

DEVELOPING YOUR OWN SPIRITUALITY

UNIT ONE

SESSION TWO: THE FORMATION MYSTERY

The formation mystery is simple in its unity and yet inexhaustibly complex and multidimensional in its appearances. Formation as a whole cannot be defined a priori. Sometimes its effects seem deformative. At other moments they seem formative from the viewpoint of our limited intellectual appraisal power. This only adds to our confusion. The mystery of formation manifests itself everywhere. It is like a never-ending dance of rising and falling forms in cosmos, humanity, culture and history.¹

And what is this? I asked the earth, and it said, 'I am not he!' And all things in it confessed the same. I asked the sea and the deeps, and among living animals the things that creep, and they answered, 'We are not your God! Seek you higher than us!' I asked the winds that blow: and all the air, with the dwellers therein, said, 'Anaximenes was wrong. I am not God!' I asked the heavens, the sun, the moon and the stars: 'We are not the God whom you seek,' said they. To all the things that stand around the doors of my flesh I said, 'Tell me of my God! Although you are not he, tell me something of him!' With a mighty voice they cried out: 'He made us!' My question was the gaze I turned on them; the answer was their beauty.²

Yes, you love all that exists, you hold nothing of what you have made in abhorrence, for had you hated anything, you would not have formed it. And how, had you not willed it, could a thing persist, how be conserved if not called forth by you? You spare all things because all things are yours, Lord, lover of life, you whose imperishable spirit is in all.³

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.⁴

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¹ Adrian van Kaam, *Formative Spirituality, Volume One: Fundamental Formation*, Crossroad, 1983, 186f.

² St Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, 6:9.

³ Wisdom 11:24ff.

⁴ John 3:16.

THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN DIMENSION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*** All existence is a never-ending giving and receiving of form which, in the end, defies all human efforts of comprehension and control; we can call this never-ending giving and receiving of form the mystery of formation or the formation mystery.**

*** It is reasonable to accept that this mystery of formation is inherently both purposeful and beneficial rather than merely random and neutral or even malign.**

*** All human beings, very early in the unfolding of their life form, develop a pre-moral primordial option for ‘abandonment to’ the mystery or ‘abandonment by’ the mystery.**

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A Preliminary Note About Our Use of the Word “Form”

We use the word “form” throughout this course primarily to refer to the deepest truth or essence of the human person. By analogy, the word “form” is also applied to events and things in our world. Human life formation is about the fullest expression of the unique human form as it is found in the individual. In this sense we can say that all human life formation:

- is a work of liberation – the liberation of the person to be who she or he most deeply is;
- it endeavours to facilitate a process of emergence or unfolding of what is already given;
- it proceeds by way of facilitation rather than mastery;
- and it must constantly discern between true and false form in the interactions of living, resisting the latter, affirming and promoting the former.

All People, Events and Things are Constantly Changing

The cosmos is never at rest. No part of it is ever entirely still. The movement and change is not always obvious, but it is real. I may, for example, consider my life to this point as a timeline. Was there ever a point at which I was absolutely still, unmoving? There may have been moments when I was bored and it *seemed* that

all time and movement had ceased. There was – and still is – a movement there that will simply occur with or without my permission. I can of course have some limited say in *how* it all unfolds. But let us leave that aside for the moment.

One of the most obvious and fascinating facts about me is that the manifestation of my life is constantly changing yet it remains somewhat the same – it is continuity amidst change. Life goes on, *I* go on even as *I* change. My heart continues to beat, my lungs pump air, my mind thinks thoughts, my feelings shift, even when I am asleep the organism that I am is a hive of activity. And amidst all of that, I do not for one moment hesitate to say “That’s me!” – always “me”, even if a changing “me”.

Events and things are subject to the same sort of movement. The very notion of an event implies that something is happening. Change is taking place. The belief that one day scientists would discover “the basic building block” of all matter, and that “building block” would be some material “thing”, is a belief that has long since dissolved. The very scientific method demanded a further question: What is that “building block” built of? Physicists now tell us that matter is composed of energy.⁵ The stones in the garden, the chairs we sit on, the floor beneath us, are not the inert, utterly still chunks of matter we may have once thought – they are masses of movement. Their forms are constantly changing. We may perhaps find this easier to accept today, in a world that is so obviously and rapidly changing under our very noses, than people of a century or more ago.

People, Events and Things are Interconnected

One of the more sobering lessons we have learned in the past several decades or so is that we live in a world of interconnections and interdependencies. We recognise this nowadays, for example, when we speak of “systems” – family systems, health care systems, eco systems, geopolitical systems and so on. I am always part of a “system”, always interconnected and interdependent with others, at least implicitly. It is unreasonable for me to consider myself as isolated from the rest of the world. It is impossible for me to *disconnect* from my world of people, events and things – for better or worse I remain connected with them and they with me, even if I rebel. How my life form emerges is inevitably influenced by the “systems” that I am part of, and vice versa. My actions and/or omissions have their impact – albeit minor and perhaps not even discernible – on the world around me.

There is a giving and receiving of form – I give and receive form to and from the people, events and things of my world, and the people, events and things of my world give and receive form to and from me. The cosmos is a constant, mutual

⁵ And the obvious further question may be asked: What is energy made of?

giving and receiving of form. The ozone layer and the oceans of the world are part of the same physical environmental system upon which I depend for survival; the policies and decisions of the European Community, the governments of Japan and the United States, are part of a wider system of policy and decision-making that affect every nation on earth; what I do with my garbage, how I recreate, the conversations I have, the very thoughts I think, all create ripples of effect beyond me.⁶

The fact that the interconnections and interdependencies may not be directly or immediately experienced by me, does not mean they do not exist. I can in fact ignore many of those interconnections and interdependencies for a good part of my life. Indeed, this is pretty much how we have behaved over the centuries. Apart from recognising the more obvious and immediate effects, human beings tended to behave as if their actions had little or no consequence beyond the immediately observable.

I Find Myself in the Midst of Mystery

One of the extraordinary paradoxes of human inquiry is that each discovery opens up more things to discover, each answer brings new questions. No matter how deeply our knowledge of reality penetrates, we will still have to ask the most basic questions of all: Why? What? How? When? Where? Each time those basic questions are answered they can be asked of the answer given. The more we know, the more we know we do not know. We use the word “mystery” to indicate this *inexhaustible intelligibility*.

The most basic and practical question of all – one we should ask of ourselves and our situations constantly and with as much honesty as we can must – is the simple question: What is happening? We will never be able to give a definitive answer to that question. The very question leads us into the mystery that each of us is. It reminds us of the mystery of human relationships and the sheer mystery of why anything exists rather than not exists. That basic and

⁶ The concept of “globalization” is worth noting. What we have described above is not the *result* of “globalization” but rather “globalization” is a *manifestation* of what is given in the way things are, made possible today because of technological advances, particularly exemplified in travel and communication. The interconnectedness was a fact of existence 5,000 years ago as it is today. The only difference 5,000 years ago was the lack of awareness – six billion people on the planet, together with their high-tech communications and travel opportunities are much more likely to bump into each other and affect each other than a few thousand people who do not even know of the existence of other places or peoples. It is ironic that, accompanying this “globalization” process today, is a process that disconnects – as is evident in the typical modern Western societies that are so much a part of the “globalization”. Australia, for example, is a culture of disconnectedness. The structures of family and neighborhood or small town/village life, with their various institutions and customs, that fostered and maintained relationships and connections amongst people, have significantly diminished and even disappeared in some places. Yes, many of us now build our lives around different kinds of relationships and connections. Still, there does seem cause to ask what is actually going on here. Hugh Mackay offers some relevant comments when he distinguishes between “The nightmare scenario: fragmentation and alienation” and “The dream scenario: reconnecting with the community” in his *Turning Point*, Pan Macmillan, 1999, xxxii-xxxv.

practical question leads me to actually experience the mystery of living as an invitation to journey ever deeper into the unknown and unknowable.

The never-ending cosmic giving and receiving of form of which I am a part is *ultimately beyond human comprehension*. We can say with absolute certitude that we will never understand all that is there to be understood.⁷ It is quite rightly called a *mystery*.

We may call this mystery, which is a mystery of constantly emerging forms, *the formation mystery* or *mystery of formation*. The formation mystery is concretely the context for all that is. It is also the beginning point for me to think of my life and its unfolding.⁸ It is unreasonable for me to think of my life, or, more precisely, the emergence of my life form, outside this context of the mystery. The form that is the very essence of my life is part of the overall form of the mystery itself. I am a mysterious instance or expression of the formation mystery. I shall ever be a question to myself. And my presence is a question to you, as indeed your presence is a question to me.

We not only find ourselves in the midst of the ultimately incomprehensible, we also find ourselves in the midst of the *ultimately uncontrollable*. The very thought of human beings having absolute control of all that is, is as frightening as it is ludicrous. The mystery of formation ultimately invites intelligent participation not wilful mastery, wonder not rationalism, reverence not functionalism, care not control, humility not arrogance, silence not speech, communion not competition.

Is this Mystery of Formation Purposeful?

In the light of the above, a number of questions might spring to mind:

- Could it be that I am caught up in a mysterious giving and receiving that is ultimately random, meaningless and purposeless, a freakish accident?
- Are purpose and meaning something we individually and corporately fabricate – necessary fictions and illusions – so that we can go on living?
- Is there any evidence to suggest that the mystery of formation is inherently meaningful and purposeful rather than meaningless and purposeless?
- Is it reasonable to live as if participation in the mystery is participation in a meaning and purpose that actually precedes and transcends any particular meaning and purpose we might wish or decide upon?

⁷ It would be interesting to do a study of the occasions scientists have used the phrase, “We used to think, but ...”

⁸ See Adrian van Kaam’s very practical little essay: “Transcendent Self-Presence and Introspection” in *Developing Your Own Spirituality, Reader Volume One*, pages 18-28 and chapter 7 in Adrian van Kaam, *In Search of Spiritual Identity*, Dimension Books, 1975.

- Or is it more reasonable to live as if the only meaning and purpose is merely the product of our own inventive imaginations and minds, a subjective agenda we simply impose, with or without the cooperation of others?

On the basis of our experience we could bring forth evidence that might suggest contradictory responses to these questions. For example, most adults have had experiences that make them wonder, no matter how fleetingly, whether life has any inherent meaning or purpose. For example, I might be left wondering this in the face of the devastation wrought by a tsunami that simply happens and leaves a trail of devastation and heartache behind it, or a bushfire that engulfs this house and leaves the place next door intact, or the chance encounter that leads to two people falling in love, getting married and giving birth to this or that child, or the hapless ant that gets crushed while crawling across the path as I walk on it. Much seems random or “accidental”.

And what are we to make of those permanent parts of nature that not only seem to have no good reason to exist but seem so destructive, like the tsetse fly, the appendix on the bowel, the hook worm, cancer cells or the cuckoo that lays its egg in another bird’s nest and when the cuckoo chick hatches it pushes the other young birds or eggs out of the nest and the host bird raises the cuckoo as its own? So much does in fact seem to be simply without any obvious purpose apart from that which I and others might give it. Maybe that is it – the only purpose we find is not *inherent* in the mystery of formation but an *illusion of order* we impose? At least sometimes this seems an entirely reasonable conclusion to draw.

However, there is much evidence to suggest that the mystery of formation is *inherently meaningful and purposeful*:

- In the first place, we in fact live *as if* there is meaning and purpose about the mystery of formation, a meaning and purpose that we did not invent. And this is based on consistent experience of order which implies meaning and purpose.⁹ It is eminently reasonable to say the universe is ordered. That is, after all, why we call it a “universe,” and it is why we speak of “cosmos” rather than “chaos.” And there are myriads of daily events which confirm the validity of this common sense view of the world. For example, night predictably and regularly passes into day, winter into spring, when I roll out of bed I land on the floor not the ceiling, when I plant petunias they either die or blossom as petunia flowers not gum trees, dogs do not beget fish and vice versa, if I jump off a cliff I will not fly or float but drop with the speed of gravity, and so on. When the expectation of order and purpose is

⁹ There is an obvious and necessary connection between order, goals and intelligence. Order implies some goal or end that exists beforehand. The existence of the goal or end beforehand implies a mind in which they exist. Take the example of building a house. The builders will want some kind of plan and they will build with that end in mind.

not fulfilled we want to know why – something has gone *wrong*. It would not occur to us to simply shrug our shoulders and say something like: “Aren’t we silly! Fancy thinking there was any order or meaning or purpose! Imagine being so stupid as to think those petunia seedlings would grow to be petunia flowers rather than gum trees!” It makes eminent sense to accept the assumption that we live in a world that is inherently ordered and purposeful, even if there are occasions that seem to fly in the face of this assumption. It is more reasonable to believe that those occasions are the exceptions, not the rule and those exceptions prove the rule.¹⁰

- In the second place, all scientific inquiry is built on the assumption of order and meaning and purpose.¹¹ That is why we ask that very fundamental question: “Why is it so?” It would be unreasonable to ask that question if there was no order or meaning or purpose by way of an answer.¹² If the formation mystery was random and accidental there could be no point in seeking to answer that question. Whether it is physics or chemistry, history or sociology, philosophy or astronomy, or any other legitimate field of study, there are certain patterns observed, with laws and rules that are discovered. These laws and rules are not mere whimsical fabrications that bear no relationship to what actually happens in the unfolding of the mystery. They are articulations of what people have repeatedly discovered as present there in the mystery and will be observed as laws and rules until such time as some further discovery or unveiling of the mystery suggests that they are either untrue or have a different application. It is hard to imagine, for example, NASA placing people in the space shuttle and launching them towards the stars if there was no order and purpose in the universe. In the end, it is an order and purpose that is found in the mystery not imposed by the human inquirers. That is precisely why scientists demand verification of scientific findings – the very notion of verification would be absurd if there was no inherent meaning and purpose in the formation mystery pointing to necessary connections between this and that.¹³

¹⁰ There is a corollary to this that we ought to mention in passing: Order implies end or goal and end or goal implies mind and thinking. If something is proceeding towards an end or goal, that end or goal already exists, at least in thought. That demands an intelligence

¹¹ It is contradictory for scientists to say that the material world of people, events and things is utterly random when all of science is predicated on the basis of the very opposite. Science presupposes order, patterns, predictability. It operates on formulae, laws and calculations. Even the very notion of “evolution” implies an ordered, goal-oriented process. Thus, for example, the eye evolved to enable animals to see. Where does all this ordered and therefore goal-oriented reality come from? Aristotle posited the notion of “the unmoved mover.” Thomas Aquinas agreed with Aristotle but named the “intelligence” behind the order as “God.”

¹² It is claimed by some scientists that evolution is random. This does not seem to me to be a reasonable claim. Take the evolution of the human eye. The very evolving happened with sight as the goal surely. And this implies order and intelligence.

¹³ A corollary of this is found in our use of language. Language implies order and purpose, consistency of reference

- In the third place, human beings who choose to base their lives on the assumption of order and purpose, and co-operate with that order and purpose, tend to manifest a depth of humanity and harmony, peace and good sense that could not possibly be found in someone who chose the opposite. Imagine, if you can, a totally purposeless existence. In all honesty, I would be condemned to this if I believed there was no purpose inherent in the formation mystery. Fabricating a purpose would leave me with precisely that – a made-up purpose, one that I had invented, a fiction. While we are all aware that we may make choices and do certain things that take our lives in a certain direction, we are also aware that all that is built on a substrate of purposeful reality and developed within the general context and limits of that purposeful reality. Much meaning and purpose is already given, in other words. All of us spend a good deal of our lives endeavouring to discover that rather than invent it. People who spend their lives inventing the meaning and purpose of their existence are recognised by us as “unreal”, perhaps psychologically disturbed.¹⁴

Is this Mystery of Formation Benign or Malign?

The meaning, purpose and order that we find in the mystery of formation might be, in the end, either more or less beneficial – ie tending towards some creative end, towards being rather than non-being – or non-beneficial – ie tending towards some destructive end or non-being. Is this mysterious, never-ending giving and receiving of form, meaningful and purposeful as it is, ultimately tending towards something benign or something malign? Is there anything in the order and purpose of the formation mystery that can give some direction and form to our search for meaning, some assistance to our desire to live good and creative lives? Just because there is order and purpose present, we cannot conclude that this order and purpose is necessarily for the good. There was, for example, a lot of order and purpose about Nazism.

As with the previous set of questions concerning purpose and meaning, we can draw on our experience to bring forward evidence to support contradictory responses to these questions. For example, even those who have a deep conviction of the ultimate beneficial nature of the formation mystery will have

and repeated patterns. If this was not the case, language could not have any coherence or meaning. Speech would be pointless.

¹⁴ The point at issue in the forgoing discussion is whether or not the formation mystery is inherently meaningful and purposeful. We are suggesting that it is reasonable to affirm that it is. However, such an affirmation does not absolve us from engaging the world in creative ways. The implication is not “fatefulness” – as if all the purpose and meaning is given and our lot is simply to accept everything that happens to us or comes our way. That would be irresponsible. Part of the meaning and purpose of the formation mystery unfolds in the conversation that is my life. In other words, my free and conscious existence contributes to the meaning and purpose of the formation mystery.

that conviction put to the test from time to time. The incessant wars, with their insane brutalities and cruelties, Hitler’s Holocaust, Stalin’s pogroms, Mao Zedong’s “Cultural Revolution”, Pol Pot’s Year Zero madness, the AIDS virus, the famines, floods, volcanic eruptions and other natural disasters that wipe out thousands of innocent people, the cancer that kills a young wife and mother, the depression, anxiety, boredom and pain that are part of ordinary living, the corruption that seems to be a permanent part of human affairs, might lead us to wonder about the beneficence of it all. There are times when the mystery of formation appears anything but benign or beneficial.¹⁵ Maybe despair rather than hope is the realistic response?

However, there is substantial evidence that would suggest that the mystery is guided by some *inherently beneficial* purpose, that ultimately the inbuilt intentionality of it all is towards being rather than non-being, affirmation rather than negation, continuation rather than annihilation, something benign rather than something malign:

- The effects of the physical affronts of our world – the diseases, volcanic eruptions and floods and so on – regularly call forth remarkable qualities in human beings, qualities of generosity, compassion and courage. This does not suggest there is no “scandal” in such affronts, but it does suggest there is something in the human psyche that is at the very least willing to work with such things as part and parcel of living. They do not necessarily engender despair. On the contrary, amidst the heartache and tragedy they may paradoxically be the occasion of great hope, suggesting that we should not assume that the mystery of formation is itself malign, even if sometimes it appears pretty grim.
- The effects of the moral affronts – the human corruption, the hatred and violence we visit on each other and so on – typically elicit a slightly different response. We recognise such moral affronts, as if instinctively, as a violation of “the proper order of things.” There is a beauty in both the

¹⁵ We find something of this in the best of the tradition. In the Old Testament we have the lament of Job and in the New Testament the cry of Jesus from the Cross: “Why have you forsaken me!” St Thérèse of Lisieux, for example, experienced excruciating anguish in her last months. This is evident in the text of her final conversations. Bernard Bro also describes it powerfully in his marvelous book *The Little Way: The Spirituality of Thérèse of Lisieux*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1979/1997. A contemporary Carmelite author sums up the experience: “Yes, but where is God in the silence and darkness, in the laboured beatings of the heart? Where is the idea of God in this uttermost emptiness? Perhaps after all the ultimate truth is not light and goodness but darkness and horror? Surely this terrible happening, this extreme anguish of the poor naked human spirit is proof that there is no God at all or that if there is he is without care of me? ‘All thy billows and thy waves have passed over me The water compassed me about even to the soul ... the bars of the earth have shut me up for ever.’ So spoke Jonas, and Job too under the silent heavens. It is indeed a note that is struck again and again in the Old Testament. But always the Lord comes to save, and is as it were thus, by this extremity, defined in the fullness of his saviourhood. Jesus comes as the one who saves, the God who saves. Yet he is also Jonas and he enters into the darkness of Gethsemane and the darkness of the tomb.” (Noel Dermot O’Donoghue, *Heaven in Ordinary*, Templegate, 1979, 74.) Such reflections ought to prevent us making easy or simplistic pious statements about the goodness of God evident in our world.

physical and moral realities, where, from time to time, we are struck by the inner form of things shining forth in harmony and goodness.

- We all have a sense – no matter how remote and implicit at times – of that “proper order of things” that is essentially good, an order and goodness that we do not impose but discover.¹⁶ Like the scientific inquirer, people seem to intuit a certain moral order and purpose that, if obeyed, opens ultimately into that which is creative and good and beautiful. By living in accord with this discovered moral order we become good human beings. Who could know a good man or woman and not have some sense that here is an expression – not a contradiction – of what can and should be, of what life, in the end, is all about? And vice versa, who could know a perpetrator of malice and not have some sense that here is a violation of “the proper order of things”, a contradiction of what *should* be, of what life is all about?
- Different cultures and peoples express that sensitivity to “a proper order of things” differently, but it is implicit in every human life. When terrorists threaten their victims, for example, they do so under such labels of goodness and creativity as “freedom” and “justice”. None but the truly sick of mind claim to intend evil simply because it is evil. We all look for some *good* reason for what we do. And if we are caught in violation of the good, we are quick to make excuses. We know, as if by instinct, that our lives do not belong in some moral chaos, at odds with the deepest moral laws of existence.
- Finally, imagine the formation mystery – of which our lives are part – was tending ultimately towards the non-beneficial, non-being, negation, annihilation. How would we live? What would be the point of living? It makes eminent sense, both on the basis of the evidence available and for the sake of maintaining sanity, to believe in the order of the formation mystery as being ultimately beneficial.

¹⁶ Aristotle (384-322BC – for 20 years a pupil of Plato) spoke of a similar common sense or innate habit, using the Greek word *synderesis*. Aristotle said there had to be a starting point for human beings in their thinking and knowing – ie human beings must be able to acquire certain truths without having to reason them out or demonstrate their veracity. Aristotle rejected Plato’s notion of “innate ideas”, saying that, while human beings do not possess such truths innately, they do possess an innate or natural habit for acquiring them. St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 – a Dominican monk) developed Aristotle’s understanding of *synderesis*, applying it specifically to the first principles of the practical order. For Aquinas – and the subsequent Christian tradition – the notion of *synderesis* has generally referred to the natural or innate habit of the mind to know the first principles of the practical or moral order without recourse to a process of discursive reasoning; thus, it is also a habit that incites to good and “murmurs” against evil. (See ST I, 79, 12th and 13th Articles.) In the same place, St Thomas also speaks of *conscience* as something distinct from *synderesis*: The latter is the *habit*, the former is the *act*. Commonly today we combine Aquinas’ notion of *synderesis* and *conscience* by simply using the latter word. (St Jerome (345-320 – Church Father and scripture scholar), in his interpretation of the four living creatures in the vision of Ezechiel (cf Ezechiel 1:10), says the eagle represents what the Greeks call *synderesis*, but what he calls in Latin *scintilla conscientiae* (“spark of conscience”). Jerome says this “spark” is not lost by original sin. In fact, Jerome’s Latin term found greater vogue amongst medieval scholastics than the Greek term which Aquinas retained.)

I Find Myself with Certain Feelings Toward the Mystery of Formation

It is one thing to acknowledge the purposeful and beneficial nature of the mystery of formation in theory. It is quite another thing to actually *feel* that way about it. Parents or their substitutes have an enormous influence on the early life formation of the child. Our earliest years – perhaps while we are still in the womb – have a significant effect on the form our lives ultimately take.

We can speak of a *primordial option* developing during this initial phase in the life formation process. That is, at a pre-moral and largely implicit level, we take up a certain emotional stance or disposition towards the world.¹⁷

If the parents – and/or others – provide an environment that is experienced by the newborn as more or less affirming it is likely – all other things being equal – that the primordial option will be one, more or less, of *abandonment to* the mystery.¹⁸ That is, we will tend to experience the mystery of formation as at least somewhat hospitable and trustworthy. People in whom this emotional disposition is more or less present, will tend, typically, to be less anxious and more trusting of the world than people in whom this disposition is more or less absent.

If, on the other hand, the parents – and/or others – evoke an atmosphere that is experienced by the person as more or less non-affirming it is likely that the primordial option will tend towards *abandonment by* the mystery.¹⁹ That is, we will tend to experience the mystery of formation as more or less inhospitable and untrustworthy. People in whom this emotional disposition is more or less present, will tend, typically, to be more anxious and less trusting of the world than people in whom the emotional disposition of *abandonment to* the mystery is dominant.

It is not always easy for us to be clear sighted about our primordial option. There are many ironies and paradoxes involved. For example, given the fact that the sense of abandonment by the mystery may be psychologically killing, it is not surprising that we would expend some effort – frequently enough without being aware of it – to devise ways of coping with a world we find more or less threatening. Out of this conflict some people become very hard workers and high achievers, some become very angry and anti-establishment, still others may become avowedly altruistic or self-pitying victims or chronically depressed.

Such awareness should not lead us to quick or simplistic judgments or diagnoses about ourselves or others. It ought to evoke a certain humble

¹⁷ The old debate emerges here: Nature or nurture? Clearly both are relevant. However, we will stress here only the early influence of significant others.

¹⁸ We also need to recognize that the growth of a human being is a most mysterious thing. Children within the same family, given apparently the same experiences can have very different attitudes towards the world. It might be, for example, that someone did not receive a lot of affirmation and hospitality from their parents yet they seem to have developed this primordial option of abandonment to the mystery. That would seem to be atypical though.

¹⁹ For example, children of alcoholic parents are vulnerable to developing a primordial option of abandonment by the mystery. The same could apply to children of constantly absent parents, violent parents, parents who were obsessively religious and so on.

awareness of the complex symbolism of human behaviour – ours and that of others. Furthermore, through attentive and intelligent listening to our experience, we can begin to make enlightened choices about our behaviour and life situations. The challenge is not so much to get rid of or even change our primordial option. It is rather to know and understand it, work with and through its more destructive tendencies wherever possible, and make enlightened choices about our life and behaviour on the basis of that knowledge and understanding.²⁰

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THE UNIVERSAL CHRISTIAN DIMENSION: GUIDING PRINCIPLE

*** *The formation mystery is but a pale reflection of the Eternal Mystery – the Great Mystery beyond the mystery – revealed in the Exodus Event of old, more fully revealed in and through Jesus of Nazareth and the New Exodus of Good Friday and Easter Day.***

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The Great Mystery Beyond the Mystery

In the Christian formation tradition we turn to the bible to guide our understanding and articulation of what we know from experience. The Bible is not about *imposing* but *exposing*. It intends to unveil, to reveal. Hence it is referred to as “divine revelation”.²¹

We are of course in the realm of faith when it comes to accepting the bible as “divine revelation”. Within our Christian tradition we accept the bible as the primary source of wisdom since we encounter there the Word of God. In every age it is, as it were, the Word addressed to each person and each community. It remains for us to meditate upon that Word addressed to us personally, listen humbly and intelligently to it in the light of the experience in which we find ourselves. What does the Word of God offer us with respect to the mystery of formation?

²⁰ Adrian van Kaam writes very well on this in his book *Religion and Personality (Revised Edition)*, Dimension Books, 1981. See especially “Development of the Religious Personality” (92-143) and “Deviations of the Religious Personality” (144-180).

²¹ It might be helpful to speak of it as “divine revealing”. In this is the implication that God’s liberating love is continually revealed in and through the Word. One of the opportunities and responsibilities of the Christian life is to take up the Word and hold it up as a mirror to our own lives. Unpleasant as we might find it at times, the Word will mirror our best and worst possibilities. The bible leaves nothing out and we should not pretend that those disgusting and blatantly immoral and cruel and crude bits do not belong there – they belong there because they are part of the human story. The bible is revealing of both God and humanity.

The very first event the bible deals with is that of creation (see Genesis 1). Out of chaos God brought cosmos. Behind the order of the world in which we find ourselves is the creative and creating God. This world is God's creation. The mystery of formation is nothing less than a dim expression of that Great Mystery we call God.

Set within the context of the entire bible, this event of creation is ongoing. Central to the process is the act of creating human beings *in the image and likeness of the creating Mystery – co-creators with the Creator*. Creation implies relationship. The formation mystery points to the Forming Mystery – the Eternal Formation Event of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Even more specifically, the human mystery mirrors in a special way the Eternal Mystery. It is as if the bible is saying: "Pay attention! Look! Listen! Follow the evidence and ponder in awe! The world is sacred ground! You are sacred! Everything in you and around you calls for recognition in wonder of the Great Mystery beyond the mystery! You and all creatures point! Every moment of your existence, every part of your being is evocative, calling you towards 'the more than'!" When you encounter yourself, in other words, you encounter inexhaustible intelligibility.

This is beautifully presented in Exodus 3:1-15 when Moses encounters the burning bush on Horeb.²² God is revealed as the utterly Transcendent Other who is intimately and lovingly present to the world through the Chosen People. That presence – proclaimed in the promise "I shall be with you!" – is not to be understood in any materialistic or magical sense. God's presence may be experienced as absence, as void, for God shall be there *as God, as Mystery*.

The Mystery Presence among the people and for the people is not a guarantee that they will have a trouble free life, endless military triumphs, social and economic stability, freedom from tragedy. The promise is a promise of *mystery presence* amidst the ordinary stuff of human existence.²³

The Covenant or intimate and unbreakable bond in faithful love that is forged between the people and their God in this way is fulfilled in Jesus the Christ (see John 1; Ephesians 1:3-24; Colossians 1:26-27). He embodies the promise. His name is "God is with us" – "Emmanuel". The Christ Event is the fulfilment of the promise. In Him, with Him, and through Him, the formation mystery is enabled to fulfil its deepest potential (see Romans 8:14-27).

For the Christian, all of creation is sacrament. Everything points to God and reveals God in some way. Every person, event or thing is, potentially at least, epiphany. As Gerald Manley Hopkins puts it so beautifully, not without acknowledging the ambiguities, in his poem "God's Grandeur":

²² "Maybe the burning bush was burning all the time and Moses didn't notice. Maybe the miracle is when you stop and pay attention." (Francine Prose, *Household Saints*, St. Martin's, 1981, 220.)

²³ See Michael Whelan, "Images of God: The Mystery Beyond the Mystery" in his *Living Strings: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality*, E J Dwyer, 1994, 85-92.

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out like shining shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings.*

Living in Mindfulness of the Mystery

We could think of spirituality – and particularly prayer – as wakefulness or mindfulness. The contemplative is the person who has awoken to the fact that the Great Mystery is present in and shining through every person, event or thing. Life is epiphany. The study of spirituality must assist us to wake up, pay attention, listen and hear; it must help us to move beyond the normal forgetfulness and mindlessness of so much of our daily living. Every practice that we engage in service of spirituality is always about remembering. More specifically, it is about living in remembrance. Liturgy is a crucial part of this process. Living in remembrance is living in such a way that my life becomes a reminder in its own right. And what do we remember and intend to remind the world of?

- We remember that God is love and those who abide in God abide in love. (See 1John 4)
- We remember that God's love is eternal and unconditional, that there is nothing I can do that will make God love me more or less.
- We remember the constant loving presence of God in every person, event or thing, the mystery of formation is a sacrament and a place of sacramentality.²⁴

²⁴ The notion of "sacrament" as used here is a broad one. Sacrament says that the divine is in the human, the eternal is in the temporal and the infinite is in the finite. Those who appreciate the sacramentality of life always see more than they see. This sacramental view of the world is one of the essential building blocks of a Christian approach to the environment. See also *Readings for Christian Spirituality, Volume I*, 151-53, for some practical ways of fostering awareness and listening, especially "transcendent self-presence".

- We remember that God’s loving presence is a loving action and that loving action is a liberating event: God is restoring the world to its original perfection, releasing the form intended from all eternity.
- We remember that we are made in the image and likeness of this Great Mystery, this One who is incomprehensible, unnameable, uncontrollable, ever creating. And so our lives are a constant prayer for and commitment to “Thy Kingdom come!”

The world is “charged”, as Gerald Manley Hopkins notes; creation is sacrament and living is sacramental. Living in mindfulness and remembrance means that this sacramental view of the world, filled with the expectation of the victory of God, shapes our thinking in every moment, at least implicitly.

And how shall we remember? We listen to what is happening in and around us! We pay attention and listen some more! And we never stop listening. We remember by doing so deliberately; we raise our minds and hearts to God; we foster and facilitate God’s presence through love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, honesty and so on; we join the assembly of the baptised in the great act of remembrance, the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup, we engage in other rituals and we develop symbols that are mnemonic in their intent, we meditate on the Sacred Scriptures and have conversations with like minded people about those things that touch our lives most deeply. The 4th century bishop, St John Chrysostom writes beautifully of the Christian life, with particular reference to prayer, a key aspect of mindfulness and living in remembrance:

There is nothing more worthwhile than to pray to God and converse with him, for prayer unites us with God as his companions. As our bodily eyes are illuminated by seeing the light, so in contemplating God our soul is illuminated by him. Of course the prayer I have in mind is no matter of routine, it is deliberate and earnest. It is not tied down to a fixed timetable; rather it is a state which endures by night and day.

Our soul should be directed in God, not merely when we suddenly think of prayer, but even when we are concerned with something else. If we are looking after the poor, if we are busy in some other way, or if we are doing any type of good work, we should season our actions with the desire and remembrance of God. Through this salt of the love of God we can all become a sweet dish for the Lord. If we are generous in giving time to prayer, we will experience its benefits throughout our life.

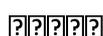
Prayer is the light of the soul, giving us true knowledge of God. It is a link

mediating between God and humanity. By prayer the soul is borne up to heaven and in a marvellous way embraces the Lord. This meeting is like that of an infant crying on its mother, and seeking the best of milk. The soul longs for its own needs and what it receives is better than anything to be seen in the world.

Prayer is a precious way of communicating with God, it gladdens the soul and gives repose to its affections. You should not think of prayer as being a matter of words. It is a desire for God, an indescribable devotion, not of human origin, but the gift of God's grace. As Saint Paul says: We do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.

If you receive from the Lord the gift of this type of prayer, you possess a richness that is not to be taken from you, a heavenly food filling up the soul. Once you have tasted this food, you are set alight by an eternal desire for the Lord, the fiercest of fires lighting up your soul.

To set about this prayer, paint the house of your soul with modesty and lowliness and make it splendid with the light of justice. Adorn it with the beaten gold of good works and, for walls and stones, embellish it assiduously with faith and generosity. Above all, place prayer on top of this house as its roof so that the complete building may be ready for the Lord. Thus he will be received in a splendid royal house and by grace his image will already be settled in your soul.²⁵



Snippets for Meditation

(1) *“Isaac Newton thought of himself as a boy playing on the seashore and diverting himself by now and then ‘finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of Truth lay all undiscovered before me’. In a similar mood, Einstein said, ‘We’re in the position of a little child entering a huge library whose walls are covered to the ceiling with books in many different tongues. The child knows that someone must have written those books. He does not know who or how. He does not understand the languages in which they are written. The child notes the definite plaqn in the arrangement of the books, a mysterious order, but*

²⁵ St John Chrysostom, *Homily 6 on Prayer*. Reproduced from Office of Readings, Friday after Ash Wednesday, as found in *Prayer of the Church*, E J Dwyer, 1974, 19-20. John Chrysostom (c350AD-407AD) was born in Antioch where he also became bishop. Renowned for his preaching, he was later made bishop of Constantinople.

does not comprehend, but only dimly suspects. That, it seems to me, is the attitude of the human mind, even the greatest and most cultured, towards God.'

"And we should point out that Einstein was not talking about any of the gods that people have been taught to worship. He was using the word in that other sense, as the word for Everything. Religion does not have the answers. It merely re-phrases the questions and tosses in a few bed time stories. Science is making progress as to What, When and How but is still flummoxed by Why. And I'm now reconciled to the fact that that will continue to elude us, forever receding as we forever advance.

"Listen to the voice of that great atheist H G Wells, who tried to comprehend where scientific thought was taking us. 'It may be that we exist and cease to exist in alternations, like the minute dots in some forms of toned printing or the succession of pictures on a cinema film. It may be that consciousness is an illusion of movement in an eternal, static, multi-dimensional universe. We may only be a story written on a ground of inconceivable realities, the pattern of a carpet beneath the feet of the incomprehensible. We may be ... part of a vast idea in the meditation of a divine circumambient mathematician. It is a wonderful exercise for the mind to peer at such possibilities. It brings us to the realization of the entirely limited nature of our intelligence, such as it is, and existence as we know it. It leads plainly towards the belief that, with minds such as ours, the ultimate truth of things is forever inconceivable and unknowable. ... It is impossible to dismiss mystery from life. Being is altogether mysterious. Mystery is all about us and in us, the Inconceivable permeates us ... At times one finds an urgency to go out and gaze at those enigmatic immensities. But for such a thing as I am, there is nothing conceivable to be done out there. Ultimately those remote metaphysical appearances may mean everything, but as far as my present will and activities go they mean nothing.'

"Finally, I believe that no human emotion, not even love, is as important as a sense of the numinous. It is the thing that links science and religion and the finest in literature. Combining an awareness of mortality within eternity, one's smallness within infinity. It poses questions without expecting answers. And atheists should remember that atheism is not an answer but, rather, the rejection of other people's answers. Not having an answer should make the atheist even more curious, more numinous in his or her responses. Particularly when we atheists are, increasingly, required to live in a universe where science is asking us to believe in ideas that are even stranger than God. Time flowing backwards and parallel universes, to name but two."²⁶

²⁶ Phillip Adams, "Praise Be The Ascent Of Man" in *The Weekend Australian*, February 23-24, 1991, Review 2.

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(2) *“No man is an island complete entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.”*²⁷

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(3) *“Naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurret.”* (“Thrust nature out with a pitchfork, she always returns”).²⁸

□ □ □ □ □

(4) *“There came to St Antony in the desert one of the wise men of that time and said: ‘Father how can you endure to live here, deprived as you are of all consolation from books?’ Antony answered: ‘My book, philosopher, is the nature of created things, and whenever I wish I can read in it the works of God.’*²⁹

□ □ □ □ □

(5) *“You created my inmost self, knit me together in my mother’s womb. For so many marvels I thank you; a wonder am I, and all your works are wonders.”*³⁰

□ □ □ □ □

(6) *“If it happens that in seeing God one understands what is seen, that means that it is not God himself who is seen but one of those knowable things that owe their being to him. For in himself he transcends all intelligence and all essence. He exists in a superessential mode and is known beyond all understanding only in so far as he is utterly unknown and does not exist at all. And it is that perfect unknowing, taken in the best sense of the word, that constitutes the true knowing of him who transcends all knowing.”*³¹

□ □ □ □ □

(7) *“I proclaim Jesus Christ, the revelation of a mystery kept secret for endless*

²⁷ John Donne, *Devotions*, XVII.

²⁸ Horace, *Epistle*, I,x,24.

²⁹ Evagrius of Pontus (346-399) cited by Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, Mowbray’s, 1979, 54.

³⁰ Psalm 139:13-14.

³¹ Dionysius the Areopagite, *Letter I to Gaius*. (Cited by Olivier Clément, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, New City Press, 1995, 30.)

ages.”³²

□ □ □ □ □

(8) “The mystery is Christ in you.”³³

□ □ □ □ □

(9) “The Christian of the future will be a mystic or he/she will not exist at all.”³⁴

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(10) “God and humanity are like two lovers who have missed their rendezvous. Each is there before the time, but each at a different place, and they wait, and wait, and wait. He stands motionless, nailed to the spot for the whole of time. She is distraught and impatient. But alas for her if she gets tired and goes away. The crucifixion of Christ is the image of the fixity of God. God is attention without distraction. One must imitate the patience and humility of God.”³⁵

□ □ □ □ □

(11) “They lay quiet for a while in the hut. The priest thought the lieutenant was asleep until he spoke again. ‘You never talk straight. You say one thing to me – but to another man, or a woman, you say “God is love.” But you think that stuff won’t go down with me, so you say different things. Things you’ll know I’ll agree with. ‘Oh,’ the priest said, ‘that’s another thing altogether – God is love. I don’t say the heart doesn’t feel a taste of it, but what a taste. The smallest glass of love mixed with a pint pot of ditch-water. We wouldn’t recognize that love. It might even look like hate. It would be enough to scare us – God’s love. It set fire to a bush in the desert didn’t it, and smashed open graves and set the dead to walking in the dark. Oh, a man like me would run a mile to get away if he felt that love around.’”³⁶

□ □ □ □ □

(12) “The reality and practice of the presence of God. I mean the sense, and the

³² Rom. 16:25.

³³ Col. 1:27 - RSV.

³⁴ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Volume XX: Concern for the Church*, Darton Longman and Todd, 1981, 149.

³⁵ Simone Weil, “The Things of the World” in G. A. Panichas (ed.) *The Simone Weil Reader* (David McKay Company Inc., 1977), 424f.

³⁶ Graham Greene, *The Power & the Glory*, Penguin, 1982, 199f.

cultivation of the sense, of his omni- presence, of his prevenience, of all things, 'in their essence (which is beautiful, true and good) coming from him, and especially all our very capacity for, and slightest wish for, goodness and him. It is, at the same time, a sense of our pathetic limitations, as against the great background and presence of the infinite and abiding; of the utter unsatisfying- ness of whatsoever is but scattered about space, or can or does pass away in sheer succession. And this sense it is which is the centrally human sense; without it we would be no more truly men. Yet this sense comes from the actual touch, the enveloping and penetrating presence, of the infinite Spirit, God upon, around and within our spirits which, finite though they be are sufficiently God-like to cause them to suffer under the keen sense of contrast of the two worlds which both touch them, and both of which they touch; the abiding, infinite, spiritual; and the fleeting, temporal, material.

“You will, Blessing, gradually get your life saturated with this sense. The following texts express it grandly: Rom. xi, 33: 'O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out.' 1John iv, 8 & 10: 'God is love. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us.' Acts xvii, 27, 28: 'He is not far from each one of us, for in him we live and move and have our being.' 2Cor. iii, 5: 'Our sufficiency is from God.' It will be especially in your daily quarter of an hour of spiritual reading and direct recollection that you will be able to foster and feed this sense. But throughout the day (as you learn to take one thing at a time and ever to let drop all sheer bustle and fever) you will have many opportunities of, more indirectly, encouraging it, until, at last, it will become an ever, more or less perceived, background and support, a light and balm and refreshment to your life, Child.

“And then, and then alone, will you have gained, with this sense of this presence of the infinite Lover and comprehender of your soul, a truly efficacious means against impatience, intolerance, injustice towards all and any of your fellow-mortals, and against the danger, that ever dogs the steps of all very sensitive souls, of becoming embittered, or gloomy, or broken, when in the course of life, keen disappointments or grave misunderstandings come to them. For, once you have learnt that the infinite Spirit alone can, but that he indeed does, completely, ceaselessly understand you, you can and will be sufficiently satisfied and moderated, gratefully to realize how much he and that fellow-mortal can and does understand you - most certainly at times, far better than you will ever understand yourself.

“Besides, this sense, when strongly developed, will teach you more and more to live, not so much in order to get, as in order to give; not so much in order to be

loved as in order to love; as Our Lord has said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts xx, 35). 'Nearer we hold of God who gives, than of his tribes that take.'³⁷



(13) *"Infinite sharing is the law of God's inner life. He has made the sharing of ourselves the law of our own being, so that it is in loving others that we best love ourselves."*³⁸



(14) *"The heart has its reasons, of which reason knows nothing; we feel it in many things. I say that the soul naturally loves universal being, and naturally loves itself according as it devotes itself thereto; and it hardens itself against one or the other as it pleases."*³⁹



(15) *"The meaning of things and their purpose,
Is in part now hidden
But shall in the end become clear.
The choice is between
The Mystery and the absurd.
To embrace the Mystery
Is to discover the real.
It is to walk towards the light,
To glimpse the morning star,
To catch sight from time to time
Of what is truly real.
It is no more than a flicker of light
Through the cloud of unknowing,
A fitful ray of light
That is a messenger from the sun
Which is hidden from your gaze.
You see the light but not the sun.
When you set yourself to look more closely,
You will begin to see some sense*

³⁷ Friedrich von Hugel, "A Letter of Spiritual Counsel", II:I – see *Spiritual Classics Texts, Volume IV*, 107.

³⁸ Thomas Merton, *No Man Is An Island*, A Dell book, 1955, 25.

³⁹ Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, J.M.Dent & Sons, 59.

*In the darkness that surrounds you.
Your eyes will begin to pick out
The shape of things and persons around you.
You will begin to see in them
The presence of the One
Who gives them meaning and purpose,
And that it is He
Who is the explanation of them all.⁴⁰*



(16) *When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer.*

*When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure
them,
When sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much
applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wandered off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.⁴¹*



(17) *Hey, beautiful morning, we're singing your God song,
a psalm of seas and mountains, of empty roads
and houses yawning under a new blue bowl of sky.
It's the song of the bellbird, of steaming cows in sheds,
of freckled trout quivering in deep dark pools,
and dew on cobwebs lacing trees.
Hey, beautiful morning, stay in our wakened hearts
so we can carry your God song into the busy day.
Remind us that newness is an ongoing gift
and that every moment is potential reborn,
but if our ears become full of other concerns,
and we lose the freshness of your song,*

⁴⁰ Cardinal Basil Hume OSB, from the front his book, *The Mystery of the Incarnation*, Darton Longman and Tood, 1999.

⁴¹ Walt Whitman

*then comfort us with the knowledge
that you will sing with us again tomorrow,
oh beautiful morning, oh song of God.”⁴²*



- (18) *“Incarnate Word, in whom all nature lives,
Cast flame upon the earth: raise up contemplatives
Among us, men who walk within the fire
Of ceaseless prayer, impetuous desire.
Set pools of silence in this thirsty land:
Distracted men that sow their hopes in sand
Will sometimes feel an evanescent sense
Of questioning, they do not know from whence.
Prayer has an influence we cannot mark,
It works unseen, like radium in the dark.
And next to prayer, the outward works of grace:
Humility that takes the lower place,
Serene content that does not ask for more,
And simple joy, the treasure of the poor,
And active charity that knocks on any door.
It’s easy said – I wish my words might chime
With fitting deeds as easily as they rhyme.
Yet somehow, between prayer and common sense,
Hearts may be touched, have lives have influence.
And when the heart is once disposed to see,
Then reason can unlock faith’s treasury.
To rapt astonishment is then displayed
A cosmic map Mercator never made.”⁴³*



- (19) *“One widely known, brief Hasidic tale ends with a catechetical savor as told by Elie Wiesel: ‘God made man because he loves stories.’ (See The Gates of the Forest, Avon Books, 1967, 10.) But who loves stories? Man? If so, why is that a sufficient reason for God to make him? Or is it God who loves stories? If so, did he create man in order to have someone tell Him stories, or is man himself God’s story? On these crucial matters the Hasidic tale and Elie Wiesel remain silent.*

⁴² Joyce Cowley, *Psalms for Pilgrims*.

⁴³ James McAuley, from “A Letter to John Dryden”, in *Anthology of Australian Religious Poetry*, selected by Les Murray, Collins Dove, 1986, 173.

Their silence, however, generates a kind of ambiguity which is appropriate as the subject comes near the core of human aspiration, human fear, and human faith. In this area, as even the most systematic of great theologians know, language strains mightily at its limitations; only ambiguity, paradox, mystery, and stories can do justice to felt truth.”⁴⁴



(20) *“Christianity in its true essence is the state of radical openness to the question of the mystery of the Absolute Future which is God. All individual statements in Christianity, in its knowledge and life, can be understood only as a modality of this radical commitment to refuse to call a halt at any point and to seek the fulfillment of its life, its ‘salvation,’ in something to which no further name can be assigned.”⁴⁵*



(21) *'And did you get what you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.
And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself beloved on the earth.’⁴⁶*



(22) *“Will those who are not Jews or Christians or Muslims allow us to give Abraham’s name to those who are called to serve? Of course other races and religions can use an equivalent name which is more appropriate to their tradition. And you, my brothers and sisters who are atheistic humanists, don’t you think you have been forgotten. Translate what I say in my language into your language. When I talk of God, translate, perhaps, by ‘nature,’ “evolution,” what you will. If you feel in you the desire to use the qualities you have, if you think selfishness is narrow and choking, if you hunger for truth, justice, and love, you can and should go with us.”⁴⁷*



⁴⁴ Theodore Hesburgh, Foreword to Elie Wiesel, *Four Hasidic Masters and Their Struggle Against Melancholy*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1978, xi-xii.

⁴⁵ Karl Rahner, “The Question of the Future,” *Theological Investigations 12*, Darton Longman & Todd, 1974, 189.

⁴⁶ Raymond Carver, “Fragment.”

⁴⁷ Dom Helder Camara, *The Desert is Fertile*, Orbis Books, 1974, 13-14.

(23) *“The life of a human being is made of many and varied activities. Deep in the heart of each one of us is the longing, fitfully glimpsed and but half realised, to gather up all these strivings into an intense pursuit of one all-embracing objective worthy of the toil and tears and devotion of the human heart. Such is the half-shaped dream; but the reality is a picture of heaped-up activities, where the trivial jostles the less trivial, and the less trivial elbows the important things, and there is no unity of design, nor ny intensity of single, concentrated purpose. There is no real perspective of values: what is essentially trivial but immediately urgent, looms large and commands attention; while what is essentially important, but not immediately urgent or insistent, is relegated to the hazy recesses of the background. But the thing of greatest importance is not always what is demanded by the needs of the moment.”⁴⁸*



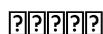
(24) *HALF MOON, SMALL CLOUD*

*Caught out in daylight, a rabbit’s
transparent pallor, the moon
is paired with a cloud of equal weight:
the heavenly congruence startles.*

*For what is the moon, that it haunts us,
this impudent companion immigrated
from the system’s less fortunate margins,
the realm of dust collected in orbs?*

*We grow up as children with it, a nursemaid
of a bonneted sort, round-faced and kind,
not burning too close like parents, or too far
to spare even a glance, like movie stars.*

*No star but in the zodiac of stars,
a stranger there, too big, it begs for love
(the man in it) and yet is diaphanous,
its thereness as mysterious as ours.⁴⁹*

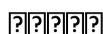


⁴⁸ Karl Rahner, *On Prayer*, Paulist Press, 1968, 7.

⁴⁹ Poem by John Updike, published in *Atlantic Monthly*, October 2006.

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- Walker, Alice, *The Color Purple*, Washington Square Press, 1982, 175-179.
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Suggested Exercises

1. Do reflectively something you would normally do pre-reflectively (eg walking, making a cup of coffee, setting the table, washing your face, turning on a light switch, closing a door).
2. Take time to observe something natural (eg a tree, a sunset). Pause and drink it in. Stop and be still – literally *still*. Let the fact of nature get inside you. Or do something that puts you in touch with the earth (eg gardening, bush walking, a picnic out in the bush).
3. Pray the prayer of St Ignatius of Loyola once each day in the coming week: “Take O Lord and receive my entire liberty, my memory, my understanding, my whole will. All that I am and all that I possess you have given me. I surrender it all to you to be disposed of according to your most holy will. Give me only your love and your grace. With these I will be rich enough and desire nothing more”. Memorize it.