

# DEVELOPING YOUR OWN SPIRITUALITY

## UNIT ONE

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### SESSION FOUR: THE FORMATION FIELD

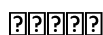
*The deepest level of communication is not communication, but communion. It is wordless. It is beyond words, and it is beyond speech, and it is beyond concept. Not that we discover a new unity. We discover an older unity. My dear brothers, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are.*<sup>1</sup>

*Ecology has to do with relations, interaction, and dialogue of all creatures (whether alive or not) among themselves and with all that exists. This includes not only nature (natural ecology) but culture and society (human ecology, social ecology and so on). From an ecological viewpoint everything that exists, co-exists. .... And everything that co-exists .... subsists by means of an infinite web of all-inclusive relations. Nothing exists outside relationships. Ecology reaffirms the interdependence of beings, interprets all hierarchies as a matter of function, and repudiates the so-called right of the strongest. All creatures manifest and possess their own relative autonomy; nothing is superfluous or marginal. All being constitutes a link in the vast cosmic chain. As Christians, we may say that it comes from God and returns to God.*<sup>2</sup>

*Relationship is, then, written into the very nature of the human person. As the Bible sees human beings, you cannot think about the person without recognizing that he or she is, as it were, made for relationship.*<sup>3</sup>

*I will be with you.*<sup>4</sup>

*The Word was made flesh, he lived among us.*<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, New Directions, 1975, 308. [NOTE: This is the last paragraph of a brief and informal talk delivered at Calcutta in October 1968.]

<sup>2</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, Orbis Books, 1995, 7.

<sup>3</sup> Aelred Squire, *Asking the Fathers*, SPCK, 1973/1994, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 3:12.

<sup>5</sup> Jn. 1:14.

## THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN DIMENSION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**\* All human life formation takes place within a dynamic context.**

**\* In that dynamic context there are always at least five polarities of influence - preformation, interformation, intraformation, situational formation and world formation.**

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### Recall Your Own Life Journey

Can you think of any moment since your conception when you were utterly disconnected, absolutely on your own in the universe with no connection to anyone or anything? There might have been moments when you *felt* like that, but there never was a moment when that was actually the case.<sup>6</sup> There never could be such a moment.

Recall, first of all the way your life is inextricably connected with your parents. You may never even have known your blood parents, but you carry something of them in your being. Recall all the people with whom you are more or less obviously connected – living and dead. Recall the various ways those connections are formed – through blood ties or through events, through presence or through absence, through cultural or geographical links, through pleasure or pain, and so on. Recall, further, the way all those people are connected to other people whom you are not even aware of. Your life is a web of relationships with people, known and unknown.

Recall the way your life has been influenced by the earth and/or sea, the weather and the environment. We are in fact becoming increasingly aware of just how interdependent our lives are with the environment. Recall the way your life has been influenced by place, by culture, by education, by travel, by recreation, by clear sunny skies or heavy dark skies, by dry seasons or by wet, and so on. Your life is more or less affected by all sorts of connections and relationships, many of which you are not even aware of. You can begin to understand yourself only in the context of the manifold connections and relationships that are part of your journey. You cannot be *you* except as part of these relationships and connections. And you will be *you* to the extent that you take the initiative and engage these

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<sup>6</sup> Recall Adrian van Kaam's essay, "Introspection and Transcendent Self-Presence" – Chapter 7 of his *In Search of Spiritual Identity* and reproduced in *Reader Volume I*. Van Kaam argues the case for always thinking of yourself in context, most especially in the context of the Transcendent. When we become disconnected we tend to think of ourselves as an isolated entity. That is unreal and generally unhelpful even destructive. Thinking of people as always participators in a bigger reality also helps to minimize the possibility of judging them harshly. It also opens us to the responsibilities that others might have towards them.

various influences – especially the more significant ones – more or less creatively.

### **No Man Is An Island**

The poet John Donne (1571-1631) wrote:

*"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main"<sup>7</sup>*

Human beings always find themselves in a context.<sup>8</sup> In speaking of this total web of interacting realities, we are in fact speaking of the formation mystery as it manifests itself concretely in our lives. That mystery is the lived reality of our daily existence. There is no avoiding it. We are always "a part of the main." Our being is part of the ocean of Being. We cannot even imagine ourselves outside of that ocean of Being. The ebb and flow of its currents and all the multitude manifestations of Being, are pertinent, more or less, to my life formation. And my life formation is pertinent to the overall mystery of formation, even if that pertinence can never be measured or even understood.

I am "thrown" into the world, as it were. The mystery of life – the formation mystery – is there to embrace and enfold me at conception and it is there to bid me farewell at death. My own mysterious story is a unique and communal chapter in the story of the formation mystery itself. I am by nature a participant – a distinctively *human* participant – always in relationship with the wider mystery and its changing forms. Our participation influences that mystery, and that mystery influences our participation. That mystery is part of us just as we are part of that mystery.

Clearly, there is a certain order of influences. A war in Iraq, for example, will almost certainly be of more direct influence on the life formation of a person living in Baghdad than a person living in Sydney. And for that person living in Sydney, the death of a loved one will be of more immediate significance than missing a bus. The demise of a species of butterfly or the increase of temperatures in the polar regions may not seem to have any direct bearing on our day to day lives but we are gradually being forced to face the relevance of such things.<sup>9</sup> The formation

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<sup>7</sup> *Devotions*, XVII.

<sup>8</sup> See for example Edward T Hall, *Beyond Culture*, Anchor Books, 1976/1989. Note especially Chapters 6, 7 & 8 on "context". Hall speaks as a cultural anthropologist and is more concerned with the "context" that human beings fabricate for themselves. See also Peter Berger & Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality*, Doubleday, 1966 - especially "The Maintenance of Subjective Reality". We will discuss this further when we consider "Tradition and Culture" in Unit One, Session Six.

<sup>9</sup> A well-grounded spirituality is not only *social* – never a private affair – it is also always *ecological*. This is not a contrived thought but a discovered fact, an implication of the formation mystery. See the work of Leonardo Boff referred to in the epigraph.

mystery is a whole and all that is part of it is interconnected and interdependent, no matter how remotely so or how mysteriously so.

The formation mystery in which we participate is never merely an abstraction for us. It is always a concrete reality, a concrete set of dynamic relationships in which and through which our lives are shaped, for better or worse. Thus we speak of *the formation field*.

Field theories are used to indicate known sets and patterns of interactions. For example, physicists speak of “electrical fields” and “magnetic fields”.<sup>10</sup> Within the formation field, as used in the study of spirituality, five polarities or sources of interaction are always said to be present:

- *preformation,*
- *interformation,*
- *intraformation,*
- *situational formation* and
- *world formation.*

Human formation involves the interactive influences of all five polarities or sources, more or less, all the time.

### **The Raw Data of Life Formation**

Living is emerging, an inside out process. As we will discuss below, this emergence is more or less fostered or more or less obstructed by a number of interactions. But central to the whole unfolding process is the inner potential of the living organism. A little story from the life of Nikos Kazantzakis illustrates this:

*Once, I remembered, I had detached a chrysalis from the trunk of an olive tree and placed it in my palm. Inside the transparent coating I discerned a living thing. It was moving. The hidden process must have reached its terminus; the future, still enslaved butterfly was waiting with silent tremors for the sacred hour when it would emerge into the sunlight. It was not in a hurry. Having confidence in the light, the warm air, in God’s eternal law, it was waiting.*

*But I was in a hurry. I wanted to see the miracle hatch before me as soon as possible, wanted to see how the body surges out of its tomb and shroud to become a soul. Bending over, I began to blow my warm breath over the*

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<sup>10</sup> In the human sciences over the past fifty or so years there has been a move towards speaking of “fields”, “*Gestalt*” and “systems”. See for example the work of people like Kurt Lewin, Kurt Goldstein and Virginia Satir. Typically, these theorists treat the human person as a whole within a whole.

*chrysalis, and behold! A slit soon incised itself on the chrysalis' back, the entire shroud gradually split from top to bottom, and the immature, bright green butterfly appeared, still tightly locked together, its wings twisted, its legs glued to its abdomen. It squirmed gently and kept coming more and more to life beneath my warm, persistent breath. One wing, as pale as a budding poplar leaf disengaged itself from the body and began to palpitate, struggling to unfold along its entire length, but in vain. It stayed half opened, shrivelled. Soon the other wing moved as well, toiled in its own right to stretch, was unable to, and remained half unfolded and trembling. I, with a human being's effrontery, continued to lean over and blow my warm exhalation upon the maimed wings, but they had ceased to move now and had dropped down, as stiff and lifeless as stone.*

*I felt sick at heart. Because of my hurry, because I had dared to transgress an eternal law, I had killed the butterfly. In my hand I held a carcass. Years and years have passed, but that butterfly's weightless carcass has weighed heavily on my conscience ever since.<sup>11</sup>*

Each of us begins the human journey – participants in the formation mystery – with a set of givens, a certain set of needs, limits and possibilities. We live out our days, more or less creatively, amidst the tension of, on the one hand, our actual and perceived needs, limits and possibilities and, on the other, the actual and perceived needs, limits and possibilities of the people, events and things in the world around us.<sup>12</sup>

The potential for all that might be actualised biologically in the course of life's journey is already present in the zygote. The possibilities, limits and needs are given. That biological potency is immediately in interaction with its environment and begins to take form as a result of that interaction, for better or worse. Our body structure, eye colour, intellectual and emotional characteristics and various physical abilities and disabilities are potentially there from the start. Life is a process of emergence or unfolding of that potential in constant interaction.

The actualisation of that potency of course is another matter. For one reason or another it may be only partially actualised. Sometimes the process of unfolding life may last a very brief time. The zygote might not even develop to become a foetus. And if it does, it might develop no further. Even for those of us whose journey has proceeded more or less well for many years, the unfolding will

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<sup>11</sup> Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, Faber, 1965/1989, 465-66. This story, in a slightly amended form found its way into his novel, *Zorba the Greek*. Kazantzakis goes on to say: "The most precious orders given us by God are: Be patient, meditate, trust" (466).

<sup>12</sup> Possibilities always imply limits and needs and vice versa.

only be more or less. Who can claim to have actualised his or her full potential? If the truth be told, we probably cannot be too precise about that potential anyway.

Implied in the biological raw data is some *distinctively human data*. The possibilities, needs and limits of spirit are also potentially there from the beginning. That quality of life that will allow us to give specifically human form to our existence through the expression of freedom, consciousness and our ability to respond well to life's challenges, our ability to be held to account for our actions and our ability to give appropriate direction to our formation, must also be part of the raw data as potential. Whilst these take particular form in interaction with the people, events and things of our surroundings, that very process presupposes the potential. This more-than-matter reality is what we have called the depth dimension, or soul or spirit or form.

We can thus speak of *preformation* that gives us the *biological data* and the *soul or depth dimension data* to begin the journey we call life. Both sets of data are constantly active, dynamic, contributing to the formation of our lives. Socialization and life experiences make it extremely difficult to be precise about this preformation. We can often enough see evidence of our parents and ancestors in our bodily constitution, comportment, temperament, abilities and disabilities. But just how much is nurture and how much is nature is not so easy to be exact about. This is even more particularly the case with the preformation of the depth dimension. The mysterious subjectivity of people is one of the truly awesome qualities of human life. Members of the same family will often show markedly different traits. Again, how much is nature and how much nurture is a matter for conjecture. What is not a matter of conjecture is that there is a mixture in all of us of both nature and nurture.

## **The Human Interface**

The body givens and depth dimension givens with which we begin the human journey have much to do with the branch of the human tree on which we grew. This too is a matter of both nature and nurture. It is reasonable to assume that from the very first moment of conception an interaction is already taking place with the mother. And since the mother is a whole person – not just a biological unit – that interaction will be more than just biological. Through the mother the world is present to the budding person in the womb.

Clearly the health of the mother – what she eats or does not eat, whether she takes exercise or not, what she experiences physically – will all affect the development of the one she carries. We know, for example, that children born of drug-dependent mothers may themselves be drug-dependent when they are

born. Relaxation and the playing of music may also influence the baby in the womb.

Further, we can reasonably assume that what the mother experiences spiritually, intellectually and emotionally will have its effect. It is reasonable to assume, for example, that it is better for the child if the mother experiences a good measure of serenity than if she experiences constant distress or even trauma. More particularly, it seems reasonable to assume that a mother whose life is a more or less consonant expression of who she is rather than a more or less dissonant expression of who she is, is likely to communicate this harmony to the child she carries.

When the child emerges from the womb, the interface with the human community is considerably expanded and intensified. A number of other people become more or less directly significant for that child. And as life proceeds, so the circle of human interaction tends to grow. Good community is built up of good interactions.

We can thus speak of *interformation*. All human life formation is also interformation. It is always in relationship to other human beings, implicitly and explicitly. We cannot think realistically of ourselves outside of the relationships we have with other human beings. Those relationships may be more or less formative, more or less deformative. They may assist the expression of form in accord with who we most deeply are, or they may inhibit that expression. One of the keys to self-understanding is the network of relationships we have experienced over the years – especially in our “system of origin”, the family.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Inner Workings of the Human Person**

Together with the raw data with which we begin the journey – our preformation – and the interactions we have constantly with other human beings – interformation – we also process life internally as we go. We are thinking and willing beings, beings who remember, anticipate and imagine. And these processes occur amidst varying degrees of emotion and at different levels of consciousness.

For the human person, nothing is ever totally objective. The influence of our inner worlds ensures that our knowledge is always perspectival. We are always involved in shaping what we call “reality”. The constant interplay between the body and soul givens, and the influences of other human beings, is in turn significantly influenced by what we do with that interplay. Note, for example, the

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<sup>13</sup> One author offers a good insight: “We love out of leisure from self-concern, and we are always self-concerned unless we know that someone other than ourself is prepared to maintain the significance of our being.” (Shirley Sugerman, *Sin and Madness: Studies in Narcissism*, Westminster Press, 54f.). See also Conrad Baars, *Born Only Once*, Franciscan Herald Press, 1975.

different ways members of a family speak of the same family event. For one it is a bad memory, for another it is something to laugh about; for yet another it is a matter of some indifference or even bewilderment.

The experience of emotional responsiveness, for example, can be seen on a spectrum. Imagine fishing nets. At one extreme you have nets with very fine holes and they catch almost everything that moves in the water. At the other extreme you have nets with large holes and they catch only big fish. So it is with people and their emotional reactions. Some – eg artists and highly sensitive people – catch nearly everything in their environment. While this can give rise to profound insight and great creative expression, it can also make life a particularly painful business for such people. At the other end of the spectrum you have those who seem to catch almost nothing in their emotional net. While this can give rise to great insensitivity and a certain deadness of personality, it might also allow such people to endure much that would be crushing for the more sensitive. Most of us, mercifully, are somewhere in between these extremes.

Clearly there are different levels of consciousness that affect the way we process reality. We can speak of:

- *focal consciousness*,
- *pre-focal consciousness* and
- *infra-focal consciousness* which may, in turn, be either
- *subconsciousness* or
- *transconsciousness*.

*Focal consciousness* refers to that small domain of consciousness where we are immediately aware. Thus, when we are having a conversation with someone, we are immediately aware of certain aspects of that person and the topic of conversation. We may not be aware, for example, of items we watched on the news last week or the experience of being in kindergarten or our favourite music. These things and many others are very much part of our consciousness. They are, however, at that instant, not part of our *focal* consciousness.

*Pre-focal consciousness* refers to that relatively larger domain of consciousness where we store information that is accessible more or less on demand. Thus, in our conversation the person might ask us where we live or where we spent Christmas. That information is generally brought into focal consciousness fairly easily. Not all that is stored in the pre-focal consciousness may be so easily retrieved. However, in principle, it is accessible, even if it takes a little effort.

*Infra-focal consciousness* is a more complex and mysterious domain of consciousness. The contents carried here are not so easily accessed. They may



emerge in special moments of insight or creativity, in moments of stress or trauma, in dreams or through in-depth therapy. Here we need to make a distinction.

- The infra-focal consciousness may be *subconsciousness*. Thus, we store the sediment of life's experiences. This is often the place where we hold memories that are too painful to bring into focal consciousness. If, for example, we were traumatized as a young child, we may withhold full awareness of that event. As adults, it seems reasonable to suggest, we may also as it were "hide" information from ourselves that would cause us significant pain. The subconscious can be a source of conflict and indeed a storehouse of conflict. Subconsciousness is neither simply good nor simply bad. It is just another fact of life. Sometimes it serves a merciful function of withholding information we are unable to bear at that time. Sometimes, however, it may serve a more deformative function of binding us, controlling our reactions in compulsive and unfree ways. It ought to be approached with care and respect by listening attentively to what we humbly and honestly note of ourselves in the day-to-day interchanges of life.
- Another realm of the infra-focal consciousness, quite distinct from subconsciousness, is that of *transconsciousness*. Deep within the human person is an openness to "the more than." Especially geniuses and creative persons may find great insights for directions for artistic expression simply emerging within them. Whilst it would be unfair to the artist to say that the art form simply "happened", it would also be unrealistic to say that the artist did not, as it were, "receive" the inspiration. Thus, Einstein "discovered" his theory of relativity while riding a tram in Vienna – it "came to him". Both Mozart and Beethoven speak of musical works coming to them – in some instances in a more or less complete form. Deep within us all is openness to "the more than", something beyond us, a source of truth, beauty, creativity and wisdom that comes to us in a moment as pure gift.

Sometimes it is not easy to distinguish between that which emerges from the transconscious and that which emerges from the subconscious. Sometimes, undoubtedly, what emerges is a mixture of both. It can take person of great discernment to know the difference.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This is an important matter in spiritual direction and the discernment of the inner movements and events of a person's life. One could wonder, for example, with the leaders of some cults, where their "inspiration" and "insight" were coming from and how much of it might be actually seriously mingled with personal agenda and unresolved conflicts within the subconscious.

Thus we must speak of the highly complex world of *intraformation*. Not infrequently, it is the one that is given primary or even exclusive attention when people speak of spirituality or psychology. This decontextualizing tendency needs to be carefully watched.<sup>15</sup> Human life formation takes place within a total context or full field of formation. Intraformation is one of the five polarities operative within that field. Again: Spirituality – life formation – is always a communal event, never a merely private event, even though it might be intensely personal.

### **The Situation in which we Find Ourselves**

Different environments also have their effect on our lives at any given time. It is one thing to live in a high rise apartment block in the middle of a large, modern city, quite another thing to live on a farm far from the city and its suburbs. A day spent with friends in a favourite place – eg the beach or the mountains – can do much for flagging spirits. Windy days can set school children on edge. Some people are depressed by continuing cloudy and damp weather. A work place that is cramped and dingy might see less useful work done than a work place that is full of air and light, nicely furnished with healthy flourish indoor plants.

The environment is partly constituted by the physical components – buildings, trees, water, furniture, light, space and so on. It is also partly constituted by human presence. In all of the above situations the *human* component is also operative. A group of human beings is more than just the sum of the individuals. Part of situational formation is the mood or atmosphere generated by the people who are – or indeed have been – part of it. In this way, we can see the particularly close interdependence of situational formation and interformation. Our own memories and associations with regard to a place can significantly affect the way we experience that place.<sup>16</sup> In this way, we can see the particularly close interdependence of situational formation and intraformation.

Town planners, architects and interior designers have their jobs because of the importance of the physical factors relevant to life formation. It is their task to create environments that are conducive to human wellbeing. If they do their job well, we are all the better for it. If they do their job badly or are not allowed to do their job well, society suffers.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This is, frequently enough, missed by the so-called New Age theorists. It also seems to be something of a problem for Jungians. See Michael Whelan, “Counterfeit Elements in Christian Spirituality: A Challenge for Theological Educators”, pages 16-32 in *Readings for Christian Spirituality, Volume I*.

<sup>16</sup> An old church, for example, can provide us with a special situation to sit and recover our equanimity. That situation is partly created by the physical reality. It is also partly created by “the spirit” of the place and that “spirit” is, typically, the result of human use and occupancy. In this context we might wonder about the Australian Aborigines and the importance of their relationship with the land and particular places. We might also wonder what damage has been done to them by cutting them off from their land and places significant to them.

<sup>17</sup> In this context one could ask a question about both the wisdom and justice of taking aborigines – especially young aborigines – away from the situation of their community and transporting them to urban areas where they are then

Thus we can speak of *situational formation*. Clearly, different people react to different environments in different ways. Some people are more sensitive to the environment and place than others. Environment is something we can, mostly, adapt to, even if it is difficult to do so. Whatever the individual reactions to environment might be, it is a factor in the full field of formation.

### **The Wider World in which we Find Ourselves**

The twentieth century has seen an increasing awareness of “the global village.” There are a number of symbols of this increasing “globalization” – the increasing numbers of interventions by the United Nations in trouble spots around the world, the growth of international corporations<sup>18</sup> and the exporting of jobs, the development of the internet and the so-called “e-commerce,” the growth of organizations like Greenpeace and Amnesty International, and so on. What happens in one part of the world is relevant to other parts of the world. Decisions by politicians, economists, agronomists, military commanders and multi-national corporations have a ripple effect.

We may be tempted to try and escape this reality and withdraw into some kind of isolationism, whether as an individual, a group or a nation. Many attempts to establish alternative lifestyle communities since the sixties, for example, have had varying results. One enduring fact seems to be that we cannot cut ourselves off completely from the rest of the human family. Sooner or later the world intrudes, implicitly or explicitly. We are forced to ask whether we should even try to cut ourselves off. On the other hand, we are also forced to ask lifestyle questions, questions about the extent of our involvement in the world around us and how to maintain some sense of peace and even sanity within a social environment that can at times be very intrusive and demanding of our time and energy.

Thus we must also speak of *world formation*. It will be more or less part of each person’s story. It behoves us to pay attention and think critically of just how the world does become part of *our* story.<sup>19</sup> It also seems reasonable to expect responsible adults to consider what contribution they can make to the sanity and peace in their part of the world. The interaction of the poles of the formation field in which we find ourselves is always mutual.

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locked inside a small cell.

<sup>18</sup> In fact it might be fair to suggest that multi-national corporations are slowly emerging alongside nation states as the great shapers of the human family’s future. If this is the case, it might be worth reflecting on what kinds of checks and balances – comparable to the laws that govern nation states – will govern the corporate world. It hardly seems responsible to leave it to market forces or trade agreements or self-regulation.

<sup>19</sup> A useful reflection might be John F Kavanaugh, *Still Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, Orbis Books, 1992. See also N T Wright, *The Millennium Myth: Hope for a Postmodern World*, Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.

## THE UNIVERSAL CHRISTIAN DIMENSION: GUIDING PRINCIPLE

**\* All human life formation takes place within an historical context imbued with God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

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### We Were Baptised into One Body in a Single Spirit

In his First Letter to the Corinthians St. Paul uses the metaphor of “the body” to express a theme to which he returns often – that of the unity of the Body of Christ:

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

*<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup> If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup> And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup> But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup> If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many members, yet one body. <sup>21</sup> The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” <sup>22</sup> On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup> and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; <sup>24</sup> whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, <sup>25</sup> that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.*

*<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers;*

*then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?<sup>20</sup>*

Our unity in Christ through baptism is a foundational fact of life for the disciples of Jesus Christ. It is also a determining fact of life. Christians can never think of themselves as isolated individuals. For those who have put on the mind of Christ (cf Phil 2:5) the plural pronoun “we” comes more immediately to mind than the singular “I” when speaking about life and being in the world.

Our unique and communal identity as human beings is affirmed, blessed and redeemed in Christ. We unfold towards the fullness of our potential by constantly submitting to the Christ Form within us and among us, making it possible for us to express our inherent relatedness in a life-giving way.

Jesus’ commandment to love (cf. Mt. 22:34ff.; Mk. 12:28ff.; Lk. 20:27 & Jn. 13:34) is an affirmation of human experience. It is as if He is saying: “You discover in your lives intimations of a connectedness with all that is and a longing to be in communion with others; act on it bravely, intelligently and generously! Don't hold back! What you have discovered is the heart of life! I am with you in that, enabling you to be what you are made to be: Expressions of my own love in and for the world!”

## **A Matter of Vocation**

Our vocation is not one of mere resignation to the fact that we are “stuck” with this world and everyone in it. Our vocation is one of active involvement, applying ourselves creatively to the context of life as a promise rather than a threat. Preformation offers us a particular set of data, which no one else has, to be a particular person in a particular human community. Preformation may leave one satisfied and well placed to gain plenty of recognition as an achiever, another it leaves with a set of apparently ordinary possibilities, yet another it leaves with terrible limits that seem to mock human possibilities. My particular preformation is one of the facts with which I must work and with which the community as community must work. It is an inevitable part of the full field of formation, one pole of that field where I seek “the treasure” (cf Mt 13:44), with which I interact,

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<sup>20</sup> 1Corinthians 12:12-30. Significantly this text is followed immediately by St Paul’s famous statement on the primacy of love. It should be noted that the metaphor of the body was also used by the Stoics to describe organizational structure. St Paul uses the metaphor in an essentially different way. See the helpful essay by Barnabas M Ahern, “Christian Union with the Body of Christ” in Carroll Stuhlmueller and Sebastian MacDonald, editors, *A Voice Crying Out in the Desert: Preparing for Vatican II with Barnabas M Ahern*, The Liturgical Press, 1996, 123-131. See page 128 for the specific reference to Stoicism and its use of the body metaphor.

for better or worse. In doing this I remember that I am free to choose an attitude, that life is not so much what happens to me as what I do with it.

Interformation calls us variously to gratitude, forgiveness, joy, compassion, anger, intimacy, confrontation, solitude, mercy and laughter.<sup>21</sup> For one, interformation may be a source of great freedom and strength, for another it is a mixed bag of positives and negatives, for yet another it is a tragedy. Again, that interformation is one of the dynamics with which I must live as creatively as I can, seeking to hear the movement of the Spirit of God in it all. The mutuality of life – or at least its effects – cannot be avoided. When I attempt to bypass, override or simply ignore it, it does not go away. Like any other dynamic pole of the formation field, I have, in effect, two options – the first is to pay attention, face it, listen to it and endeavour to make it a more or less formative part of my life, the second is to resist it and, in so doing, make it a more or less deformative part of my life. The poles of the formation field will not go away simply because I wish it or remain ignorant of their action and influence.

Intraformation provides us with an opportunity to participate in and facilitate the unfolding of our lives. Most particularly, intraformation is about developing dispositions that will enable me to relate in life giving ways with God, myself, other people, events and things. God's Spirit and my spirit bear united witness that I am a child of God and an heir to the Kingdom (cf Rom 8:16). Intraformation is a privilege and a responsibility, a matter of complexity and simplicity, joy and pain, depression and sadness, light and darkness. Like it or not, we all have the possibility and the responsibility to participate in the formation of our lives. We are accountable for that. We are called to pay close attention to what is happening within us, to listen gently and carefully to it, always mindful of the embrace of God's mercy which holds us in being. In responding generously to this call, we progressively become the person we are made to be, we find ourselves being more and more in love.

For some, intraformation seems to be a matter of straightforward practicalities, for others it is an ebb and flow of light and dark, for still others it may be a matter of seemingly constant darkness and pain. Unlike my interaction with the other poles of the formation field, intraformation is an internal conversation, one for which I ought to have the utmost respect – whether it is within myself or another person. The greater the hospitality I can foster within myself, the more effective that internal conversation can be, the more likely I am to facilitate the emergence of the Christ form in myself and others. Needless to say, there is a close correlation between this internal conversation and my conversation with the world of people, events and things.

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<sup>21</sup> Recall “primordial option” discussed in Session Two of this Unit.

Situational formation opens me to the physical world beyond myself and the sacramentality of things. Situations are potential epiphanies. Through this pole of the field of formation I can become alive to atmosphere, the spirit of a place, painting, music, architecture, colours, stars, rivers, animals, mountains, flowers, trees, sunsets and the awesome wonder of the cosmos. I am also opened to the ugly, the brutal, the dirty and the disastrous effects of humanity's abuse of the environment and my failure to interact formatively with that pole of the formation field.

World formation reminds me of my corporate destiny. Together I share the privilege of living in this cosmos, God's creation. With that privilege goes the responsibility to care for one another and the world we share. At the same moment I realise in awe that I am part of a massive community of human wayfarers reaching back thousands of years, I also realise in some fear the implications of that when I see the destructiveness of which we are now capable.

And all of the above puts us in mind of the Incarnation. God has entered our world. In particular God has entered our humanity. When Jesus says, "Follow!" – as indeed he does more than twenty times in the Gospels – we can hear it as an invitation to be one with Jesus in that incarnational journey. The Christian vocation is nothing if it is not always taking us deeper into our humanity.

### **Jesus Christ in the Field of Formation**

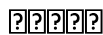
We realise God brought this world into existence, that God has entered this world in the flesh and the whole of creation groans in one great act of giving birth as God's designs are brought to perfection (see Romans 8:19). This is the field of formation which the Great Mystery has entered, enfleshed as Jesus of Nazareth. He is the Christ. In Him we await the liberation of all things, the triumph of life over death, love over hate, truth over falsehood. The enfleshing of God in the world has radically altered the structure of existence as such; this world's ultimate destiny is now shaped by Jesus Christ. We may choose to let evil triumph here or there. We may even choose to let evil triumph in our whole lives. In this or that situation evil might triumph, despite our best efforts. But evil can never have the final word in the cosmos.

What I experience in the field of life should be seen in the larger context of God's saving love. Every moment, every person, every event, every thing points back to God and the loving plan manifested in Jesus Christ. We could perhaps read the parable of the treasure in the field (cf Matthew 13:44) in this light. Each day we enter the field; each day we are open to finding the treasure – or, more precisely, being found by the treasure Himself. This is where Christian spirituality is born and grows, in the mundane field of daily living. Thus we do not enter this

field as would-be conquerors or masterers, rather we enter the field with care and listening, paying attention to what is happening. We seek to be available to the gentle movements of the Spirit, to be formed by the liberating love of God that pervades every moment – even the darkest. We remember the promise: “I am with you!”

Christian spirituality is *incarnational*. It drips with the mud of the field – the field of life. Christ waits for us in that mud – be it the dishes to be washed, the embrace of a loved one, just another boring day, a bilious attack, a sunset, an argument, a smiling child, a moment of intense pleasure or intense pain, days of depression, days of ordinary contentment, a cup of coffee with a good friend or a toilet to be cleaned.

How we respond is the key. A response in faith, hope and love is the authentic Christian response. We believe the Incarnation applies to *this* moment. The Incarnation is *now*. We hope in the final gathering of all things in Christ because we trust the Promise, “I am with you!” Even in the darkest moments of our lives we know that the last word has not been spoken, since that belongs to Christ, and it is a liberating and life-giving word of love and mercy. We love because we have been loved (see 1John 4:7-21). In love we find our freedom and life and the fulfilment of our heart’s deepest longings. Love – not hate or indifference – will bring life and healing to a world that so badly needs it. And our love is not merely the goodwill of the human ego but the Spirit of the Christ leading our spirit home.





## Snippets for meditation

(1) *“Childhood training, then, is an exceptionally strong influence in causing an individual to think illogically or neurotically. But it is not a fatal or irrevocable influence.*

*“Neurosis, in sum, seems to originate in and be perpetuated by some fundamentally unsound, irrational ideas. The individual comes to believe in unrealistic, impossible, often perfectionistic goals – especially the goals that he should be approved by everyone who is important to him, should do many things perfectly, and should never be frustrated in any of his major desires. Then, in spite of considerable contradictory evidence, he refuses to surrender his original illogical beliefs. ....*

*“My personal inclination, after working for the last several years with rational-emotive psychotherapy, is to say that yes, there is one absolutely necessary condition for real or basic personality change to occur - and that is that somehow, through some professional or non-professional channel, and through some kind of experience with himself, with others, or with things and events, the afflicted individual must learn to recognize his irrational, inconsistent, and unrealistic perceptions and thoughts, and change these for more logical, more reasonable philosophies of life. Without this kind of fundamental change in his ideologies and philosophic assumptions, I am tempted to say, no deep-seated personality changes will occur.”<sup>22</sup>*



(2) *“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.”<sup>23</sup>*



(3) *“God's love for us is not the reason for which we should love him. God's love for us is the reason for us to love ourselves. How could we love ourselves without this*

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<sup>22</sup> Albert Ellis, *Reason and Emotion in Psychotherapy*, The Citadel Press, 1977, 92-93 & 117.

<sup>23</sup> Simone Weil, "The Things of the World" in G. A. Panichas (ed.) *The Simone Weil Reader*, David McKay Company Inc., 1977, 424f.

motive?"<sup>24</sup>

□ □ □ □ □

(4) *"The fundamental polarity of human life between what is and what ought to be, between lack and fulfillment, between determination and freedom, is not abnormal; it is the norm. Every person is exposed to it because of the inescapable structure of human formation."*<sup>25</sup>

□ □ □ □ □

(5) *"Nothing is ever completed ... Incompleteness is a part of nature and it takes great art or great wisdom to know when to lay down the brush ... we should always avoid perfectionism."*<sup>26</sup>

□ □ □ □ □

(6) *"When you visualized a man or a woman carefully, you could always begin to feel pity – that was a quality God's image carried with it. When you saw the lines at the corners of the eyes, the shape of the mouth, how the hair grew, it was impossible to hate. Hate was just a failure of imagination."*<sup>27</sup>

□ □ □ □ □

(7) *"Behind all these labors was another question, one of great personal importance for him: What did it mean to be a monk, a contemplative, in the twentieth century? In a way his whole twenty-seven years at Gethsemani had been an attempt to find the answer to this problem, and as the years stripped away the obvious answers and the comforting illusions he felt he was left with little but his humanity. Like Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his Nazi prison, he began to see that the highest spiritual development was to be 'ordinary', to be fully a man, in the way few human beings succeed in becoming so simply and naturally themselves. He began to see the monk not, as he credible ascetic heroism for the love of God, but as one who was not afraid to be simply 'man', who, as he lived near to nature and his appetites, was the 'measure' of what others might be if society did not distort them with greed or ambition or lust or desperate want."*<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Simone Weil, *The Simone Weil Reader*, op cit, 351.

<sup>25</sup> Adrian van Kaam. *The Transcendent Self*, Dimension 1979, 172.

<sup>26</sup> Jean Monnet. *Memoirs*, Trans. Richard Mayne, Doubleday, 1978, 521.

<sup>27</sup> Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory*, Penguin, 1971, 131.

<sup>28</sup> Monica Furlong, *Merton: A Biography*, Harper & Row, 1980, xviii.

(8) *“I am what I am or I am nothing. .... My first elementary lesson of duty is that of resignation to the laws of nature, whatever they are; my first disobedience is to be impatient at what I am, and to indulge an ambitious aspiration after what I cannot be.”*<sup>29</sup>

□ □ □ □ □

(9) *“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who found a treasure in a field. With great joy he went off, sold everything he had and bought the field.”*<sup>30</sup>

□ □ □ □ □

(10) *“If we could get rid of the idea that the unconscious is a separate, and some sort hostile or animal entity set over against the conscious mind; and realize that it is, simply, our whole personality, with the exception of the scrap that happens at any moment to be in consciousness – then, perhaps, we should more easily grasp the importance of exploring and mobilizing its powers. As it is, most of us behave like the owners of a well furnished room, who ignore every aspect of it except the window looking out upon the street. This we keep polished, and drape with the best curtains we can afford. But the room upon which we sedulously turn our backs contains all that we have inherited, all that we have accumulated, many tools which are rusting for want of use; machinery too which, left to itself, may function satisfactorily, or may get out of order and work to results that we neither desire nor dream. The room is twilit. Only by the window is a little patch of light. Beyond this there is a fringe of vague, fluctuating sometimes prismatic radiance: an intermediate region, where the images and things which most interest us have their place, just within range, on the fringe of the field of consciousness. In the darkest corners the machinery that we do not understand, those possessions of which we are least proud, and those pictures we hate to look at, are hidden away.”*<sup>31</sup>

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(11) *“I would say that they are not so much human beings as beasts who say that one should live without being a comfort to anyone, taking no delight in another’s good, causing no trouble to others by one’s faults, loving no one, and caring to be loved by no one. Yet heaven forbid I should allow them really to love who think friendship is a business affair, only professing to be friends with their lips when the hope of some worldly advantage smiles on them, or who try to make their friends*

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<sup>29</sup> John Henry Newman, *A Grammar of Assent*, Image Books, 1955, 272f.

<sup>30</sup> Mt 13:44.

<sup>31</sup> Evelyn Underhill, “The Well-Furnished Room”.

*the minister of some vile practice.”<sup>32</sup>*



(12) *“There can be no properly moral problems for anyone in whom this vulnerability to love is not operative, and those in whom it is inhibited at its source, often have to be helped to experience the nature of what they genuinely feel before they can begin to lead a morally human life at all.”<sup>33</sup>*



(13) *“Who does not know, indeed, that the human being is a gentle and sociable being, and not solitary or savage? Nothing is as proper to our nature as to enter one another’s society, to have need of one another, and to love the person who is of our race. After having given us these seeds which He has cast into our hearts, the Lord came to claim their fruits and He said: ‘I give you a new commandment: to love one another’ (Jn 13:34). The Lord, wishing to arouse our souls to observe this commandment, did not require of his disciples either unheard of prodigies or miracles (even though He gave them, in the Holy Spirit, the power to do such things); but ... what did He say to them? ‘All will know that you are My disciples by the love that you have for one another’ (Jn 13:35). Everywhere He unites these precepts to such an extent that He refers to Himself the good deeds of which our neighbor is the object. ‘For I was hungry and you gave me to eat ...’ and He adds: ‘Everything that you did to the least of My brethren you did to Me’ (cf Mt 25:34-46). And so, by means of the first precept, it is possible to observe the second, and by the second to go back to the first: in loving the Lord to love also the neighbor, for ‘He who loves Me,’ says the Lord, ‘will keep my commandments,’ and, ‘My commandment is that you love one another as I have loved you’.”<sup>34</sup>*



(14) *“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of human beings. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the kingdom of their Father, and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is*

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<sup>32</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, as cited by Aelred Squire, op cit, 79.

<sup>33</sup> Aelred Squire, op cit, 70.

<sup>34</sup> St Basil cited by Louis Bouyer, *A History of Christian Spirituality, Volume I*, Crossroad, 1963, 336-37.

*meant for everyone. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with humankind and its history by the deepest bonds.”<sup>35</sup>*



(15) *“In the whole world, throughout the whole of history, even among religious men and saints, Christ suffers dismemberment. His physical Body was crucified by Pilate and the Pharisees; His mystical Body is drawn and quartered from age to age by the devils in the agony of that disunion which is bred and vegetates in our souls, prone to selfishness and to sin.*

*“All over the face of the earth the avarice and lust of men breed unceasing divisions among them, and the wounds that tear men from union with one another widen and open out into huge wars. Murder, massacres, revolution, hatred, the slaughter and torture of the bodies and souls of men, the destruction of cities by fire, the starvation of millions, the annihilation of populations and finally the cosmic inhumanity of atomic war: Christ is massacred in His members, torn limb from limb; God is murdered in men.*

*“The history of the world, with the material destruction of cities and nations and people, expresses the interior division that tyrannizes the souls of all men, and even of the saints. Even the innocent, even those in whom Christ lives by charity, even those who want with their whole heart to love one another, remain divided and separate. Although they are already on in Him, their union is hidden from them, because it still only possesses the secret substance of their souls.*

*“But their minds and their judgments and their desires, their human characters and faculties, their appetites and their ideals are all imprisoned in the slag of an inescapable egotism which pure love has not yet been able to refine. As long as we are on earth, the love that unites us will bring us suffering by our very contact with one another, because this love is the resetting of a Body of broken bones. Even saints cannot live with saints on this earth without some anguish, without some pain at the differences that come between them.*

*“There are two things which men can do about the pain of disunion with other men. They can love or they can hate. Hatred recoils from the sacrifice and the sorrow that are the price of this resetting of bones. It refuses the pain of reunion.”<sup>36</sup>*

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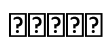
<sup>35</sup> *Gaudium et spes* (The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World”), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, Anthony Clarke, 1972, 55-57.

(16) *“At this time I began to learn how it is that God can still behold us in our sin. I went on to see that it is only pain that blames and punishes, but that our gracious Lord comforts and sympathizes, for he is ever kindly disposed towards our soul, and, loving us, longs to bring us to his bliss. It was a simple sort of place where the lord was sitting. It was the earth, bare, deserted, lonely, wild. His clothes were full and flowing and seemly. Their colour was the blue of the sky, restrained but beautiful; his countenance full of pity; his face was a light tan in colour and he had regular features; his eyes were dark, beautiful, and true, filled with loving compassion. There was deep and generous insight, full of eternity and heaven. And I thought that the love with which he ceaselessly regarded his servant, especially when he fell, would melt our own hearts with love and break them for very joy. This lovely gaze displayed a wonderful and fitting blend of compassion and pity, of joy and blessedness. The latter surpassed the former as the heaven does the earth. Pity was earthly, blessedness heavenly. The compassion and pity was that of the Father when his most loved creation, Adam, fell; the joy and blessedness was in his own beloved Son who is equal with the Father. The merciful gaze of his loving eyes ranged the whole earth, and went down with Adam into hell; his continuing pity kept Adam from eternal death. Mercy and pity dwell thus with mankind until at last we come to heaven. But man in this life is blind and cannot see God, our Father, as he is. And whenever he wills of his goodness to show himself to man, he shows himself in great simplicity, as man. All the same I saw quite clearly that we ought to know and believe that the Father is not man.”<sup>37</sup>*



(17) *“I love that Church which plunges into the thickets of human history and is not afraid of compromising itself by getting mixed up with human affairs, with their political conflicts and their cultural disputes. I love that Church because it loves people and therefore goes out to look for them wherever they are. And I love best of all that Church which is mud-splashed from history because it has played its part in history.”<sup>38</sup>*



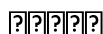
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<sup>37</sup> Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, Chapter 51.

<sup>38</sup> Jean Danielou, *Prayer as a Political Problem*, Burns & Oates, 1967, 55.

## Suggestions for Further Study

- Baars, Conrad, *Born Only Once*, Franciscan Herald Press, 1975.
- Bernard of Clairvaux, *The Twelve Steps of Humility and Pride*, I, 3-6.
- Boff, Leonardo, *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm*, Orbis Books, 1995.
- Cinema
- Lord of the Flies* (1963) (Dir: Peter Brook adapts William Golding’s novel.) A group of English schoolboys stranded on an island remind us of the darker potential in our interconnectedness.
- Zorba the Greek* (1964) (Dir: Michael Cacoyannis with Anthony Quinn) Based on Nikos Kazantzakis’ autobiographical novel, a memorable portrayal of some of the best and worst characteristics in us human beings.
- One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1975) (Dir: Milos Forman with Jack Nicholson) This film is a disturbing presentation of, among other things, the interconnectedness of people and the abuse of power.
- Hall, Edward T, *Beyond Culture*, Anchor Books, 1976/1989.
- Hammarskjold, Dag, *Markings*, Trans Leif Sjoberg and W. H. Auden, Alfred A. Knopf, 1976, 131.
- Kavanaugh, John F, *Still Following Christ in a Consumer Society*, Orbis Books, 1992.
- McDonagh, Sean, *Passion for the Earth: The Christian Vocation to Promote Justice and Peace and the Integrity of Creation*, Orbis Books, 1994.
- Satir, Virginia, *Peoplemaking*, Science and Behaviour Books, 1972.
- Squire, Aelred, *Asking the Fathers: The Art Of Meditation and Prayer*, SPCK, 1973/94 – especially Chapter 6, “The Art of Arts”.
- Tacey, David, *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*, Harper Collins, 1995.



## **Suggested Exercises**

1. Next time you go into a Church, be mindful of your actions – sign of the cross, genuflection and so on. Pay attention gently. Be where you are. Let your body movements be sacramental for you.
2. This week pray for God’s blessing on someone you do not like.
3. Take out some family photos and look at them. What thoughts and feelings do they evoke? Listen gently to those thoughts and feelings. You might even feel led to pray for this or that person, or yourself. Let come what will.

