today, to find theologians who think that spirituality is a sub-branch of theology rather than vice versa. When this disordering takes place, spirituality as a discipline tends to suffer from abstractedness and dislocation from

²⁵ François Vandenbroucke, op cit, 225. With particular reference to the technique of arranging “sentences” from the Fathers and theologians around “questions” put by the “master”, Vandenbroucke observes: “The danger of this rigidly technical work was that henceforth it would come between the churchman and the Gospel. The theologian would forget the Word of God and rely for his whole spirituality on the *Sentences*. Clearly there had to be some sort of systematization in the twelfth century: the new sources and the new methods of research were bound to end in a new synthesis. But there was a real danger that the Word of God would no longer be given to souls who longed to hear and live by it” (op cit, 228-29). In the latter part of the twentieth century the Church was suffering gravely from the dislocation of theology from spirituality begun in the twelfth century. One author reflects the thought of von Balthasar on this matter: “Theology, (von Balthasar) holds, is contemplation brought to conceptualization, issuing from prayer and leading to prayer. Not only does von Balthasar deprecate the rift, developing over centuries, between theology and spirituality; his work marks the most sustained effort by a twentieth-century Catholic theologian to repair it, by the impassioned placement at the heart of that work, of the living Object of prayer. Moreover, and in complete harmony with this sensitivity, the only truly convincing verification of Christianity and its theological vision is, for von Balthasar, the saint.” (Robert Imbelli, “Surpassing Depth in a One-Dimensional Day”, *Commonweal*, November 4, 1983, 592)

²⁶ It is therefore probably no accident of history that the Inquisition in Toulouse, in 1229, forbade the reading of the Bible by all lay people.

human experience. In fact, theology follows spirituality and finds its roots in spirituality or it loses its way. One of the Fathers puts it well:

*If you are a theologian you will pray truly; and if you pray truly you are a theologian.*²⁷

In developing a well grounded spirituality, a vigorous and constant and never-ending conversation must be promoted between experience and the various sources of wisdom. Thus we can say that experience is the great teacher.

A person who is not able to listen and hear what is happening in his or her lived experience is quite simply unable to develop a well grounded spirituality. He or she may become very knowledgeable *about* spirituality – its history, its themes, its theological ramifications etc – but spirituality will not be integral into that person’s life. For that very reason, such a person might be dangerous if he or she is sought out as guide to developing one’s spirituality.

In this new environment, dominated by the rational and the abstract, what puts the person in motion, as it were, in the spiritual life, is intellectual conviction and will power, with particular emphasis on the latter.²⁸ The spiritual life was thus easily reduced to a moralistic project. Many Christians suffered under this reductionism and were thus denied the freedom and joy that are potentially part of an authentic spirituality. We could say that this changing emphasis under the influence of the schools, shifted our primary focus away from Jerusalem to Athens, from Hebrew thinking to Greek thinking, from Jesus to Aristotle. It could be said that the Christian life, in this ideological structure, became another form of Stoicism thinly disguised by Christian concepts.

One of the unfortunate outcomes of this development was that spirituality – our living relationships with God in Christ, ourselves, other people and the world – tended to be stripped of feeling. With the loss of feeling there was also a loss of passion,²⁹ and with the loss of passion there tended to be a loss of both Gospel

²⁷ Evagrius of Pontus, *On Prayer*, 61 (Philokalia 1,182).

²⁸ This gave rise to what might be called “head and teeth spirituality” – figure it out with your head and grit your teeth and do it. It might also be called “religion reduced to ideology.” It is worth noting that during the centuries in which this desiccated “spirituality” was taking hold in the community of the baptized, a comparable movement was also happening in the secular world. Psychiatrist R D Laing has written well of its effects in his *The Politics of Experience*, Penguin, 1968. See also, Huston Smith, *Beyond the Post-Modern Mind*, Crossroad, 1982. T S Eliot’s *The Cocktail Party* is essentially an exposition of a group of well educated, highly socialized moderns who have no spiritual roots and are suffering because of it. See especially Celia’s conversation with Reilly in Act II of this play.

²⁹ Willful endeavor increased – this ought not be mistaken for genuine “passion”. The former is ideologically driven and, in the end, ego-based. The latter is the energy that comes from the experience of Love. It is Mystery-centred. The former tends to be driven by duty, the latter tends to be drawn by delight.

realism and freedom.³⁰ All the while we were purporting to analyze and understand the message of Jesus, we were tending rather to domesticate it and turn it into an ideology in which we – not Jesus – were in charge.³¹

Let us hasten to add here that this critique is not a critique of the intellectual life as such or of the use of reason in human and Christian life formation. Both are to be commended and developed. It is, rather, a critique of the *misuse* of the intellectual life and reason. It was a good thing that, in the twelfth century, the schools emerged as a prominent and influential part of the Church's life.³² However, as one author observes, up until the eleventh century

*thinkers still drew their inspiration from the liturgy and from the traditional lectio divina of monasticism, that is from Scripture and the Fathers.*³³

There is no need to either idealize or demonise the Schools of the 12th century. As with every era in history, it is the behaviour of people that makes the difference. Again, life is not what happens to us but what we do with what happens to us.

³⁰ It is ironic – and perhaps predictable? – that during this same century there was an enormous upsurge of intense piety. People – typically lay people – longed to live the Gospel more literally. St Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) is probably the best example of this. There was also the beginnings of a eucharistic piety focused more on “adoration” than “action”, the Eucharist becoming something to behold rather than an event within which one was an active participant. A strongly sentimental devotion to the Mother of God also emerged at this time. It should also be noted that this is the century that produced the very fruitful School of St Victor in Paris (with Hugh and Richard as outstanding witnesses to the tradition) and also St Anselm of Canterbury (d 1109), Hildegard of Bingen (d 1179), St Bernard of Clairvaux (d 1153), St Thomas à Becket (d 1170) and St Dominic (1170-1221).

³¹ Soren Kierkegaard was very critical of what he called “Christendom” in the nineteenth century. In his *Attack on Christendom* he writes: “The sort of men who now live cannot stand anything so strong as the Christianity of the New Testament (they would die of it or lose their minds), just in the same sense that children cannot stand strong drink, for which reason we prepare for them a little lemonade – and official Christianity is lemonade – twaddle for the sort of beings that are now called men, it is the strongest thing they can stand, and this twaddle then, in their language, they call ‘Christianity’, just as children call their lemonade wine.” Making this kind of critical analysis is not to deny the fact that many lived generous and Christ-like lives.

³² Paris was, for a time at least, the major center for the Schools. The Paris University was founded in 1150. Oxford University was founded in 1167 by the Jewish scholar and theologian, Ibn Ezra, and Cambridge University was founded in 1200.

³³ François Vandenbroucke, “New Milieux, New Problems: From the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century” in Louis Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality, Volume II: The Spirituality of the Middle Ages*, Seabury Press, 1968, 224.

The community of the baptized in the post-Enlightenment world³⁴

The encounter between the Catholic Church and the 18th Enlightenment was ironic, given the ascendancy of a more rational and abstract way of thinking that had gained an ascendancy within the Catholic Church during the 12th century. The Church tended to react against the scientific, social, cultural and political developments of the Enlightenment. This suggests that the approach of “reason” that had taken hold in the Church was directed more to defending an ideology than in exploring truth, no matter where or how that truth was manifested.

The reaction of the Catholic Church authorities to Galileo at the beginning of the 17th century is symptomatic of a certain reactive style of thinking that seemed to be endemic within the Catholic Church then and until recent generations. We only have to reflect for a moment on the effects astronomy is having on our own consciousness today to gain some appreciation for the threat the new astronomy presented to an institution – the Catholic Church – that felt itself to be the holder and protector of all truth, standing at the centre of this earth which is the centre of the universe.³⁵

We could name six different but interdependent negative factors that have tended to characterize the Catholic Church during the post-Enlightenment years:

1. An unnecessary antipathy between faith and science has lingered to the present day within Christianity. While many within the Christian community have come to realize that the truth – no matter where it is found or by whom it is found and spoken – is in some way a reflection of the Truth Himself, many who see the Christian Church as irrelevant to their lives, think of science as having replaced faith or at least rendered faith irrelevant.
2. Secondly, and closely allied to the above, there seems to have been a style of thinking within the Catholic Church that saw the Church over against “the world” and “the world” over against the Church. This thinking perceives the Church as a *sanctuary* from the world rather than a *sign* in it. One of the most significant effects of the Second Vatican Council for the thinking of Catholics was that it gave powerful impetus to some new ways of thinking about the Church. Central to this new thinking is the idea that conversation is constitutive of not only the Christian life but humanity as such, not just an optional extra. Ecumenism is an obvious corollary, as is respect for other religious traditions and the willingness to listen to all men and women of good will.³⁶

³⁴ The comments that follow are restricted to one strand of the Christian tradition – the Catholic Church.

³⁵ Part of the conflict with Galileo was also the belief that his theory was violating Scripture.

³⁶ See for example the fine little article by John O’Malley, “The Style of Vatican II”, *America*, February 24, 2003, 12-15.

3. Thirdly, the Catholic Church reacted very strongly against the movements toward political and religious freedom, liberalism and the kind of social tolerance espoused by John Locke and other Enlightenment thinkers. The Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) manifested much that the Church found objectionable. Along with some destructive features, there was within the Church a struggle to promote dialogue with the world and adopt something of the new freedoms espoused by Enlightenment thinking. One name in particular is associated with this push for a more liberal Church: Hugues Félicité de Lammenais. This reactive mode of 19th century Catholicism was somewhat – but not completely – countered by the Second Vatican Council, especially the documents *Gaudium et Spes* (“Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (“Declaration on Religious Freedom”). Both these documents were among the last to be promulgated by the Council, on December 7, 1965, literally twenty four hours before the closing of the last session of the Council.
4. Fourthly, and running parallel to the above and helping to engender a sort of siege mentality within the Catholic Church, was the sense of urgency to defeat Protestantism. So much Catholic thinking during the Counter Reformation years was precisely that – “Counter Reformation” thinking. It gave rise to a strong emphasis on apologetics and tended to take on a distinctly polemical tone.³⁷
5. Fifthly, and rooted in the style of thinking of the 12th century, but given impetus by the rationalism and abstract approaches to thinking also characteristic of the Enlightenment, theological thinking tended to be propositional and impositional rather than descriptive and expositional. That is, the theological project tended to be reduced to developing and maintaining a set of propositions that were imposed rather than a process of describing a mystery or telling a story in different ways that would facilitate the exposition of the truth in particular instances. The theological project, implicitly at least, was dedicated to maintaining a system and this was supported by authoritarian pronouncements. Scriptures were used not so much to lead us to Christ as to prove the validity of the system and its dogmas.³⁸ A descriptive and expositional approach would have been much more open to genuine scholarship and the emergence of surprising truths, to story and the poetry of a mystery that is, of its nature, incomprehensible; it

³⁷ One of the further effects of this preoccupation with Protestantism, was the development of a pseudo-unity and cohesion within the Catholic Church. While naming a common “enemy” can be a relatively easy way to unite people, it can also be a superficial and dangerous thing to do. It is superficial because it generates a commitment on the basis of the enmity and as soon as the enmity goes, so does the commitment; it is dangerous because otherwise thoughtful and mature adults can be manipulated into some dastardly and even violent thoughts and behaviours on the basis of the enmity.

³⁸ We might say that we engaged in “in-house maintenance talk” rather than genuine conversation.

would have also been open to the breaking of old boundaries and the ongoing transformation of lives as they came in contact with different cultural and social situations and different ways of thinking and different scientific discoveries. The incomprehensible and uncontrollable Mystery, revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ by the power of the Great Spirit of the Living God, can never be adequately described by propositions. It therefore resists impositions of any kind. Perhaps this is why Jesus told stories to introduce his listeners to the Truth?

6. Sixthly, there were two other significant consequences of the abstract and ideological way of thinking that emerged in the 12th century and was nurtured in the environment of the Enlightenment:

- In the first instance, there seemed to be a deep conviction that we Christians had “the answers” to all of life’s big questions. And these “answers” were clearly laid out in manuals. And the chosen agents of the system – specifically the clergy – were schooled by those manuals and went out to the faithful with “the answers.” In matters of faith and morals, a certain infantilism therefore was fostered among many Christians.³⁹
- In the second instance, there was a tendency to reduce the Christian life to a moral project, with clear rules and laws as guides. Jesus tended to be presented principally as a moral teacher and exemplar who had given clear directions as to how His followers should behave. The Church understood and proclaimed those clear and unambiguous directions, leaving the Christian faithful in no doubts about the way to eternal life (or death). This way of thinking also carried with it particular ways of thinking about God as judge and there fore ways of thinking about our relationship with God as overly influenced by fear and guilt.

As with the general legacy of thinking left to us by the Enlightenment, the particular legacy of thinking left to us by previous generations of the Church is being rightly called into question. The dangers and opportunities that face us are enormous.

One danger is to throw the baby out with the bath water, as the saying goes. There is a rich legacy of the intellectual life and the uses of reason to plumb the depths of the Great Mystery and we must foster that continually. That said, central to our challenge for renewal within the Church is to develop a way of thinking that enables us to be a life-giving part of a conversation between the Gospel, the authentic Christian Tradition and the world in which we find ourselves. Perhaps we could take to heart the Enlightenment challenge – “Sapere aude!” – without proceeding down the path of rationalism and functionalism.

³⁹ I wonder whether Islam is not faced with this same dynamic, where the mass of Muslims wait for the clerics to tell them what they are to think and how they are to behave.

A way forward?

Michael Buckley SJ offers one possible way of thinking that suggests a way forward in his remarkable book, *Denying and Disclosing God: The Ambiguous Process of Modern Atheism*. He discusses the phenomenon of atheism, a particular child of the Enlightenment. He suggests that there is, paradoxically, a close relationship between the thinking implied in the best of the Christian contemplative and mystical traditions and the thinking implied in modern atheism. Towards the end of the book he writes:

I wonder again if Wittgenstein does not give us something of a hint when he stated so emphatically to Drury that ‘the symbolism of Christianity is wonderful beyond words, but when people try to make a philosophical system out of it I find it disgusting.’ What does it mean to say that symbols are ‘wonderful’? That they evoke wonder. And how? In and through the reality they embody and manifest. Wittgenstein also acknowledged this religious cogency in such works as Augustine’s Confessions, Dostoyevski’s The Brothers Karamazov, Tolstoy’s short stories, and William James’ Varieties of Religious Experience. It is not that these narratives or reflections upon narratives argued a case, but rather that they made manifest, they disclosed, the reality they embodied. They offered a manifestation rather than an inference – quite literally a presentation, an emergence into presence – quite different from scientific argument, but not anti-intellectual.⁴⁰



⁴⁰ Michael Buckley, *Denying and Disclosing God: The Ambiguous Process of Modern Atheism*, Yale University Press, 2004, 125.

Snippets for meditation

(1) *“(Informative thinking) is an issue-oriented style of thinking that, in service of functional achievements, aims primarily not at formation by information. It leads to definite measurable results. Linear and progressive, it does not dwell or recollect itself for formative thinking; it moves from one logical-functional insight and its practical realization to the next. When it becomes exclusive and excessive, it abandons the soul by not allowing it to be nourished by creative repetition of contemplation on the transcendent meanings hidden in formative events.*

“Exclusive dependence on informative thinking deforms the core, current, and manifest forms of human life. They deteriorate into collections of mere functional modes and modalities of presence to reality; their ongoing formation is cut off from their nourishing ground, the unique foundational form in the soul waiting to be incarnated in these modes and modalities of presence. It warps and confuses the receptive formative vision of reality, laying waste the divine formative powers shared by human nature. ...

“The splendor of the practical results of informative reason led historically to a powerful pulsation in the minds and hearts of people: an almost exclusive exaltation of the functional dimension of the spiritual life. A counter pulsation of formative thinking must balance the influence of this exaltation. Otherwise, indifference might lead to the disappearance of the more foundational art of formative thinking. Total disappearance would deform human nature lastingly; it would destroy authentic human presence on this earth.”⁴¹



(2) *“The more one seeks “the good” outside oneself as some- thing to be acquired, the more one is faced with the necessity of discussing, studying, understanding, analysing the nature of the good. The more, therefore, one becomes involved in abstractions and in the confusion of divergent opinions. The more “the good” is objectively analyzed, the more it is treated as something to be attained by special virtuous techniques, the less real it becomes. As it becomes less real, it recedes further into the distance of abstraction, futurity, unattainability. The more, therefore, one concentrates on the means to be used to attain it. And as the end becomes more remote and more difficult, the means become more elaborate and complex, until finally the mere study of the means becomes so demanding that all one’s effort must be concentrated on this, and the end is forgotten. Hence the nobility of the ju scholar becomes, in reality, a devotion to the systematic uselessness of practicing means which lead nowhere. This is, in fact, nothing but or- ganized despair: “the good” that is preached and exacted by the moralist thus finally becomes an evil, and all the*

⁴¹ Adrian van Kaam, “Glossary,” in *Studies in Formative Spirituality*, I, 1 (Feb 1980), 153-54.

more so since the hopeless pursuit of it distracts one from the real good which one already possesses and which one now despises or ignores.”⁴²



(3) “Childhood training, then, is an exceptionally strong influence in causing an individual to think illogically or neurotically. But it is not a fatal or irrevocable influence. Neurosis, in sum, seems to originate in and be perpetuated by some fundamentally unsound, irrational ideas. The individual comes to believe in unrealistic, impossible, often perfectionistic goals – especially the goals that he should be approved by everyone who is important to him, should do many things perfectly, and should never be frustrated in any of his major desires. Then, in spite of considerable contradictory evidence, he refuses to surrender his original illogical beliefs. ... My personal inclination, after working for the last several years with rational-emotive psycho-therapy, is to say that yes, there is one absolutely necessary condition for real or basic personality change to occur – and that is that somehow, through some professional or non-professional channel, and through some kind of experience with himself, with others, or with things and events, the afflicted individual must learn to recognize his irrational, inconsistent, and unrealistic perceptions and thoughts, and change these for more logical, more reasonable philosophies of life. Without this kind of fundamental change in his ideologies and philosophic assumptions, I am tempted to say, no deep-seated personality changes will occur.”⁴³



(4) “The Reformation had another effect on the modern mind contrary to Christian orthodoxy. For Luther’s appeal to the primacy of the individual’s religious response would lead gradually but inevitably to the modern mind’s sense of the interiority of religious reality, the final individualism of truth, and the pervasive role in determining truth played by the personal subject. As time passed, the Protestant doctrine of justification through the individual’s faith in Christ seemed to place more emphasis on the individual’s faith than on Christ – on the personal relevance of ideas, as it were, rather than on their external validity. The self increasingly became the measure of things, self-defining and self-legislating. Truth increasingly became truth-as-experienced-by-the-self. Thus the road opened by Luther would move through Pietism to Kantian critical philosophy and Romantic philosophical idealism to, finally, the philosophical pragmatism and existentialism of the late modern era” (243).

“Although Newton’s working concept of gravity as a force acting at a distance – a concept transposed from his studies of the sympathies and antipathies of

⁴² Thomas Merton, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, New Directions, 1965, 23..

⁴³ Albert Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*, The Citadel Press, 1962/1977, 93 & 117.

Hermetic philosophy and alchemy-seemed esoteric and insufficiently mechanical to continental mechanistic philosophers, and puzzled even Newton, the mathematical derivations were too spectacularly comprehensive not to be compelling. Through the concept of a quantitatively defined attractive force, he had integrated the two major themes of seventeenth-century science – the mechanistic philosophy and the Pythagorean tradition. It was not long before both his method and his conclusions were recognized as the paradigm of scientific practice. In, 1686-87, the Royal Society of London published Newton’s Principia Mathematica Philosophiae Naturalis. During the following decades, his achievement was celebrated as the triumph of the modern mind over ancient and medieval ignorance. Newton had revealed the true nature of reality: Voltaire called him the greatest man who ever lived. The Newtonian-Cartesian cosmology was now established as the foundation for a new world view. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, the educated person in the West knew that God had created the universe as a complex mechanical system, composed of material particles moving in an infinite neutral space according to a few basic principles, (270) such as inertia and gravity, that could be analyzed mathematically. In this universe, the Earth moved about the Sun, which was one star among a multitude, just as the Earth was one planet among many, and neither Sun nor Earth was at the center of the universe. A single set of physical laws governed both the celestial and the terrestrial realms, which were thus no longer fundamentally distinct. For just as the heavens were composed of material substances, so were their motions impelled by natural mechanical forces. It also seemed reasonable to assume that after the creation of this intricate and orderly universe, God removed himself from further active involvement or intervention in nature, and allowed it to run-on its own according to these perfect, immutable laws. The new image of the Creator was thus that of a divine architect, a master mathematician and clock maker, while the universe was viewed as a uniformly regulated and fundamentally impersonal phenomenon. Man’s role in that universe could best be judged on the evidence that, by virtue of his own intelligence, he had penetrated the universe’s essential order and could now use that knowledge for his own benefit and empowerment. One could scarcely doubt that man was the crown of creation. The Scientific Revolution - and the birth of the modern era - was now complete” (271).⁴⁴



(5) *“Where Tertullian’s influence has proved most harmful is, perhaps, in the kind of polemics which he succeeded only too well in acclimating in ecclesiastic circles: combining an abstract and completely a priori logic with the supposition (candid or implied) that the adversary must be a fool or else dishonest.”⁴⁵*

⁴⁴ Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*, Ballantine Books, 1991, 243 & 270-71.

⁴⁵ Louis Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality, Volume I: The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*, Seabury Press, 1963, 454.

(6) “‘God’ is itself the final word before wordless and worshipful silence in the face of the ineffable mystery. It is the word that must be spoken at the conclusion of all speaking (‘God’) is n almost ridiculously exhausting and demanding word. If we were not hearing it in this We would have heard something that has nothing in common with the true word ‘God’ but its phonetic sound. The concept ‘God’ is not a grasp of God by which a person masters the mystery, but it is letting oneself be grasped by the mystery that is present and ever distant.”⁴⁶



(7) [Exactly fifty years ago, in August 1957, at a conference held in Cuernavaca, Mexico, the psychiatrist, Erich Fromm, gave a paper entitled “Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism.” His observations, for the most part, are uncannily applicable fifty years on:] “While the majority of people in the West do not do not consciously feel as if they were living through a crisis of Western culture (probably never have the majority of people in a radically critical situation been aware of the crisis), there is agreement, at least among a number of critical observers, as the existence and nature of this crisis. It is the crisis which has been described as ‘malaise,’ ‘ennui,’ ‘mal de siècle,’ the deadening of life, the automatization of man, his alienation from himself, from his fellow man and from nature. Man has followed rationalism to the point where rationalism has transformed itself into utter irrationality. Since Descartes, man has increasingly split thought from affect; thought alone is considered rational – affect, by its very nature, irrational; the person, I, has been split off into an intellect, which constitutes my self, and which is to control me as it is to control nature. Control by the intellect over nature, and the production of more and more things, became the paramount aims of life. In this process, man has transformed himself into a thing, life has become subordinated to property, ‘to be’ is dominated by to have.’ Where the roots of Western culture, both Greek and Hebrew, considered the aim of life the perfection of man, modern man is concerned with the perfection of things, and the knowledge of how to make them. Western man is in a state of schizoid inability to experience affect, hence he is anxious, depressed, and desperate. He still pays lip service to the aims of happiness, individualism, initiative – but actually he has no aim. Ask him what he is living for, what is the aim of all his strivings – and he will be embarrassed. Some may say they live for the family, others, ‘to have fun,’ still others, to make money, but in reality nobody knows what he is living for; he has no goal, except the wish to escape insecurity and aloneness.”⁴⁷



⁴⁶ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, Seabury Press, 1978, 51-54.

⁴⁷ D T Suzuki, Erich Fromm and Richard De Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, Harper Colophon Books, 1960, 78-79.

Suggestions for further study

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Suggested exercises

1. Pause a number of times this week and ask yourself: What is happening? Let it be an open question – one you ask with your head and answer with your stomach, or a question you ask then listen within for the response. Let it apply to yourself and/or the circumstances and/or other people.
2. Do something *reflectively* this week that you would normally do *pre-reflectively* – like walking, turning on a light, making a cup of coffee, getting on a bus. Become aware of the fact that living is more a matter of facilitation than mastery.

