

# DEVELOPING YOUR OWN SPIRITUALITY

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## **UNIT THREE** **SESSION FIVE:** **The person as consciousness**



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*Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue.*<sup>1</sup>



*To be human is to be spirit in the flesh. Our spiritual life finds its rootedness in our fundamental or spirit self and its anchorage in the vital drives of the body, the vital self. This spirit self is already an openness to what is beyond us, to the whole of all that is, the Holy. Any spiritual presence finds its core in this intuitive pre-presence to the sacred, the eternal, the infinite. The term pre-presence signifies that this intuition is not necessarily a conscious one. When the infinite announces itself to our awareness, we may be terrified by this immense beyond; we may be frightened too by the demands it may make upon us. We may flee from this experience by a refusal that bans this announcement of the beyond from our awareness once and for all or so we hope. This radical refusal has an effect somewhat similar to that which repression has on our infra-conscious drives.*<sup>2</sup>



*O Lord thou hast searched me and known me! Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up; thou discernest my thoughts from afar. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. Thou dost beset me behind and before, and layest thy hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it.*<sup>3</sup>



*In fact, this seems to be the rule, that every single time I want to do good it is something evil that comes to hand. In my inmost self I dearly love God's Law, but I can see that my body follows a different law that battles against the law which my reason dictates.*<sup>4</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Henry James, "The Art of Fiction" collected in *Partial Portraits* (1888).

<sup>2</sup> Adrian van Kaam, *In Search of Spiritual Identity*, Dimension, 1975, 110.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 139:1-6.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 7:21-23.

## ***THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN DIMENSION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES***

**\* *One of the characteristics of distinctively human life is consciousness.***

**\* *Human consciousness operates at different levels.***



### **The common sense meaning of consciousness**

We use the word “consciousness” to generally indicate “awareness,” “alertness” or an ability to be attentive to what is happening in and around oneself. Thus we say things like, “I was conscious that you were feeling uncomfortable” or “He was knocked unconscious by the fall.” This colloquial use in fact belies the complexity of what we actually understand by that word.

We attach to the notion of human consciousness an *active* component, a way of *being-towards* the people, events and things of our world. Human consciousness is *a way of being present*, a way of engaging the world. For example, if a woman – let us say a total stranger – is standing next to me in a crowded bus she is not “present” in the same way as another person who is on that same bus but is intently listening to me speak.

Let us suppose further that I am telling the second person in the crowded bus a very interesting story, one that catches the attention of others within earshot. What are they likely to do? Typically, they will begin listening too; they will, in other words become conscious of me and towards me. That is, their presence to me will change.

Let us suppose, further, in the course of my telling this interesting story, I mention some experience that reminds the person to whom I am speaking, of some troubling experience in her own life. She may now become more conscious of her own feelings and thoughts with regard to that triggered memory. She may, in fact, begin to re-tell her experience and she might even become quite caught up in that process. *I* suddenly become the listener. There has been a radical shift both *in* me, *in* her and *between* us. You might recall the experience later by saying something like, “Suddenly I was conscious that she was no longer listening to me but I was listening to her.” I might even note that her presence becomes distracted, perhaps self-absorbed. In a sense, she may no longer be present to me.

In reflecting on such a mundane experience, we begin to become alert to the mysterious inner worlds of people. We could note, for example:

- *Awareness* is one aspect of that mysterious inner world – awareness of what is happening *within* and awareness of what is happening *beyond and outside* of me; the two may become disconnected from each other or one may overpower the other or distort the other. This awareness is in fact made up

of all the intra-formative powers – thinking, willing, remembering, anticipating, imagining and feeling.

- *Lack of awareness* or partial awareness or biased awareness is also part of the experience. For example, I may be so absorbed in your story that I lose awareness of the fact that I am beginning to feel quite angry or sad or tired or cold.
- This inner world seems to have *a life of its own*. In the above example, something I said “switched” the listener on to such a powerful memory that, like a train that had been re-routed onto another line, she went off on a tangent. And she may not have been aware that she had done this.

We could all describe any number of instances where we have observed this strange connection between the “inner world” and our behaviour. We might wonder why we feel this or that, why a certain thought or memory or feeling just “popped up” at that moment, why we said something that we regretted later, why we took an instant liking or disliking to a particular person, and so on.

Have you ever smelled something that “took you” to some other time or place in your life? For example, the smell of fresh-baked bread or new-mown grass or the aroma of certain plants and flowers can “transport” us. Yes, this is obviously a function of remembering. But the very process of remembering implies recalling information from some “inner place.”

Consider the more extreme example of someone who has been traumatized in one way or another – for example, by the experience of war, sexual abuse, marriage breakdown, loss of job, violence and/or frightening inconsistency in childhood and so on.<sup>5</sup> That mysterious inner world can become very confused and painful, so much so, that it might profoundly and adversely affect our interactions both with ourselves and with other people, events and things. The traumatizing experience itself or parts of that actual experience, might recur in disturbing ways in the imagination and memory, sleep might be repeatedly disrupted by nightmares or relationships might become extremely problematic and dysfunctional, the individual might be overwhelmed with anxiety attacks, or experience desperate loss of self-confidence, or become deeply depressed, or manifest an inclination to violence or uncontrollable tears. And so on. The individuals themselves may not be perplexed by their own behaviour.

Consider, on the other hand, an alternative example of those who feel they have been extraordinarily blessed in life, loved by wonderful people, enjoyed good health and many great opportunities. That mysterious inner world can be a place of more or less equanimity, energy and creative focus for such people, enabling them

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<sup>5</sup> These examples of being traumatized and the one following are a bit one dimensional; human beings are in fact much more complex and multi-layered than either of these examples might suggest. However, for the sake of making a point, it is useful to take the examples at face value.

to push on with life and relationships more or less happily and peacefully.<sup>6</sup>

We might make four practical observations in the light of the foregoing:

- We cannot exercise absolute control over that inner world; at best we can – and must – exercise facilitative control.
- This inner world, secondly, is one of life’s givens, it is part of our being-in-the world; as such it registers what is happening just as our thinking, our willing, our remembering, our anticipating, our imagining and our feeling register what is happening; we do well to listen carefully to what is going on.
- This inner world, thirdly, may seem threatening precisely because it moves in ways that – some times at least – are baffling and out of control. It is important that we take positive steps to prevent an enmity developing within, that we foster a relaxed spirit of hospitality rather than hostility. This is done by gentle and honest attentiveness, a willingness to listen to whatever is thrown up there. Provided we do adopt this gentle self-companionship and do not set about digging and aggressively trying to “sort out” that inner world, nothing can hurt us from that world.
- This inner world, fourthly, seems to have its own curative properties and processes and timing which work quite well when we do pay attention and listen gently and honestly and intelligently.<sup>7</sup>

And we ought not forget the human experience of *dreaming*. In our rationalistic and functionalistic culture, we tend to take little account of the human capacity to dream. Or, alternatively, we set about rationally trying to analyze the dreams to gain some sort of clear (ie rational) understanding of what is going on in a person’s life. There are many cultures, however, where the people are much more at ease with dreams and their capacity to reveal reality. In such cultures dreams and dreaming can play a simple and natural role, connecting people with reality and bringing healing into individuals and groups.

Complementing nature’s work in dreaming, most societies have an array of rituals and symbols and stories and customs and practices to promote creative and constructive processes in the inner human world. We might wonder, however, whether the modern West has such processes in place, given its excessive emphasis on the rational and the functional.

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<sup>6</sup> Again, we must avoid being simplistic here. A person who has been traumatized might also be incredibly focused in life and accomplish much *precisely because they have been traumatized*. For example, a writer might write well because – rather than in spite of – traumatic experience. As always, we must remember the principle: Life is not what happens to us but what we do with what happens to us. Freedom is everything and the deepest of all freedoms is the freedom to choose an attitude.

<sup>7</sup> Sometimes this intelligent listening and attentiveness to the movements of this inner world can be assisted by expert help.

## **Towards a deeper understanding of consciousness**

Recall the intra-formative powers about which we have spoken in recent lectures. We are *thinking, willing, remembering, anticipating, imagining* and *feeling* beings. These powers that enable us to participate in the mystery that is life, operate at different levels of consciousness.

I may, for example, be remembering and thinking at this moment about the 1936 Chevrolet we used to have when I was a child. What is *focal* is that green car with the long sloping back. But just off stage, as it were, and still out of view, are other details of life from that time. There are the big fig trees in the front yard, the weather board buildings, the wire fences, the cane growing next door, and so on. But for the moment, I am absorbed by my consciousness of the green Chevrolet.

Suppose the phone rings at that moment. All of a sudden I am drawn away from this little focus. The person on the phone speaks about their new car. A different focus develops quite easily.

While I am on the phone my consciousness may continue to work with that old memory of the green Chevrolet, even though I am not aware now that that is happening. When the phone conversation finishes, I may return quite easily to the Chevrolet and the subject of the phone conversation slips away into another part of my consciousness. In fact, I might return to an actual event that my consciousness has thrown up: I can see the car in my imagination, it is just “there,” as it were, without my having summoned it, and I see the whole family in the car as my father drives through the waters covering the Pacific Highway during a flood. And so it goes. This is the person as thinking, willing, remembering, anticipating, imagining and feeling, all in the one complex action, at different levels of consciousness.

We might distinguish the differing “levels” of consciousness as follows:

- Focal consciousness;
- Pre-focal consciousness;
- Infra-focal consciousness or infra-consciousness;
- Transconsciousness;
- Interconsciousness.

a. Focal consciousness

Clearly there is a small dimension of that inner world of consciousness that, at any given moment is in focus. We might call this *focal consciousness*. Whatever you are actually aware of – through thinking, remembering, anticipating, imagining, feeling – in the given moment, represents your focal consciousness. Obviously it is a very tiny part of the consciousness.

b. Pre-focal consciousness

Just as clearly, there is another domain of consciousness, whilst not in focus at the given moment, can be brought into focus with more or less ease. We might call this *pre-focal consciousness*. Thus, while I recalled the Chevrolet, I was easily able to pick up the phone and engage in a conversation about another matter altogether and then move back to the Chevrolet and a particular incident associated with it. This *pre-focal* domain is *more or less* readily accessible. Generally speaking, it may either pop into our minds unbidden and unpredictably or it may be summoned deliberately by us.

Our beings as such, in interaction with *this* concrete world in *this* specific moment, have the ability to call on a “stock of knowledge” without our even realizing this is what we are in fact doing. Thus, when you go to the bus stop, wave the bus down, pay our fare, take the ride and eventually leave the bus, we are calling on that “stock of knowledge.” And it is more than just the functioning of memory. Such taken for granted behaviour involves the person as thinking, willing, remembering, anticipating, imagining and feeling.

c. Infra-focal consciousness

It seems reasonable to suggest that there is yet a whole other domain of consciousness, beyond both the *focal* and the *pre-focal*, that is not so accessible. For example, in those traumatized people about whom we spoke earlier, clearly there are dynamics operating within their inner worlds that radically affect their behavior. Yet those dynamics are not easily accessed or understood. They are therefore not easily described or spoken about. It is not uncommon that memories, thoughts, images and feelings – especially if they are in any way threatening to us<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> And we might also note that I may not be aware that this or that thought or memory or image or feeling is in fact being perceived by me as a threat. It is possible that such dynamics can occur “out of view”, as it were. One of the functions of good therapy is to facilitate a process whereby we are able to face and work through such threatening thoughts, memories, images and feelings. Our lives may remain significantly unfree until or unless we effectively engage in such a process – with or without professional help.

– only come slowly into awareness.<sup>9</sup> This gradual awareness can take many years in fact. And it seems that in some instances the contents of those deeper recesses of the inner world may never be released or accessed. We know there is “something” going on “in there” but we cannot reach it. It is entirely possible, for example, that a person may carry the disturbing sediments of past experiences to the grave, never having fully purged themselves of their influence.

We can therefore speak of an *infra-focal consciousness* or simply the *infra-consciousness*. This is a domain of our consciousness that is hardly accessible, yet may have content – the residue of life’s experiences – that significantly affects our life and relationships for better or worse.

#### d. Transconsciousness

There is still more to this mysterious inner world. The above three distinctions are unable to help us satisfactorily understand the processes of human creativity, invention, intuition and vision. Creative people, such as poets, musicians and artists, will unanimously bear witness to the fact that the act of creation is one in which the creator is a sort of *instrument* of some other “force” or “process.” Artistic creation is never essentially a matter of mastery but facilitation, it is not so much *by us* as it is *through us*. Similarly, people of depth and vision and magnanimity seem to be able to tap into a bigger reality via this inner world.

So how might this happen? What is going on here? What faculty of the human person opens us to this “more than,” this “beyond,” this “bigger reality” of creativity and vision?

It is this kind of reflection that has led Adrian van Kaam to suggest a further distinction. He suggests that part of the human world of consciousness is *transconsciousness*. He uses this category to describe the radical human openness to the deeper, limitless world of reality that manifests itself concretely as artistic creation or as remarkable intuition or some other *transrational* phenomenon.<sup>10</sup>

This category of the *transconscious* not only helps us to understand the processes whereby we are creative and know ourselves to be connected in the

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<sup>9</sup> Central to the work of therapy is the process of becoming aware. This is not just rational awareness and it cannot be forced. Two excellent books that deal with the nature of this awareness are by Karen Horney – *Our Inner Conflicts: A Constructive Theory of Neurosis* (W W Norton & Company, 1945/1966) and *Self-Analysis* (W W Norton & Company, 1942/1968). For example, Horney observes: “As so often in neurotic phenomena – or is it always? – we find that the patient’s reasoning, conscious or unconscious, is flawless, but rests on false premises.” (*Our Inner Conflicts*, 61.)

<sup>10</sup> The word *transrational* is used to designate a way of interacting with the world that is (a) a way of knowing that is (b) not rational and (c) not irrational but (d) more than both these. Much of our cultural knowledge, for example, is *transrational*, as is the knowing that is involved in symbols, rituals and myths. In fact, if the truth is told, very little of our knowing and our ordinary “stock of knowledge,” could safely be called *merely rational*.



depths of our beings to some reality more than ourselves, it also gives us a way of understanding some rather peculiar and worrying forms of human behaviour. Both the *infra-conscious* and the *transconscious* are out of view and defy absolute control. It seems possible that they might in fact overlap and intermingle in the life of an individual in such a way that it becomes difficult to know whether the individual's expression is more one of the *infra-conscious* and therefore fraught with all sorts of conflicted and perhaps hysterical agenda, or the *transconscious* and therefore, potentially at least, a very powerful opening to the Transcendent.

We might, for example, understand tragedies like the infamous Jonestown affair of 1978<sup>11</sup> a little more if we apply these categories of thought. Thus, Jim Jones does seem to have been a particularly creative person, a man with considerable potential for openness to great vision through his *transconsciousness*. He also seems to have been a deeply disturbed person, a man with considerable unaddressed conflict and tensions in his *infra-consciousness*. Initially at least, the former masked the latter. Gradually, however, the latter raged out of control, fantasy replaced reality and the awful results were remarkable for their violence and the sickening triumph of death over life.<sup>12</sup>

#### e. Interconsciousness

There remains one further category of our consciousness that we ought to name. A point that we have emphasized throughout this course is that we are interconnected and that human life formation finds its fulfilment in and through relationships. It is entirely reasonable to expect that our consciousness will manifest something of this interconnectedness. Adrian van Kaam uses the term *interconsciousness*.

People who share the same formation field for a length of time may come to “share” a certain consciousness. We can probably expect this to be particularly the case if the shared formation field was more or less traumatising (eg prison or concentration camp) or more or less difficult (eg boot camp, boarding school) or more or less happy and rewarding (eg pilgrimage or school days).<sup>13</sup> Obviously, the *interconsciousness* can work either to our benefit or detriment.

### **Towards a healthy consciousness**

A healthy consciousness or inner world will serve us well in our efforts to relate

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<sup>11</sup> On November 18, 1978, nearly one thousand people – citizens of the United States – committed suicide in the jungle of Guyana. They had gone there with the Rev Jim Jones and established a settlement which they named “Jonestown”.

<sup>12</sup> See Michael Whelan, “Counterfeit Elements in Christian Spirituality: A Challenge for Theological Educators” in *Readings for Christian Spirituality, Volume I*, 16-32.

<sup>13</sup> I think there is a recognizable “Catholic consciousness” that can be seen in those who have shared the Catholic culture over many years.

creatively with ourselves and other people, events and things. A healthy consciousness will also promote a deepening connectedness with “the more than,” it will awaken us to the deeper roots of our beings and our origins in Being. A healthy consciousness will facilitate unencumbered communication and relationships. What is “in there” tends to become part of what is “out there,” whether we like it or not.

Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic of a healthy consciousness will be *freedom*. A healthy consciousness will have a certain flexibility and resilience to it. It will not be dominated by unaddressed agenda. Nor will it be a fearful place we dare not go.<sup>14</sup> It will be a place of hospitality where, potentially at least, I am able to encounter the healing and enlightening movements of life. Consciousness – at all levels – must be nurtured as a friend.

A second characteristic of healthy consciousness follows quite naturally from the above: It will be more or less *transparent*. A *transparent* consciousness will be manifest particularly in a free flow of communication within, without filtering and twisting. The communication tends to be straightforward and clear. That person is perceived as open and honest.

On the other hand, a consciousness that is choked with un-faced agenda, contorted by unresolved conflicts and generally not a place where the truth is regularly and readily sought and faced, will tend to be *opaque*. This will be manifest in the person’s presence in all their relationships, particularly in their communication. In that inner world of *opaque* consciousness, the flow of communication is intercepted. The resulting communication may be more or less deformed, being ambivalent, dishonest, manipulative or just plain inept. We might say that the opaque consciousness becomes a filter that can radically alter what we perceive as reality. And we may not even be aware that this is happening.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Recall Henry James powerful image of “the beast in the jungle”. Perhaps we could say there are two radical options: Facing or fleeing. We can face that inner world and work honestly and compassionately and intelligently with its agenda in the context of our formation field of many relationships, or we can evade that work and live out a more or less externalized existence – an existence which will also be more or less superficial. An effective contemplative life assists the facing and the purification that is an inevitable part of that facing.

<sup>15</sup> Again, see the earlier references to works by Karen Horney noted above. Her analysis of the “idealized image” is most insightful and practical.

There are at least two keys to a healthy and life-giving consciousness, one that is both free and transparent:

- *good self-awareness*<sup>16</sup> and
- *good education/discipline*.

Good self-awareness results from a relaxed vigilance, one in which I accompany myself with both honesty and love.<sup>17</sup> Where necessary I can work deliberately to address specific experiences with their particular thoughts and feelings, memories and expectations. Thus, when I am consistently pursuing practical and effective processes for self-understanding I am also dealing with the issues of life that present themselves – the conflicts and confusions, the frustrations and disappointments, the illusions and evasions, the resentments and angers. I can grow *through* these and *because* of these. These are *life*. I not only free my consciousness of potential “baggage” in this way, I also enhance its potential for life-giving possibilities. In other words, I grow.

Good education and discipline goes hand in hand with the self-awareness. But it also includes feeding the inner life with good images and good thinking, taking time to be still and silent and allow ones deep openness to “the more than” to play its rightful part in the life formation process.

We are able to engage effectively in this process of self-understanding and inner learning because of our deep spiritual nature:

*The possibility for holistic formation is based on the unique capacity of the human being to rise above separate particular experiences in an appraising and integrating overview, a capacity we call spirit. Holistic formation can, therefore, also be called spiritual formation.*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Recognizing that there are times in our lives when we might need particular help with the work of listening to and dealing with what is happening within our inner worlds, it is difficult to go past Eugene Gendlin’s *Focusing* as a practical and effective way of promoting self-awareness in the ordinary run of life. See also Adrian van Kaam, “Introspection and Transcendent Self-Presence” in *Readings for Christian Spirituality, Volume I*, 103-112; “Growing in Self-Awareness: Some Practical Suggestions”, *op cit*, 151; “Review of the Day – Video Replay”, *op cit*, 152-153; “Writing as an Aid to Living”, *op cit*, 154; Karen Horney, *Self-Analysis*, Norton, 1942. Clearly, apart from specific “exercises” we might do to foster self-awareness, we can learn much through the business of daily living if we have established a well developed disposition of openness and expectation that every person, event and thing and every experience is in some way a “sacramental” moment. It should be noted that, while awareness may call for some deliberate choice and action, very often the awareness itself is enough, carrying, as it does, a certain power to heal by the very fact that we are brought face to face with truth in our beings.

<sup>17</sup> Clearly we have a very good start in this relaxed vigilance if we have grown up in a family where faith and love generally permeate the environment. We tend to learn to treat ourselves as significant others have treated us.

<sup>18</sup> Adrian van Kaam, “Transcendence Therapy” in Raymond Corsini, editor, *Innovative*

We could even say that, if we do not engage in some form of effective self-understanding, we will lose touch with our deep spiritual nature – the very depths of our own selves. The deformative effects of this will be more or less serious. Typically, for instance, if we are torn and conflicted within, our perceptions and engagements of other people, events and things will reflect this. The pain we cause in the world is typically the inner pain we have not dealt with.



## **CHRISTIAN ARTICULATION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

***\* The Christian consciousness is one that is continually formed and re-formed by the Holy Spirit and our spirit being given opportunity to bear witness that we are people who call God “Abba! Father!”***



### **Consciousness in the Jewish Scriptures**

The biblical consciousness is a Covenant consciousness. The faithful people of the bible are permeated by a profound sense of God at work in and through human history. They know that, through no particular achievement of their own, they have been chosen as God’s People and their lives have purpose and meaning as part of the whole thrust of Salvation History.

We can get some idea of the experience of consciousness in the Jewish Scriptures by considering the contrasting personalities – Saul and David.<sup>19</sup>

#### **a. Saul**

The First Book of Samuel introduces us to Saul:

*Among the men of Benjamin there was a man named Kish ... He had a son named Saul, a handsome man in the prime of life. Of all the Israelites there was no one more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders taller than the rest of the people.*<sup>20</sup>

Despite his obvious talents as a leader, there is a profound ambivalence from the very beginning of Saul's reign as king. Although he is chosen by God and anointed by Samuel<sup>21</sup>, and he places himself within the ongoing history of the Covenant<sup>22</sup>, Saul's very designation as "king" is an affront to the vocation of Israel<sup>23</sup>. Israel is not like any other nation, it has only one "king" - the Lord of the Exodus. In other words, the wish for a king arises from a consciousness alien to the Covenant. This is an inauspicious start.

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<sup>19</sup> For an extended discussion of these contrasts, see Michael Whelan, *Living Strings*, E J Dwyer, 1994, 115-126.

<sup>20</sup> 1Samuel 9:1-2; see also 10:23-24.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. 1Samuel 9:15.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. 1Samuel 12:6ff.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. 1Samuel 8:1-9.

Saul shows himself to be a man whose consciousness is imbued with forces other than those shaped by the Covenant. He usurps the priestly role of Samuel;<sup>24</sup> he is rejected by the Lord because he lacks the obedience of the true servant<sup>25</sup>. A consciousness disconnected from the Covenant becomes increasingly the victim of its own conflicted drives and the political and cultural forces around it. Cut off from the source of redeeming love in the Mystery, Saul is left to his own ego resources and slowly disintegrates under their weight.<sup>26</sup> Finally, there is something brave yet pathetic about his death.<sup>27</sup>

There is a radical conflict deep within Saul: He is trying to be both self-centred, as king, and Yahweh-centred, as a servant of the history of salvation. Deep down Saul does not trust the Mystery and the promises made. In the end, his inner world – and therefore his outer world – is ego-centred, not Mystery-centred. And if there is one “mortal” sin – as envisaged by the Decalogue – this is it. There is only one God and the life of the Covenant is a life that finds its fulfillment in manifesting and reverencing the utter sovereignty of God. Here is the great paradox of the Covenant: Lose your life in God and you will find your life. Saul does not understand this.

Saul’s consciousness is closed to the influences of the God of the Covenant. His is an unfree and opaque consciousness. Thus, one author observes:

*The sinfulness that distrusts life is illustrated by the tragic life of King Saul. He found evil and darkness in his life, as all do, but he allowed it to gain the upper hand and to cast a blight eventually on everything he did. This is usually a gradual process. It begins with a tendency to be critical and judgmental which become ever more pervasive until it darkens everything. Nothing is beyond criticism; everything is flawed. The final stage in this process is bitterness which drives all enjoyment out of life and makes happy surprises impossible.*<sup>28</sup>

## b. David

Because of the infidelity of Saul, Samuel is sent by the Lord to anoint a new king. He is sent to "Jesse of Bethlehem"<sup>29</sup> to anoint Jesse's son - "the youngest ... a boy of fresh complexion with fine eyes and pleasant bearing".<sup>30</sup> Paradoxically, this newly anointed one becomes Saul's solace in his misery<sup>31</sup> and "Saul loved him greatly"<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. 1Samuel 13:8ff.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. 1Samuel 15:10-23.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. 1Samuel 16:14-16; 18:10-11; 28:3ff.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. 1Samuel 31:1-13.

<sup>28</sup> Demetrius Dumm, *Flowers in the Desert*, Paulist Press, 1987,52.

<sup>29</sup> 1Samuel 16:1.

<sup>30</sup> 1Samuel 16:11-12.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. 1Sam. 16:19-23.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Given Saul's attitude to life, with his radical mistrust contaminating all his thoughts and actions, his unerring ability to turn promise into threat, possibility into impossibility, it was probably predictable that David, his one source of comfort, would soon become his primary source of distress. Ego-centric people are always vulnerable to envy.

David's fighting prowess becomes legendary.<sup>33</sup> Saul's anger is aroused and he "turned a jealous eye on David from that day forward".<sup>34</sup> Saul even tries to murder David at the very time he is playing the harp to soothe his (ie Saul's) anguished spirit.<sup>35</sup> It is typical of people like Saul to bight the hand that feeds them. David is protected by Jonathan<sup>36</sup> and, having escaped the immediate threat of Saul, he becomes a wanderer like his ancestors<sup>37</sup>.

David is a figure of Israel, and in that, a figure of the whole human family and each one of us. He is an extraordinarily complex mixture of virtue and sin, innocence and pragmatism, a saint and a scoundrel. Beneath it all, however, is a profound trust in the Lord of the Covenant. In the end, David's life is profoundly Mystery-centred. David is not ego-centred. This will not save him from sin. It will save him from the ultimate sin: Despair. The Mystery-centred person knows, unerringly, there is always mercy.

David's consciousness is permeated, through and through, with this sense of the Covenant and the confidence that God will remain faithful to that union. David's very sins are occasions for the mercy and compassion of the Lord to shine forth. Just as Saul's very talents occasioned his dislocation from the Covenant, David's very brokenness as a human being occasions his strengthening of that Covenant.

Saul's world is limited by his virtues and sins and thus full of impossibilities; David's world - the world of the Real beyond the real, revealed as the world of the Covenant - is limitless and full of possibilities. He never becomes lost in the darkness of human affairs because he is deeply rooted in the light of God's mercy and never-ending love for the people. He is always, in the final analysis, open to the Mystery. Again, Demetrius Dumm observes:

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. 1Samuel 18:6-7 & 29:5.

<sup>34</sup> 1Samuel 18:9.

<sup>35</sup> 1Samuel 18:10-11 & 19:8ff.

<sup>36</sup> 1Samuel 19:1-3 & 20:1-21:1.

<sup>37</sup> 1Samuel 22:1ff.

*David's significance is highlighted against the background of Saul.*

*For David was as self-confident and decisive as Saul was insecure and wavering. David had no liturgical scruples when he and his men took and ate the sacred bread (1Sam 21:3-6). David also committed really serious sins, notably when he ordered the death of Uriah to cover up his sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11). But he was able to repent and seemed to be even better for the experience. Saul managed to turn peccadillos into unforgivable sins; David turned grievous sins into opportunities for grace and growth. Saul was snake-bitten, always in the wrong line of traffic, forever snatching defeat from the jaws of victory! David, by contrast, had a golden touch, won out against all odds, always seemed to know exactly the right thing to say or do.*

*At first sight it seems that David was lucky and Saul was cursed. But David knew adversity too: the incest against Tamar, the murder of Amnon, the treason of Absalom, the disobedience of Joab. The difference goes much deeper than chance. It is a matter of faith. Saul and David both believed in God and the goodness of God. But Saul, unlike David, seemed incapable of believing in the goodness of God's world, of God's future and of Saul himself. And so he was a worried, anxious man and was always prepared for evil and always found it. David was confident, optimistic, positive; he was prepared for good, for happy surprise and, since God's world is basically good, he was able to find blessing, in spite of problems and setbacks. Saul could not lead Israel, as Samuel sensed, because no one will follow a loser. David was an extraordinary leader because he was ready to see the promise in others and trusted his own instincts in bringing that promise to fruition.<sup>38</sup>*

## **Consciousness in the Jewish Scriptures**

As with the Jewish Scriptures, the consciousness of the disciples of Jesus is a consciousness also imbued with a sense of the Covenant and God's action in and through history. The Christian Scriptures consciousness, however, is explicitly rooted in Jesus, the enfleshed God, the fulfillment of the Covenant. In particular, through baptism into Christ, we share the one Spirit, a Spirit who bears united witness with our spirit and causes us to cry "Abba! Father!" (cf Romans 8:16).

The Christian Scriptures consciousness can be brought into relief by, again, considering contrasting personalities – Judas and Peter.

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<sup>38</sup> *Flowers in the Desert, op cit, 41-42.*



### a. Judas

Whatever interpretation we might like to put on Judas' actions, the biblical authors clearly see him as a traitor<sup>39</sup>. He must have had some organizational ability because he was put "in charge of the common fund".<sup>40</sup> He is quick to calculate the "value" of the ointment used by Mary to anoint Jesus.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps Oscar Wilde's description of the cynic as one who knows the cost of everything but the value of nothing, fits this man. The boundaries of his imagination and mind - indeed of his whole consciousness - seem to be those set by pragmatic principles. Judas' consciousness seems to have been shaped by "the main chance", how to strike a deal, get a job done and so on. This seems to have, in turn, shaped his whole life. And herein lies the tragedy of Judas.

It is not difficult to imagine that Judas had no intention of seeing Jesus' crucified when he betrayed him for the thirty pieces of silver. Judas is a pragmatist and the pragmatist in him would have already seen Jesus' remarkable facility in getting out of tight spots. What he did not reckon on was the fact that he and Jesus lived in two very different worlds - Jesus' world is the world of the Real beyond the real, the world of the Covenant, a world only accessed by faith; Judas' world is the world of superficial realities, a world easily accessed - and manipulated - by anyone with a bit of talent and cunning, energy and commitment. The one thing that might save such a person from outright despair will be the illusion that it all seems to work, that the real world actually operates according to these rules within these tiny boundaries.

When finally confronted by the pathetic limitations of his world, however, Judas despairs. His consciousness knows no other possibilities – possibilities like mercy and forgiveness and a life lived in the freedom of the children of God. Had he remembered Jesus' account of His own temptations in the wilderness - "Man does not live on bread alone"<sup>42</sup> - Judas may have, at this time of cruel testing, been able to enter that world of the Real.

### b. Peter

Peter stands in contrast to Judas. To the outside observer, there may have been little to distinguish Peter and Judas up until the time of the crucifixion. Neither seems to have been aware of what was going on.<sup>43</sup> Both seem, in their own ways, more or less supportive of Jesus. Peter does seem to have leadership potential that Jesus

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. Matthew 10:4.

<sup>40</sup> John 13:29.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. John 12:5.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew 4:1-11.

<sup>43</sup> Eg Jesus' rebuke to Peter (Matthew 16:21-23) immediately after Peter's bold profession of faith (Matthew 16:13:20).

recognizes.<sup>44</sup> And he is a man of *faith* - not the gift of faith to know Jesus as Lord so much as the gift of faith to know life as a promise not a threat. Perhaps Peter had a more loving upbringing; perhaps Peter was temperamentally a different style of person.

The crucial difference, however, between the two personalities is seen in the way they handle the confrontation with their own sinfulness. And this cannot be assigned simply to upbringing or personality type. Peter betrays Jesus just as surely as Judas does.<sup>45</sup> But, whereas Judas reacts in a pragmatic way – the only way he knows – taking the money back and trying to reverse what he had done<sup>46</sup> - Peter "went outside and wept bitterly".<sup>47</sup> He knows there is no human answer to this mystery of evil that has overpowered him in his moment of trial. It is not a problem that can be solved by this or that strategy or course of action. It is a mystery that can only be lived with when one is rooted in the deep consciousness of the Lord who saves. Only God's mercy can redeem humanity in its misery.

### **Consciousness and conscience**

St Gregory the Great (540-604) introduces a helpful insight. Gregory speaks at length of how we might build a life of contemplation. The first step in the process is to recollect oneself, the second is to examine oneself carefully and honestly and the third is to open oneself in constant attention to the Author of one's being.<sup>48</sup>

Gregory's instructions may be understood in terms of consciousness. For Gregory – and the great guides of the authentic tradition – the inner world of the person was ultimately the place in which we either meet or avoid God. Whether we meet or avoid God in that inner world – in facing what must be faced or fleeing it – we will tend to meet or avoid God in the external world of daily living. Gregory, like all the best guides of the tradition, were profoundly aware that each of us carries – *lives* – a personal world where we will be either true or false and where we will be accountable for our lives before the Eternal Mystery. The rest of our lives will be lived out of this inner world – for better or worse.

Gregory's insights remind us of the importance of recollection, of attention to what is happening within, of feeding the consciousness with images and ideas that are conducive to life rather than death, truth rather than falsehood. He reminds us of the importance of addressing and dealing with forces within that inner world that are

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Matthew 16:18.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Luke 22:55ff; Mark 14:66ff.; Matthew 26:69ff.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Matthew 27:3ff.

<sup>47</sup> Luke 22:62.

<sup>48</sup> See St Gregory the Great, *Homilies on Ezekiel*, II, v, 9. See also G R Evans, *The Thought of Gregory the Great*, Cambridge University Press, 1986, 105-11.

death-dealing rather than life-giving – most particularly the forces of “the father of lies.”<sup>49</sup>

In the context of this pursuit of a free and transparent consciousness, Gregory has some helpful remarks to make about conscience. He speaks of conscience as the *internus iudex* (“internal judge”) or *internus arbiter* (“internal arbiter”). Through this “internal judge” we are able to monitor our progress in contemplation.<sup>50</sup> Gregory sees this as God acting in us and restoring – at least in part – our capacity to know ourselves as we most truly and deeply are – beings made in the image and likeness of Eternal Being, those who have been baptized into Christ and therefore sharing his divine destiny. So we should be in awe of this depth dimension of consciousness. It manifests itself as a *radical sensibility*, potentially an unerring guide to our growing relationship with God. The more we can be open to this voice the more likely we are to become who we are made to be.<sup>51</sup>

It may be helpful to recall recent authoritative teachings within the Catholic Church on conscience:

*Only in freedom can we direct ourselves toward goodness. Our contemporaries make much of this freedom and pursue it eagerly; and rightly so, 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. For God has willed that we be left 'in the hand of our own counsel' (Ecclisiasticus 15:14) so that we can seek our 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. Such a choice is personally*

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<sup>49</sup> Later, and in the same spirit, St Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) – “the last of the Fathers” – makes much of the deliberate pursuit of “the truth” in itself, in others and within oneself. See St Bernard’s *Steps of Humility and Pride*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> It hardly needs to be added that this same “internal judge” enables us to monitor the whole of our lives as human beings.

<sup>51</sup> It might be useful at this point to distinguish between *super-ego* and *conscience*. Our *consciousness* can in fact become so cluttered with “baggage” that we received conflicting and conflicted, confusing and confused voices from within. This is the possibility of *super-ego* – that world of *infra-consciousness* – blocking out genuine *conscience* which belongs to the world of *transconsciousness*. A healthy life formation process is therefore constantly about the business of cleansing *consciousness* that true *conscience* – our openness to the Great Mystery – might emerge with ever-greater force and clarity. Of course, this very discussion highlights the point that we can never take our *conscience* for granted and must always be willing to open ourselves to things we have not taken into account and perhaps admit that what we thought was our *conscience* was actually our *infra-consciousness* pretending to be *conscience*. We are all born with a genius for self-deceit. A clear-eyed and unbending acknowledgement of this dubious gift is one of the first steps required of us in the painstaking journey towards an honest life. No wonder we always begin the celebration of Eucharist with the Penitential Rite!

*motivated and prompted from within. It does not result from blind internal impulse nor from mere external pressure.*<sup>52</sup>

*Deep within their conscience human beings discover a law which they have not laid upon themselves but which they must obey. Its voice, ever calling them to love and to do what is good and avoid evil, tells them inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For human beings have in their hearts a law inscribed by God. Their dignity lies in observing this law, and by it they will be judged. Conscience is their most secret core, and their sanctuary. There they are alone with God whose voice echoes in their depths. By conscience, in a wonderful way, that law is made known which is fulfilled in the love of God and one's neighbour. Through loyalty to conscience Christians are joined to other people in the search for truth and for the right solution to so many moral problems which arise both in the lives of individuals and from social relationships. Hence, the more a correct conscience prevails, the more do persons and groups turn aside from blind choice and try to be guided by the objective standards of moral conduct. Yet it often happens that conscience goes astray through ignorance without losing its dignity. This cannot be said of those who take little trouble to find out what is true and good, or when conscience is by degrees almost blinded by the habit of committing sin.*<sup>53</sup>

*The importance of this interior dialogue of persons with themselves can never be adequately appreciated. But it is also a dialogue of the person with God, the author of the law, the primordial image and final end of the human person. St. Bonaventure teaches that 'conscience is like God's herald and messenger; it does not command things on its own authority, but commands them as coming from God's authority, like a herald when he proclaims the edict of the king. This is why conscience has binding force.' Thus it can be said that conscience bears witness to our own rectitude or iniquity to ourselves, together with this, and even beforehand, conscience is the witness of God himself, whose voice and judgment penetrate the depths of the human soul calling the person forth strongly and gently to obedience.*<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, (“The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World”),17.

<sup>53</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 16.

<sup>54</sup> *Veritatis Splendor*, (“The Splendor of Truth” – encyclical of 1993 by Pope John Paul II), 58. Two further statements by Pope John Paul II are worth recording here: “People are obliged to follow their conscience in all circumstances and cannot be forced to act against it.” (Pope John Paul II, Message for World Peace Day 1999). “Respect for a person’s conscience, where the image of God himself is reflected (cf Genesis 1:26-27), means that we can only propose the truths to others, who are then responsible for accepting it. To try to impose on others by violent means what we consider to be the truth is an offence against human dignity, and ultimately an offence against God whose image that person bears.” (Pope John Paul II, World Day of Peace Message 2002.)

*The Church herself puts herself always and only at the service of conscience.*<sup>55</sup>

*On our part, we perceive and acknowledge the imperatives of the divine law through the mediation of conscience. In all our activities we are bound to follow our consciences in order that we may come to God, the end and purpose of life. It follows that we are not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to our conscience. Nor, on the other hand, are we to be restrained from acting in accordance with our consciences, especially in matters religious.*<sup>56</sup>

### **In the depths of our consciousness we discover unity**

In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares: “The Father and I are one.”<sup>57</sup> John uses the metaphor of the vine (John 15:1-17) – a symbol of unity.<sup>58</sup> Later, in the same Gospel we hear Jesus pray:

*“I have given them the glory you gave me, that they may be one as we are one. With me in them and you in me, may they be so perfect in unity that the world will recognise that it was you who sent me and that you have loved them as you loved me.”*<sup>59</sup>

But it is St Paul who develops this theme of unity most powerfully. “We are baptized into Christ Jesus.”<sup>60</sup> A favourite metaphor for Paul is that of the body.<sup>61</sup> Our union is so complete Paul can say to the Christians in Philippi: “Christ will be glorified in my body,”<sup>62</sup> and to the Christians in Galatia: “I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me.”<sup>63</sup> We might reasonably assume that this thinking of Paul’s is rooted in the experience of his conversion, when he heard the words of Jesus: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”<sup>64</sup> This Jesus Christ is

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<sup>55</sup> *Veritatis Splendor*, (“The Splendor of Truth” – encyclical of 1993 by Pope John Paul II), 64. The emphasis is in the original text.

<sup>56</sup> *Dignitatis Humanae* (“Declaration on Religious Freedom”), 3.

<sup>57</sup> John 110:30.

<sup>58</sup> See also 1John 1:3: “Our life is shared with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

<sup>59</sup> John 17:22-23.

<sup>60</sup> Romans 6:3. See also Galatians 3:27: “All you have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”

<sup>61</sup> See especially, 1Corinthians 6:14-17; Romans 6:3-11, 7:4 & 8:1-39; .

<sup>62</sup> Philippians 1:20.

<sup>63</sup> Galatians 2:20.

<sup>64</sup> Acts 9:4.

*The beginning, the first born from the dead, so that he should be supreme in every way; because God wanted all fullness to be found in him and through him to reconcile all things to him, everything in heaven and everything on earth, by making peace through his death on the cross.*<sup>65</sup>

Thus, Paul's vision of the new society made possible by Jesus Christ:

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*<sup>66</sup>

Thomas Merton is someone who was profoundly aware of this radical unity that lies at the heart of the Christian consciousness. He writes, for example:

*In this paper the term 'monastic' is applied in a broad way to those forms of special contemplative dedication which include ..... (b) A preoccupation with the radical inner depth of one's religious and philosophical beliefs, the inner and experimental 'ground' of those beliefs, and their outstanding spiritual implications; (c) A special concern with inner transformation, a deepening of consciousness toward an eventual breakthrough and discovery of a transcendent dimension of life beyond that of the ordinary empirical self and of ethical and pious observance. This monastic 'work' or 'discipline' is not merely an individual affair. It is at once personal and communal. Its orientation is in a sense suprapersonal. It goes beyond a merely psychological fulfillment on the empirical level, and it goes beyond the limits of communicable cultural ideals (of one's own national, racial etc background). It attains to a certain universality and wholeness which have never yet been adequately described – in terms of psychology. Transcending the limits that separate subject from object and self from not-self, this development achieves a wholeness which is described in various ways by the different religions; a self-realization of Atman, of Void, of life in Christ, of fana and baqa (annihilation and reintegration according to Sufism), etc. ...*

*Monastic training must not form men in a rigid mold, but liberate them from habitual and routine mechanisms. The monk that is to communicate on the level that interests us here must be not merely a punctilious observer of external traditions, but a living example of traditional and interior realization. He must be wide open to life and to new experience because he has fully utilized his own tradition and gone beyond it. This will permit him to meet a discipline of another, apparently remote and alien tradition, and find a*

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<sup>65</sup> Colossians 1:18-20. See also Ephesians 2:15: "His purpose in this way was, by restoring peace, to create a single New Man ..."

<sup>66</sup> Galatians 3:28.

*common ground of verbal understanding with him. The 'postverbal' level will then, at least ideally, be that on which they both meet beyond their own words and their own understanding in the silence of an ultimate experience which might conceivably not have occurred if they had not met and spoken ... This I would call 'communion.' I think it is something that the deepest ground of our being cries out for, and it is something for which a lifetime of striving would not be enough.*<sup>67</sup>

*Christianity and Buddhism alike, then, seek to bring about a transformation of man's consciousness. And instead of starting with matter itself and then moving up to a new structure, in which man will automatically develop a new consciousness, the traditional religions begin with the consciousness of the individual, seek to transform and liberate the truth in each person, with the idea that it will then communicate itself to others. .... The whole purpose of the monastic life is to teach men to live by love. The simple formula, which was so popular in the West, was the Augustinian formula of the translation of cupiditas into caritas, of self-centered love into an outgoing, other-centered love. In the process of this change the individual ego was seen to be illusory and dissolved itself, and in place of this self-centered person came the Christian person, who was no longer just the individual but was Christ dwelling in each one. So in each one of us the Christian person is that which is fully open to all other persons, because ultimately all other persons are Christ.*<sup>68</sup>

*And the deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words, it is beyond speech, and it is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity. My dear brothers, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are.*<sup>69</sup>



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<sup>67</sup> Thomas Merton, "Monastic Experience and East-West Dialogue" (Notes for a paper to have been delivered in Calcutta, October, 1968) in *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, New Directions, 1973, 309-10 & 315-16.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Merton, "Marxism and Monastic Perspectives" (Talk given at Bangkok Conference on the morning of December 1, 1968) in *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, op cit, 333-34.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Merton, "Thomas Merton's View of Monasticism" (Informal talk delivered at Calcutta, October 1968) in *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, op cit, 308. Merton develops this theme in other places – see, for example, his material on growing beyond the "non-self" in *Zen and the Birds of Appetite*, New Directions, 1968, 33-58.

## Snippets for meditation

(1) *"In order to master the psychological problems of growing up – overcoming narcissistic disappointments, oedipal dilemmas, sibling rivalries; becoming able to relinquish childhood dependencies; gaining a feeling of selfhood and self-worth, and a sense of moral obligation – children need to understand what is going on within their conscious self so that they can also cope with that which goes on in their unconscious. They can achieve this understanding, and with it the ability to cope, not through rational comprehension of the nature and content of their unconscious, but by becoming familiar with it through spinning out daydreams, ruminating, rearranging, and fantasizing about suitable story elements in response to unconscious pressures. By doing this, children fit unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable them to deal with that content.*

*"It is here that fairy tales have unequalled value, because they offer new dimensions to childrens' imagination which would be impossible for them to discover as truly on their own. Even more important, the form and structure of fairy tales suggest images to the children by which they can structure their daydreams and with them give better direction to their lives.*

*"In child or adult, the unconscious is a powerful determinant of behavior. When the unconscious is repressed and its content denied entrance into awareness, then eventually the person's conscious mind will be partially overwhelmed by derivatives of these unconscious elements, or else they are forced to keep such rigid, compulsive control over them that their personality may become severely crippled. But when unconscious material is to some degree permitted to come to awareness and worked through in imagination, its potential for causing harm to ourselves or others is much reduced; some of its forces can then be made to serve positive purposes.*

*"However, the prevalent parental belief is that children must be diverted from what troubles them most: their formless, nameless anxieties, and their chaotic, angry, and even violent fantasies. Many parents believe that only conscious reality or pleasant and wish-fulfilling images should be presented to children, that they should be exposed only to the sunny side of things. But such one-sided fare nourishes the mind only in a one-sided way, and real life is not all sunny.*

*"There is a widespread refusal to let children know that the source of much that goes wrong in life is due to our very own natures – the propensity of all people for acting aggressively, asocially, selfishly, out of anger and anxiety. Instead, we want our children to believe that, inherently, all people are good. But children know that they are not always good; and often, even when they are, they would prefer not to*



be. This contradicts what they are told by their parents, and therefore makes the children monsters in their own eyes.

*“The dominant culture wishes to pretend, particularly where children are concerned, that the dark side of humanity does not exist and professes a belief in an optimistic meliorism. Psychoanalysis itself is viewed as having the purpose of making life easy – but this is not what its founder intended. Psychoanalysis was created to enable people to accept the problematic nature of life without being defeated by it, or giving in to escapism. Freud's prescription is that only by struggling courageously against what seem like overwhelming odds can people succeed in wringing meaning out of their existence.*

*“This is exactly the message that fairy tales get across to children in manifold form: that a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence – but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious.*

*“Modern stories written for young children mainly avoid these existential problems, although they are crucial issues for all of us. Children need most particularly to be given suggestions in symbolic form about how they may deal with these issues and grow safely into maturity. "Safe" stories mention neither death nor aging, the limits to our existence, nor the wish for eternal life. The fairy tale, by contrast, confronts children squarely with the basic human predicaments.”<sup>70</sup>*



(2) *“Time past and time future  
Allow but a little consciousness.  
To be conscious is not to be in time  
But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden,  
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,  
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall  
Be remembered; involved with past and future.  
Only through time is time conquered.”<sup>71</sup>*



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<sup>70</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, Vintage Books, 1977, 6-8.

<sup>71</sup> T S Eliot, *Four Quartets*, ‘Burnt Norton’, Lines 83-89.

(3) *“It is this dynamic spirit that keeps the human self changing, expanding, growing. The human self is thus steadily emerging because of its inclination to transcendence under the attraction force of the spirit which keeps drawing out the possibilities of human life.”*<sup>72</sup>



(4) *“As we gather to celebrate these sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins. ... You were sent to heal the contrite, Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy. You came to call sinners, Christ have mercy. Christ have mercy. You plead for us at the right hand of the Father, Lord have mercy. Lord have mercy”*<sup>73</sup>



(5) *“The more a person is intent upon maintaining the status quo the more impenetrable are his defenses.”*<sup>74</sup>



(6) *“The deepest source of a man’s philosophy, the one that shapes and nourishes it, is faith or lack of faith in mankind. If he has confidence in human beings and believes that something fine can be achieved through them, he will acquire ideas about life and about the world which are in harmony with his confidence. Lack of confidence will generate corresponding ideas.”*<sup>75</sup>



(7) *“To one of the brethren appeared a devil, transformed into an angel of light, who said to him: I am the Angel Gabriel, and I have been sent to thee. But the brother said: Think again – you must have been sent to somebody else. I haven’t done anything to deserve an angel. Immediately the devil ceased to appear.”*<sup>76</sup>



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<sup>72</sup> Adrian van Kaam, *Dynamics of Spiritual Self-Direction*, Dimension Books, 1976, 14.

<sup>73</sup> From the Penitential Rite at the beginning of the Roman Rite for the celebration of Eucharist. One of the primary functions of rituals such as the celebration of Reconciliation and Eucharist is to purify and keep purified our inner world, that we might live with a clear and deep consciousness of who and what we are.

<sup>74</sup> Karen Horney, *Self-Analysis*, W W Norton & Company, 1942/1968, 67.

<sup>75</sup> Max Otto cited by Karen Horney, *Self-Analysis*, W W Norton & Company, 1942/1968, 22. This raises serious questions about the effects of pessimistic anthropologies that have sometimes crept into Christian thinking over the centuries – eg Jansenism.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Wisdom of the Desert*, New Directions, 1960, 54.

## Suggestions for further study

- Horney, Karen, *Self-Analysis*, W W Norton, 1942/1968.  
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Robinson, Geoffrey, *Neurosis and Human Growth*, Norton, 1953.  
*Confronting Power and Sex in the Catholic Church: Reclaiming the Spirit of Jesus*, John Garratt, 2007.
- Van Kaam, Adrian, *In Search of Spiritual Identity*, Dimension, 1975 – especially “Psychodynamics of Spiritual Presence”, 108-137.  
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Whelan, Michael, “Introspection and Transcendent Self-Presence” in *Readings for Christian Spirituality, Volume I*, 103-11.  
*The Transcendent Self*, Dimension Books, 1979.  
“Counterfeit Elements in Christian Spirituality: A Challenge for Theological Educators” in *Readings for Christian Spirituality, Volume I*, 16-32. Also available as Aquinas Monograph.  
“Saul and David, Judas and Peter” in *Living Strings*, E J Dwyer, 1994, 115-128.



## Suggested exercises

1. Are you aware of any dynamics within your consciousness that affect your relationships adversely? For example, are there any moments and events or sorts of people that typically provoke a compulsive and unfree reaction in you? Listen carefully for and to the feeling content in the moment of reaction. Deliberately face what is happening in such instances. More generally, accompany yourself through the day and listen – honestly, gently and compassionately. Do not try to “solve” what is happening, as if there was some sort of “problem” here. These reactions are part of your being present in the world – grow through them by treating them with respect and allowing them to play the role in your life that they must play. Perhaps you could use Eugene Gendlin’s Focusing technique to work with them – see Eugene Gendlin, *Focusing*, Bantam, 1978. Sometimes it is also helpful to write in such a way that the writing becomes a healing process.

2. Observe those around you this week. Reflect gently on the differences between those who seem to have inner freedom and transparency, in contrast with those who seem more conflicted and opaque. What do you think makes the difference? How free are you?

3. How significant a part is played in your life by your conscience? To what extent do you see it as a gateway to the depths of who you are? (NOTE: Conscience is not a convenience that allows us to do what we like; it is a demand, it is a summons and a challenge calling us home to what is true and good and beautiful.)

