

RETREAT
FOR THE PRIESTS OF
THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SYDNEY
JUNE 30TH - JULY 4TH AND JULY 7TH - JULY 11TH 1997

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'If you knew the gift of God!' (Jn 4:10). The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for God. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.2560)

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We too often fail to realize that one of the primary purposes of holy Scripture, considered as a vital whole, is to show man to himself, as he was made and as he has become, as he acts and reacts in relation to his maker, with nothing left out. Hence the violence and crudity and sensuality that God there pushes in front of our noses, even if we would, to our very great danger, prefer to turn away. The God of the Bible does not whittle down the truth, and we must not try to do so either. Then, beside these mirrors, universal in their validity, there are others for our more particular information, held up to us by those in the past or the present whose development we are personally best prepared to understand and, surer still, those additional portraits of ourselves that we are daily making in the actions and thoughts which mirror what we individually are. Even those who imagine they know themselves, will often be surprised at what they see, if they have the courage to look honestly into those mirrors. From those, particularly, we shall often prefer to look away, but from time to time, in a moment of grace, which we can either accept or refuse, we shall be forced to look, and then we shall either be humbled and led back to the God of inexorable truth, or turn angrily away and lose ourselves in lies. Yet the living Truth, the great breaker of idols and destroyer of false gods, is ultimately easier to live with than the most comforting of lies. It is better to lose the God we found it easy to envisage and the faith that was only a protection from our fears, and stand naked and unknowing in the presence of the One who can only really be known when he is lived with. At least with that God, we can and, indeed, must begin from where we are. There can be no becoming that does not start from something that already is (Aelred Squire, *Asking the Fathers*, SPCK, 1973, p.10f.).

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In persona Christi, when it is applied to the ordained person, speaks of a reality deep within that person. Appearances, if you will, remain unchanged. Just as bread and wine still look like and act like bread and wine after consecration, so ordained human beings still look and act like human beings after the consecration prayer has been prayed. Moreover, just as bread and wine must be food for the particular mode of Christ's presence to accomplish its (his) purpose, the ordained person must be a human being for yet another mode of Christ's presence to achieve its distinctive and intended purpose. Here I think is the final paradox of that noble insight called transubstantiation: to be something it is not, it must be precisely what it is. When consecrated bread and wine cease being food, they cease to be the body and blood of Christ. When a priest ceases to be a human being, he cannot be the presence of Christ envisioned by the phrase in persona Christi, the priest must be precisely what he is, a human being (Peter Fink, "The Sacrament of Orders: Some Liturgical Reflections," *Worship*, 56 (November 1982), p.499).

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THEMES FOR MEDITATIONS

Why do people run marathons?
Can our hearts be mistaken?
Do we really desire to be human?
Is dying part of what we desire?
And why were the Jews out in the desert?
Let's forget about the Cross, please?
Can we live by delight?

Lectio divina awakens desire
Contemplation fans the flames
The call to be
Growing in self-awareness (Part One)
Growing in self-awareness (Part Two)
When the bullet train stops
the Church a restless people

SESSION ONE:

WHY DO PEOPLE RUN MARATHONS?

Spirituality

Working definition

"living relationships" pointing to both relationships that are living and lifegiving and commitment to actually living those relationships more a matter of disposition than achievement

Relationships with whom/what?

The disposition towards living relationships with

God

Self

Others

World

The relationships with God is the relationship that gives context and meaning to the other relationships

Levels of consideration

There are at least five different levels of consideration in thinking about spirituality:

The foundational human

The foundational religious

The foundational Christian (or Islamic, Judaic, Hindu, Buddhist etc.)

The specifically Christian (or Islamic, Judaic, Hindu, Buddhist etc.) (eg Catholic)

The specifically Catholic (eg priest, married, vowed religious, young etc)

Premature movement to one of the more specific levels of research without adequately researching the more foundational roots will lead to some kind of deformation (eg starting with divine revelation without taking full account of the foundational human aspects of the issue)

You cannot be fully human without spirituality - at least implicit

To rob a people of their spirituality is one of the most dreadful things you can do to them

A society that does not take care to nurture its spirituality will eventually disintegrate - this will be especially the case if it actively resists spirituality

The ultimate issues facing society at large are issues of spirituality; a well grounded spirituality is the necessary context for dealing with the major social, political, cultural and economic issues

The ultimate issues facing the Church are issues of spirituality; a well grounded spirituality - with a deep mystical heart - is essential to the life of the Church generally, but must characterize our efforts for renewal in particular

What is the human ground of my spiritual life?

Do I have lifegiving relationships?

Can I point to anyone I love dearly?

Is there anyone who loves me dearly?

Which is more important for me: "the system" (rules, jobs etc) or people?

How do I deal with people? How do I think others would describe my relational style?

Can I learn anything about myself by the way I relate to others?

In what sense does my relationship with God define my life?

Is there any obvious experiential connection between my relationship with God and my other relationships?

SESSION ONE (cont):

Walker Percy:

The sand trap and the clouds put me in mind of being ten years old and in love and full of longing. The first thing a man remembers is longing and the last thing he is conscious of before death is exactly the same longing. I have never seen a man die who did not die in longing. When I was ten years old I woke one morning to a sensation of longing. Besides the longing I was in love with a girl named Louise. and so the same morning I went out to this same sandtrap where I hoped chance would bring us together. At the breakfast table I took a look at my father with his round head, his iron-coloured hair, his chipper red cheeks, and I wondered to myself: at what age does a man get over his longing? (Love in the Ruins, p.20).

One sign that the world has ended, the world we knew, the world by which we understood ourselves, an age which began some three hundred years ago with a scientific revolution, is the dawn of the discovery that its worldview no longer works and we find ourselves without the means of understanding ourselves. There is a lag between the end of an age and the discovery of the end. The denizens of such a time are like the cartoon cat that runs off a cliff and for a while is suspended, still running, in mid-air but sooner or later looks down and sees there is nothing under him. My growing conviction over the years is that man's theory about himself doesn't work anymore, not because one or another component is not true, but because its parts are incoherent and go off in different directions like Dr Doolittle's pushmi-pullyu. Those who don't take this matter seriously forfeit the means of understanding themselves. Many people in fact are quite content to live out their lives as the organisms and consumer units their scientists understand them to be; to satisfy their needs, even 'higher' needs, according to the prescription of those who profess to understand such things. Those who do take it seriously find themselves involved in certain characteristic dilemmas and predicaments all too familiar to the denizens of the late twentieth century. One tires of the good life and the best of all possible worlds one has designed for oneself. One feels anxious without knowing why. One is at home yet feels homeless. One loves bad news and secretly longs for another of the catastrophes for which the century has become notorious (Walker Percy, "The Delta Factor" in *The Message in the Bottle: How Queer Man Is, How Queer Language Is, and What One Has To Do With The Other*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981, p.19f.).

Martin Heidegger:

“University philosophers will never understand what Novalis said: ‘Philosophy is, strictly speaking a homesickness’. It is not a discipline that can be learned ... He who does not know what homesickness is, cannot philosophise if - and because - we do not feel at home anywhere, because we are unceasingly being pushed up against Being, against that because we feel at home nowhere except on the way to the total and essential. We are without a native land and are restlessness itself, living restlessness; it is because of this that it is necessary for us to philosophise. ... And we are not allowed to let it pass away. to comfort ourselves in an illusion about totality and a satisfactory infinitude. We must not only bear this restlessness in us but accentuate it... only then are we in a position to be ‘gripped’. And when we thus make ourselves ‘grippable’, by handing ourselves over to reality, our homesickness makes us into human beings.” (M. Heidegger cited in A. Naess, *Four Modern Philosophers*, University of Chicago Press, 1967, p.174).

Abraham Maslow:

I had not realised that in most neuroses, and in many other disturbances as well, the inner signals become weak or disappear entirely (as in the severely obsessional person) and/or are not 'heard' or cannot be heard. At the extreme we have the experientially empty person, the zombie, one with empty insides. Recovering the self must, as a sine qua non, the recovery of the ability to have and to cognize these inner signals, to know what and whom one likes and dislikes, what is enjoyable and what is not, when to eat and when not to, when to sleep, when to urinate, when to rest. The experientially empty person, lacking these directives from within, these voices of the real self, must turn to outer cues for guidance, for instance eating when the clock tells him to, rather than obeying his appetite (he has none). He guides himself by clocks, rules, calendars, schedules, agenda, and by hints and cues from other people (A. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Viking, 1971, 33).

Saul Bellow:

We struggle perpetually to free ourselves. Or, to put it somewhat differently, while we seem so intently and even desperately to be holding on to ourselves, we would far rather give ourselves away. We do not know how. So, at times, we throw ourselves away. When what we really want is to stop living so exclusively and vainly for our own sake, impure and unknowing, turning inward and self-fastened. The quest, I am beginning to think, whether it be for money, for notoriety, reputation, increase of pride, whether it leads us to thievery, slaughter, sacrifice, the quest is one and the same. All the striving is for one end. I do not entirely understand this impulse. But it seems to me that its final end is the desire for pure freedom (Saul Bellow, *The Dangling Man*, Penguin Books, 1944/1988, p.153).

Do I know this yearning and longing?

Have I ever felt lonely, melancholic, 'homeless' and if so what difference does it make?

Do I know the difference between wanting (gut truth) and liking (emotional preference)?

Do I know what do I really want in life?

To what extent is my life drawn by desire, to what extent driven by willpower and/or external demands?

SESSION TWO:

CAN OUR HEARTS BE MISTAKEN?

Adrian van Kaam:

In the beginning of my spiritual life I am in the preparatory stage of my religious growth. I have not yet found the proper object of my religious mode of existence. I may not even know what I am looking for. I may be searching for the divine without being aware of it. My deepest longing is for God but, not knowing that my desire is for Him alone, I may look for other people and other things which might temporarily take the place of God for me. This striving of my whole existence for God is thus transferred to someone or something less than He is. I may call this transference of my existential desire an existential transference. As long as I am not mature enough to find God Himself, I may go through many of these existential transferences. I may become fascinated by many people and things as if they were God Himself. Therefore, we may say that the preparatory phase of religious development consists of a series of existential transferences which are due to my unconscious search for the proper object of my religious mode of existence (Adrian van Kaam, *Religion and Personality* (Revised Edition), 1964/1980, p.120f.).

Aldous Huxley:

Without any understanding of man's deep-seated urge to self-transcend, of his very reluctance to take the hard, ascending way, and his search for some bogus liberation either below or to one side of his personality, we cannot hope to make sense of our own particular period of history or indeed of history in general, of life as it was lived in the past and as it is lived today. For this reason I propose to discuss some of the more common Grace-substitutes, into which and by means of which men and women have tried to escape from the tormenting consciousness of being merely themselves. human beings have felt the radical inadequacy of their personal existence, the misery of being their insulated selves and not something else, something wider, something in Wordsworthian phrase, 'far more deeply interfused'." (A. Huxley, "Appendix" from *The Devils of Loudun* (Penguin Books, 1971), p.313f.)

St Augustine:

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 (St Augustine, Confessions, Book X, 6:9).

Love cannot be idle. What is it that moves absolutely any man, even to do evil, if it is not love? Show me a love that is idle and doing nothing. Scandals, adulteries, crimes, murders, every kind of excess, are they not the work of love? Cleanse your love, then. Divert into the garden the water that was running down the drain. Am I tell you not to love anything? Far from it! If you do not love anything you will be dolts, dead men, despicable creatures. Love, by all means, but take care what it is you love (St Augustine, Sermon II on the Psalms, 31:5).

Too late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new, too late have I loved you! Behold you were within me while I was outside: it was there that I sought you, and, a deformed creature, rushed headlong upon these things of beauty which you have made. You were with me but I was not with you. They kept me far from you, those fair things which, if they were not in you would not exist at all. (St Augustine, Confessions, Book X Chapter 27).

"He who on his pilgrimage groaneth not, shall not rejoice as a citizen, because there is no longing in him for the heavenly Jerusalem." (St. Augustine on Psalm 148:4)

St Thomas Aquinas:

"When the tie of original uprightness, by which all the powers of the soul were held in order is dissolved, each power has an inclination to its private movement; and the stronger the power is, the more potent the inclination. It happens, further, that certain powers are stronger in one person than in another on account of bodily constitution." (St. Thomas Aquinas, S.T., I-II, Q.82, a.41, ad.1)

The Desert Fathers:

If you see a young monk by his own will climbing up into heaven, take him by the foot and throw him to the ground, because what he is doing is not good for him (Thomas Merton, ed, The Wisdom of the Desert, A New Directions Book, 1960/1970, p.47).

Can I recognize any instance of existential transference in my past life? Stay with this, gently listening, allowing it to reveal something of yourself to yourself.
In what ways might my innate desire for God be diverted or transferred at this time of my life?
What structures do I have in my life to stir this longing and maximize its lifegiving possibilities?

SESSION THREE:

DO WE REALLY DESIRE TO BE HUMAN?

T S Eliot:

Humankind cannot bear very much reality (T S Eliot, *Burnt Norton*).

Our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible and sensible world (T S Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, Barnes and Noble, 1970).

Norman O Brown:

The last thing to be realized is the incarnation. The last mystery to be unveiled is the union of humanity and divinity in the body. The last gesture is ecce homo (Norman O Brown, *Love's Body*, Vintage/Random House, 1966, p.221).

Incarnation is iconoclasm (Norman O Brown, *Love's Body*, Vintage/Random House, 1966, p.222).

Monica Furlong:

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 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 a way few human beings succeed in becoming simply and naturally themselves. He began to see the monk, not as he had believed in youth, as someone special, undertaking feats of incredible 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. (Monica Furlong, Merton: A Biography, Collins, 1980, xviii)

Karl Rahner:

Anyone who accepts his existence, that is, his humanity - no easy thing - in quiet patience, or better, in faith, hope and love ... Anyone who accepts his own humanity in full - and how immeasurably hard that is, how doubtful whether we really do it! - has accepted the Son of Man, because God has accepted man in him (Karl Rahner, Theological Investigations, Volume 4, p.119).

The basic and ultimate thrust of Christian life consists not so much in the fact that a Christian is a special instance of mankind in general, but rather in the fact that a Christian is simply man as he is. But he is a person who accepts without reservations the whole of concrete human life, with all its adventures, its absurdities and its incomprehensibilities. A real non-Christian on the other hand, a person who could not even be called an "anonymous Christian" in the ultimate depths of the way he lives out human existence, is characterised precisely by the fact that he does not muster this unconditional acceptance of human existence. In the concrete a Christian is a person who is distinguished in a great variety of ways from a non-Christian: he is baptised, he receives sacraments, he belongs to a very definite organisation, he receives norms from this organisation, he has to acquiesce calmly in a certain lifestyle with the same kind of patience with which he confronts, the uncontrollable givens in the other areas of his life. The really ultimate thing is that he accepts himself just as he is, and does this without making anything an idol, without leaving anything out, and without closing himself to the totality of what in the ultimate depths of reality is inescapably imposed upon man as his task" (Karl Rahner,., Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity, Seabury Press, 1978), p.402).

Dermot Lane:

The Incarnation invites man to 'put on Christ' in the fundamental sense of incarnating in his personal life the real God-man and man-God unity that was realized in Jesus. In this regard it is important to remember that the achievement of Incarnation by Jesus was not simply an instantaneous happening but rather a progressive realization of God's unique self-communication addressed to the self-transcendent openness of Jesus which was there from the beginning. To be sure, the mystery of the Incarnation was instituted in Jesus from the moment of his conception onwards, but the working out of this event took place historically through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In particular it was cemented through different moments such as doing good, combating evil, overcoming temptation, leading a life of prayer, and maintaining a radically theocentric outlook, each of which in its own way contributed to the crystallisation of the God-man and man-God unity in Jesus. In the same way every individual is invited to respond to the different modes of God's self-communicating presence in the world, which are constantly summoning him so that he may grow in his own God-man and man-God unity under the inspiration of Jesus Christ as the Word Incarnate (Dermot Lane, The Reality of Jesus, p.139).

Is there any docetism evident in my own spiritual life?
What is the connection in my mind between my humanity and my priesthood?
Where do I need the most grace in my life?

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

“For many historical and other reasons, some of them Australian and our own fault, Christianity is no longer On Top in Australia. Others ... will have gone into the modalities of this more effectively than I could do. All I have to add are some personal impressions. The first of these is that the experience is probably a salutary one for us. The time for ecclesiolatry, the worship of the visible church instead of God, is past. We're no longer free to indulge our bad habits of boring people, bullying them and backing up respectability; we're no longer in a position to call on the law to do for us what we should be doing by inspiration and example; we're no longer in a position to push second-rate thinking and an outworn picture of the cosmos, where God is Up, we are in the middle and Hell is Down; we're no longer free to indulge the internecine warfare of denominations that has so harmed God's cause on earth for the past four centuries; finally, we're not going to be universally accepted as a spiritual elite, so we'd better get on with being what our Founder told us to be which is salt of the earth, the baking-soda in the loaf of mankind. Salt and baking-soda aren't privileged substances, but they're pretty essential ones. The second of my impressions is that, while our vision is no longer the dominant one, and may never have been, neither is any other at the moment. There is as yet no other vision abroad in our society which commands the same authority as ours does, the same sense of being the bottom line, the great reserve to be called on in times of real need. Many of the themes of the rallies are necessary problem solving and little more, and much in the spiritual supermarket is fair weather stuff, adjuncts to a prosperity which may now be vanishing. Unbelief, once a daring and rather aristocratic gesture, must now have exhausted most of its glamour; it is certainly no longer exclusive, or particularly rebellious. Much the same could be said of sexual indulgence, pornography and the like. Having by now surely lost most of its flavour of forbidden fruit, sexual licence has to justify itself in terms of whatever real satisfaction it can give; its utility as a bait to draw people out of traditional ways and beliefs, and if possible into new allegiances, must by now also be wearing thin. And it will be difficult at the very least, for the cult of unremitting youthfulness and physical beauty to survive in the era of aging populations which it has helped to produce. By now liberal humanism is as badly fragmented by dissension as our witness ever was, and its fiercest adherents are often covertly uneasy at its lack of gentleness, its readiness to force the facts and its desolate this-worldliness. Its unrelenting adulthood forces people onto the thorns of tragic complexity and the strange intractability of the world, and often when people who subscribe to it relax for a moment, their eyes are seen to contain an almost desperate appeal: please prove us wrong, make us believe there is more to it than this, show us your God and that Grace you talk about. We are more widely judged on our own best terms than we think, and more insistently expected to be the keepers of the dimension of depth than we find comfortable. We will be punished if we do try to live up to what we profess, but we will be punished much worse if we don't, because so many of our enemies are relying on us. If we say God and Christ stand by what we've said, we don't stand alone, but we do have to expect some splinters in our shoulders. We should not, I suggest, be tempted to see ourselves as a team that has to win for God; He is not helpless - and anyway His idea of a win is the Cross.”

Les A. Murray, “Some Religious Stuff I know About Australia” in D. Harris et al, eds., *The Shape of Belief: Christianity in Australia Today*, Lancer, 1982, pp. 25-26 of pp. 13-28.

SESSION FOUR

IS DYING PART OF WHAT WE DESIRE?

Victor Hugo:

To journey is to be born and die each minute. Perhaps somewhere in the vague recesses of his mind (Jean Valjean) perceived parallels between his dissolving views and our human life. All the elements of life are in constant flight from us, with darkness and clarity intermingled, the vision and the eclipse; we look and hasten, reaching out our hands to clutch; every happening is a bend in the road ... and suddenly we have grown old. We have a sense of shock and growing darkness; ahead is a black doorway; the life that bore us is a flagging horse, and a veiled stranger is waiting in the shadows to unharness it (Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, Norman Denny, trans., Penguin Classics, 1987, p.231).

Frederic Flach:

Rather than being some kind of propulsion toward the grave, the so-called death instinct may actually be that part of the human personality which is required for the disintegrative or falling-apart phase of the normal response to stress. The greater the stress and the more profound its impact, and the greater the demand for recovery to a higher level, the more disruptive the shock will be to the individual. There is plenty of evidence in the collective history of mankind to support such a concept. In Christian theology, the admonition to 'die in order to be born again' has been taken to mean a promise of life after death. But it can also be interpreted within the framework of each person's own evolution throughout life, so that the process of adaptation to stress, especially at life's turning points, becomes a series of deaths and rebirths on a psychological rather than a physical plane. And it is precisely when people cannot fall apart and recover, that they enter a condition in which most of their energy is spent holding themselves together in one piece, while a crippling spiritual and emotional corrosion goes on underneath (Frederic F. Flach, *Choices: Coping Creatively With Personal Change*, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1977, p.47).

J Glenn Gray:

Death belongs to the human situation as such and to the situation of each individual ... What, then, is the fruitful way to regard death? How can we make out of our own death an event of great import? Jaspers and Heidegger answer in effect: You must gain a vivid realization of death as a constitutive part of life, not as a mere end of life. Death is a phenomenon within life (J Glenn Gray in N Scott, ed, *The Modern Vision of Death*, John Knox Press, 1967, p.53).

Karl Rahner:

A man might be unconscious at the moment he is passing away. Death might take him by surprise, if what we mean by death is the instant at the end., in which the death we die all through our lives with regard to this moment is manifested. But just because we die our death in this life, because we leave permanently, because we are parting permanently, because we are looking towards the end, we are thwarted permanently; ceaselessly we break through the reality into nothingness; continually we narrow the possibilities of the freedom of life through our actual decisions and actual life until it is exhausted completely and we drive life into the straits of death; because we always experience the fathomless, we constantly reach out beyond our range into the realm of the incomprehensible where we are impotent; and because only then do we exist in a properly human manner, if we do die all through our life, therefore, that which we call death is actually the end of death, the death of death. Whether this death of death will be a second death or the killing of death and the victory of life, depends completely on us. Hence, because death is permanently present in the whole of human life, biologically and existentially, death is the act of freedom (Karl Rahner, *On the Theology of Death*, Herder and Herder, 1961, p.92f).

Adrian van Kaam:

The main themes of an existential psychology of human development are the changes, conflicts, and crises that mark man's self-emergence. One basic meaning underlies them: the recurring death and rebirth of personality, a death which prophesies resurrection on a higher level of existence. Not every

psychological death, to be sure, leads to rebirth. There are ways of dying which do not lead to a renewal of life; rather, they impede human unfolding. At certain moments of my life I am faced with a crisis which I can solve only by dying to former modes of living. I have no choice: I must decide either to die authentically to my past or to die inauthentically in a fixation on a past way of life which will fossilize my existence. Therefore, an existential death wish permeated by the desire for self-emergence in a new way, is crucial in my life (Adrian van Kaam, "Existential Crisis and Human Development", originally published in *The South African Journal of Pedagogy*, 1969, 3, 1, pp.63-74. Later published in Adrian van Kaam, *Foundations for Personality Study*, Dimension Books, 1982, pp.357-371).

In what areas of my living am I being asked my especially at the moment to embrace the dying?
Are there any signs at the moment that I might be refusing the dying necessary to living?
Do I believe dying is necessary to living, that you cannot have the one without the other?
Do I think of dying as "the last thing that happens" or a process that permeates everyday of my life?
What do you think Karl Rahner means when he says "the death of death" and "death is the act of freedom"?
What does our culture say of the relationship between living and dying?
Does this have anything to say about the Church and renewal?

SESSION FIVE

AND WHY WERE THE JEWS OUT IN THE DESERT?

John Courtney Murray:

The text (Ex 3:1-15) Contains a threefold revelation - of God's immanence in history, of his transcendence to history, and of his transience through history. God first asserts the fact of his presence in the history of his people: 'I shall be there'. Second, he asserts the mystery of his own being: 'I shall be there as who I am'. His mystery is a mode of absence. Third, he asserts that, despite his absence in mystery, he will make himself known to his people: 'As who I am shall I be there'. The mode of his transience is through his action, through the saving events of the sacred history of Israel. However, what thus becomes known is only his saving will. He himself, in his being and nature, remains forever unknown to men, hidden from them (John Courtney Murray, *The Problem of God: Yesterday and Today*, Yale University Press, 1964/1977, p.10f).

Francine Prose:

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

Meister Eckhart:

The shell must be cracked apart if what is in it is to come out; for if you want the kernel you must break the shell.' And therefore, if you want to discover nature's nakedness, you must destroy its symbols and the farther you get in, the nearer you come to its essence. When you come to the One that gathers all things up into himself, there you must stay (Meister Eckhart in R. Blakney, trans, *Meister Eckhart*, Harper Torchbooks, 1941, p.148).

The Cloud of Unknowing:

How wonderfully is man's love transformed by the interior experience of this nothingness and this nowhere. He who patiently abides in this darkness will be comforted and feel again a confidence about his destiny, for gradually he will see his past sins healed by grace. The pain continues yet he knows it will end, for even now it grows less intense. Slowly he begins to realise that the suffering he endures is not hell at all but his purgatory (*Cloud of Unknowing*, Image Books, 1973, Chapter 69, 137).

St John of the Cross:

"One dark night,/ Fired with love's urgent longings/ - Ah the sheer grace! -/ I went out unseen,/ My house being now all stilled." (John of the Cross, "Stanzas of the Soul" from "The Dark Night", trans. By K. Kavanagh & O. Rodriguez.)

Thomas Merton:

The transformation through which the world must pass will not be merely political. It is indeed an illusion to think that the forces which are at work in our modern society are, above all, political. The great political movements of our time, so complex and so often apparently so meaningless, are the smoke screen behind which are developing the evolutions of a spiritual war too great for men to wage by any human plan. This is something that is going on in the whole of mankind, and it would go on even if there were no political movements. The politicians are only the instruments of forces which they themselves ignore. These forces are more powerful and more spiritual than man." (Thomas Merton, *The Monastic Journey*, Sheed Andrews and McMeel, 1977, p.36f).

Douglas J Hall on Shusaku Endo:

We shall be in a position to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd only when we have stopped using the Christian religion to shield us from the realities of our lostness and our night. Jesus will become alive to us only as we are denied access to a Christ who functions as sanctuary from the world. The Lord who lives and speaks can only be met in the real world, in the 'swamp' of the fallen creation. This is where he came. This is where he is still to be found. (Douglas J. Hall, "Rethinking Christ: Theological Reflections on Shusaku Endo's Silence" in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, XXXIII (1979), 267).

The Old Testament and the Wilderness:

The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness (Jer 31:2).

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness (Hos 2:14).

How do I understand the Exodus and what relevance does it have for my living?

How might the metaphor of "the desert" (and Exodus) apply in my own life - past or present?

How might the metaphor of "the desert" (and Exodus) apply in the life of the Church?

What could it mean to have a moral vision underpinned by the principle, "Love others into freedom as you have been loved into freedom?"

SESSION SIX

LET'S FORGET ABOUT THE CROSS, PLEASE?

St Ireneus:

He who through his obedience on the cross wiped out the former disobedience concerning the tree, is himself the Logos of Almighty God whose unseen presence permeates us all. Since that is so, he has the whole world in his grasp, in its length and breadth, its height and its depth. For by the Logos all things are guided in orderly fashion, and God's Son is crucified in them, in so far as he stamps upon them the form of the cross. It was right and fitting that, by becoming visible himself, he should impress on all visible things, this community in the cross with them, for thus by means of these visible things he was to show forth his power and to do so in visible form, making it plain that it is he who illuminates the high places - heaven, that is to say - that it is he whose grasp extends to the depths, even to the last foundations of the world, that it is he who spreads out the flatland from East to West and stretches forth the wide spaces from North to South, that it is he who gathers together all that is scattered, that all may know the Father (St Ireneus (140-202) cited by Hugo Rahner, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, Burns and Oates, 1963, p.51; Rahner comments: "For the study of the mystery of the cross this is indeed one of the most pertinent and classical passages in ancient Christian literature).

Karl Rahner:

Among the central mysteries of Christian and Church life we proclaim in the Lord's Supper the death of the Lord until he comes again. We Christians, then, are really the only people who can forgo an "opiate" in our existence or an analgesic for our lives. Christianity forbids us to reach for an analgesic in such a way that we are no longer willing to drink the chalice of the death of this existence with Jesus Christ. And to this extent there is no doubt that in living out its Christian existence Christianity is required to say in an absolute and sober realism: yes, this existence is incomprehensible, for it passes through something incomprehensible in which all of our comprehending is taken from us. It passes through death. And it is only when this is not only said in pious platitudes, but rather is accepted in the hardness of real life - for we do not die at the end, but we die throughout the whole of life, and, as Seneca knew, our death begins at our birth - and it is only when we live out this pessimistic realism and renounce every ideology which absolutizes a particular sector of human existence and makes it an idol, it is only then that it is possible for us to allow God to give us the hope which really makes us free (Karl Rahner's "Remarks on the Christian Life" in his Foundations of Christian Faith, A Crossroad Book, 1978, p.404).

Hans Kung:

The cross is not only example and model, but ground, power and norm of the Christian faith (Hans Kung, On Being a Christian, Doubleday, 1976, p.410).

The cross ... is the element which radically distinguishes Christian faith and the Lord who is the object of this faith from other religions and their gods (Hans Kung, "What is the Christian Message?" in The Catholic Mind, 68 (December 1970), p.32).

Jürgen Moltmann:

The death of Jesus on the cross is the centre of all Christian theology ... All Christian statements about God, about creation, about sin and death have their focal point in the crucified Christ. All Christian statements about history, about the church, about faith and sanctification, about the future and about hope stem from the crucified Christ (Jürgen Moltmann, The Crucified God, Harper and Row, 1974, 204).

Thomas Merton:

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope that I do not do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it. Therefore I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone (Thomas Merton, Thoughts in Solitude, Farrar Straus and Cudahy, 1958, 83).

St Thérèse of Lisieux:

'We must weakly carry our cross' Thérèse remarked. Yes, if we love mercy, we must consent to leading our lives and carrying our cross deplorably badly. Only then do we know that we haven't been cheating, we know that we've reached the light at the last. Yes, says God, this is all I ask of you and you will be my disciple. (Bernard Bro, The Little Way: The Spirituality of Thérèse of Lisieux, Christian Classics, 1980, p.82).

Where is the Cross in my own spirituality?

In what sense does the Paschal Mystery represent the fullness of the incarnating of God?

Have I ever felt repelled by the Cross? If not, why not?

Is there something about the Cross that reveals the very essence of what it means to live a fully human life?

IF YOUR EYE OFFENDS YOU

“Any serious and sustained attempt to find the meaning of Christian faith must put at risk our sanity and our moral integrity. However disturbing this claim may be, the New Testament and the lives of very many saints hardly gainsay it, while contemporary psychological insight offers sharp corroboration, often unknowingly. There is also Shakespeare's King Lear, who will provide my most extended example.

“At the start of the play King Lear in old age is presented as a man of enormous and uncriticised ego. He is about to divest himself of the responsibilities of his kingdom by dividing it between his three daughters. Before announcing the detail of the division which he has already decided upon he insists that each daughter must publicly voice her love for him, ostensibly that he may be sure which loves him most and reward her accordingly. Faced with this outrageous demand Goneril and Regan have no difficulty in uttering honeyed words which cost nothing. Cordelia, the youngest and the only daughter truly to love her father, is tongue-tied: 'What shall Cordelia do? Love, and be silent.'

“Lear's trivialising and psychologically brutal game turns instantly sour with Cordelia's refusal to play, and his rage is ungovernable. Hitherto it has been possible for him to assume that those around him were at his beck and call, with the implication that they existed merely as extensions of his personality. Cordelia refuses to collude with this state of mind. The faithful Duke of Kent moves rapidly to her defence, telling the King he is mad to reject her:

... be Kent unmannerly

When Lear is mad. What wouldst thou do, old man?

“Enraged now beyond measure, Lear summarily banishes the man who has his interests at heart and confronts him with the truth. He is still riding high as the reigning monarch possessed of all his faculties.

“It is only when he is reduced to nothing except a different and threadbare and self-confessed form of madness - 'My wits begin to turn' - that Lear's salvation takes shape. Against the onset of this madness he had already prayed:

Oh let me not be mad:

Not mad, sweet heaven.

In the event heaven graciously encourages his madness to find full scope, for nothing else could break open the armour which encased him. How else was this man to be brought beyond his absurd strategy and posturing into the truth of his own heart? In Lear a spurious sanity breaks down and loses its grip. He has to go mad to be brought to the truth of things, to acceptance and acknowledgement of responsibility, and to the capacity to give and receive love: 'I am a very foolish, fond old man.' In and through traumatic disintegration Lear's gaze clears. He begins to see straight for the first time. Edgar notes the paradox:

Oh matter and impertinency mixed:

Reason in madness.

“In the same play the Duke of Gloucester is blinded. His enemies, whom he had thought to be his friends, pluck out his eyes. The Duke's sight plays the same role in the story as the King's sanity. Gloucester is subsequently in no doubt that he is in better case sightless than seeing. He voices this conviction with maximum economy of words to those who take pity on him for his blindness: 'I stumbled when I saw.' In this connection it is worth recalling that Saul of Tarsus was blinded, albeit temporarily, on the Damascus road, and the Lord to whom he in consequence gave his allegiance was the one who had earlier cried out: 'If your eye offends you, pluck it out.'

“The hyperbolic form of this saying should not distract from the truth it seeks to show forth: the violence that needs in one way or another to be done to unregenerate ways of perception if there is to be hope. Lear is driven out of his worldly wits into a transparent madness which frees him from his egotistic prisonhouse, the vehicle of destruction. Gloucester is by unspeakably barbaric means released from a superficial and partial seeing which had made him evil's dupe.”

(Nicholas Peter Harvey, *Morals and the Meaning of Jesus: Reflections on the Hard Sayings*, The Pilgrim Press, 1993, 41-42)

SESSION SEVEN

CAN WE LIVE BY DELIGHT?

Adrian van Kaam:

Whether I am a child or an adult, a simple person or a hero, a prisoner or a free citizen, I am always a potentiality for transcendence in many ways. If I were to 'freeze' myself into one mold by repression of the aspiration to transcend what I currently am, I would die to authentic living. The most sordid crime against our humanity is to destroy what we basically are: transcendent selves. (A. van Kaam, *The Transcendent Self*, Dimension Books, 1979, 167f.)

St John Chrysostom (347-407):

(Prayer) is a desire for God, an indescribable devotion, not of human origin, but a gift of God's grace. ... 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. (St. John Chrysostom - Office of Readings, Friday After Ash Wednesday)

Diadochus of Photike (d c 468):

He who has a heartfelt love for God is known by him. For a person grows in the love of God in the measure in which he takes that love into his inmost soul. Which is why, afterwards, such a one passionately longs for the illumination of knowledge to the point of feeling in his very bones, no longer aware of himself but wholly transformed by the love of God. Such a one is in this life without being in it. He still lives in his own body but unceasingly goes out to God through love by the very momentum of his soul. Henceforward, his heart burning with the fire of love he adheres to God with a sort of irresistible desire, as if quite torn away from the love of self by the love of God. (Diadochus of Photike - Office of Readings, Week 2 of Ordinary Time, Friday)

Jean Vanier:

When I discover that I am poor, that I am confused, that you call me by my name, that you love me, then there is the moment of transformation. (Jean Vanier, *Followers of Jesus* (Gill & MacMillan, 1976), 80)

The Prophet Jeremiah:

You have seduced me Yahweh and I have let myself be seduced; you have overpowered me: you were the stronger. I am a daily laughing stock, everybody's butt. Each time I speak the word I have to howl and proclaim: 'Violence and ruin!'. The word of Yahweh has meant for me insult, derision, all day long. I used to say, 'I will not think about him, I will not speak in his name anymore'. Then there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones. The effort to restrain it wearied me, I could not bear it. (Jer. 19:7-9)

St Paul:

Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; because I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:8-14)

Marie Noël:

Lord, I do not love You, I do not even want to. I am weary of You. I am not even sure that I believe in You. But look on me in passing by. Take shelter for a moment in my soul, set it in order with your breath, discreetly, silently. If You want me to believe in You, bring me faith. If You want me to love You, bring me love. I have none, and there is no help for it. I give You what I have: my weakness, my pain. And the need for affection which torments me and which You know. ... And despair. ... And wild shame ... My hurt, only my hurt. ... Nothing more! And hope! (Marie Noel, *Notes For Myself*, trans. H. Sutton, Cornell University Press, 1968)

Do I think that I could have gained more joy and fulfillment in life if I had never heard of religion or Christ?

In what sense can I speak of my faith as (existentially rather than just abstractly) as "a treasure"?

What is "grace" and how is it part of my life (existentially rather than just abstractly)?

What keeps me going as a priest?

Do I have a rich contemplative life - or any kind of contemplative life - underpinning my priesthood?

Do I ever have the sense of being ministered to even as I minister?

SESSION EIGHT

LECTIO DIVINA AWAKENS DESIRE

The Cistercian Father Arnoul of Bohéris:

When he reads, let him seek for savor, not science. The Holy Scripture is the well of Jacob from which the waters are drawn which will be poured out later in prayer. Thus there will be no need to go to the oratory to begin to pray; but in reading itself, means will be found for prayer and contemplation. (Cited by Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, Fordham University Press, 1957/1988, p.73)

Aelred Squire:

It is often assumed there must be some secret about the life of the spirit which could be finally formulated and once and for all learned. None of the great spiritual masters believes this, nor does the Church, in spite of the rare dogmatic formulations which enter into our creeds. (Aelred Squire, *Asking the Fathers*, SPCK, 1973, p.118)

St Gregory the Great:

Holy Scripture is set before our minds like a mirror, that we may see our inward face in it. It is there that we come to know our ugliness and our beauty. There we realize what progress we are making, how far we are from improvement. It tells of the doings of the holy ones, and stimulates the hearts of those who are weak to emulate them. For, as it records their successes, it strengthens our frailty in our struggles against the vices. Its words have the effect that our mind is less afraid in its conflicts for seeing the victories of so many brave men set before it. Sometimes, however, it not only tells us of their virtues, but also reveals their falls. In the successes of the strong we see what we ought to aim at imitating; in their falls what we should fear. Thus Job is described as raised up by temptation, but David brought to the ground by it. (St Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, 2, 1, 1)

Rainer Maria Rilke:

He does not always remain bent over his ages; he often leans back and closes his eyes over a line he has been reading again, and its meaning spreads through his blood. (Rainer Maria Rilke, trans M D Herter Norton, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, W W Norton, 1949, p.201)

Guigo II (a 12th century Carthusian monk)

Reading seeks for the sweetness of a blessed life, meditation perceives it, prayer asks for it, contemplation tastes it. Reading, as it were, puts food whole into the mouth, meditation chews it and breaks it up, prayer extracts its flavor, contemplation is the sweetness itself which gladdens and

refreshes. Reading works on the outside, meditation on the pith: prayer asks for what we long for, contemplation gives us delight in the sweetness which we have found. To make this clearer, let us take one of many possible examples. I hear the words read: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." This is a short text of Scripture, but it is of great sweetness, like a grape that is put into the mouth filled with many senses to feed the soul. When the soul has carefully examined it, it says to itself, There may be something good here. I shall return to my heart and try to understand and find this purity, for this is indeed a precious and desirable thing. Those who have it are called blessed. It has for its reward the vision of God which is eternal life, and it is praised in so many places in sacred Scripture. So, wishing to have a fuller understanding of this, the soul begins to bite and chew upon this grape, as though putting it in a wine press, while it stirs up its powers of reasoning to ask what this precious purity may be and how it may be had. (Guigo II, *The Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations* by Guigo II, trans Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, Image Books, 1978, p.81f)

St Paul:

Everything written in the Scriptures was written to teach us, in order that we might have hope through the patience and encouragement which the Scriptures give us. (Rom 15:4)

Hans urs von Balthasar:

The Word of God can demand something from me today which only yesterday it did not demand, and that is why in order to understand this demand, I must be absolutely and completely open and attentive. ... Man is the being who was created as hearer of the Word and who rises to his proper dignity by a response to that Word. He was conceived of as becoming in his inmost depths a partner to a dialogue. (Hans urs von Balthasar, trans S V Littledale, *Prayer*, Sheed and Ward, 1961, p.18f)

Do I use the practice of lectio divina to good advantage in my life?

Is there any way I can combine this ancient formation practice of lectio divina with other priestly duties (eg homily preparation)?

What might be some of the obstacles to establishing a regular practice of lectio divina?

AN EXERCISE IN LECTIO DIVINA

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur notes an underlying structure to the parable of the treasure in the field (cf Mt 13:44) and suggests that it may be a useful paradigm in understanding the parables as such (cf Paul Ricoeur, "Listening to the Parables of Jesus" in C. E. Reagan & D. Stewart, eds., *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work*, Beacon Press, 1978, pp.239-246.) The parables, he argues, appeal to the imagination rather than the will. Only when we have been "put in motion" by the insight into reality that the parable bears, can we turn our minds and hearts to action. The Event-Reversal-Decision structure Ricoeur finds in the parables can also give us a practical format for developing our own consciousness in tune with the Bible:

Step One - "Event" ("The Finding"): Take a certain passage from the Bible and read it meditatively, with a keen ear to what is happening to you as you do so. Wait upon the text. Allow it to affect you. Chew over particular words and phrases. (This may take say 5 to 15 minutes.) Then take pen and paper and simply express what is beginning to move within yourself. Do not worry about sentence construction or grammar. Still with a keen ear to what is happening within you gently try words, phrases, images that may fit the inner movements. It may go something like this: "I feel ... funny ... a sort of hollow feeling ... yes, empty ... sad ... Sad about what? ... life in general ... I remember when I was seven ... I can see myself there in the backyard ... Anyone else there? ... no ... I used to play by myself a lot and ... yes, Dad used to do a lot of travelling ... Mum and I were home by ourselves most of the time ... How does that seven year old feel there in the backyard? ... etc." Let it run, listening attentively, asking questions that flow out of what has already surfaced. Let the experience have a life of its own. Keep going until there is some sense of completion. (This may take say 30 to 40 minutes - though do not feel bound by this time frame.) (Eugene Gendlin's *Focusing*, Bantam Paperbacks, 1986, may offer a useful aid in this step.)

Step Two - "Reversal" ("The Selling"): Leave the writing at this point and gently consider what has emerged. Does it point to any "baggage", obstructions to the fullness of life, any lack of freedom. Stay with that. Let it come home to you in the context and mood set by the Mystery being revealed through the Word. Simply face that "baggage", dishonesty, anxiety, obstruction or lack of freedom, hold it up to God. Make a decision to stand against it without resolving to willfully rid yourself of it. Perhaps your journey entails carrying that baggage for sometime yet. Leave it in God's hands. Humbly face the truth that has emerged. (This may take say 5 or 10 minutes - though do not feel bound by this time frame.)

Step Three - "Decision" ("The Buying"): Gently consider yourself and your life in the light of what has emerged to this point. Is there something in particular you would like to affirm, give thanks for, say "yes" to? Dwell with that, allow it to make its home in you just a little more deeply. Again there is no question of willfully striving to make any thing happen. It is more a question of resting with God in the presence of something good, savouring a contemplative moment. Conclude with a brief prayer of thanksgiving and perhaps petition. (This may take say 5 to 10 minutes - though do not feel bound by this time frame.)

(The above is taken from Michael Whelan, *Living Strings: An Introduction to Biblical Spirituality*, E J Dwyer, 1994.)

SESSION NINE

CONTEMPLATION FANS THE FLAMES

Simone Weil:

In the Christian concept of education the key to prayer is that prayer is born from attention. It is an orientation toward God with all the attention of which the soul is capable. The quality of attention accounts for much in the quality of prayer. Fervor of heart cannot supply here. Only the higher part of attention enters into contact with God, when prayer is sufficiently intense and pure for such a contact to be established; but all the attention is turned towards God. Properly understood, academic exercises develop a less elevated part of the attention. Nevertheless, they are fully efficacious for increasing the power of attention which is at one's disposal at the moment of prayer; but on condition that one uses them for that end and for that end only. Although today we seem to ignore it, it is the formation of the faculty of attention that is the true goal and almost the unique concern of studies, of education. To have true attention we must know how to understand it. More often we confuse an aspect of muscular attention with attention. If one says to some students, "Come now, pay attention", one sees them frown, hold their breath, contract their muscles, etc. If after two minutes one asks them what they were paying attention to, they cannot answer. They have not paid attention to anything. They have simply not paid attention. They have contracted their muscles. ... It is the role of desire in study which permits one thereby to prepare for the spiritual life. For desire, oriented towards God, is the only force capable of lifting up the soul. Or rather it is God alone who comes to seize the soul and raise it up; but it is only desire that obliges God to descend. He does not come but to those who ask Him to come; and He cannot keep himself from descending to those who ask often, for a long time and ardently. ... Happy are those who spend their adolescence and their youth only in forming this power of attention. (Simone Weil, *Attente de Dieu*, cited by Marie-François Herbaux, "Formation in *Lectio Divina*" in *Cistercian Studies*, 17:2 (1982), p.130)

A Jewish mystic:

The essential purpose of knowledge, said R. Schneur Zalman, is not that people should know the greatness of God from authors and from books. The essence is to deepen one's awareness of God's greatness, and fix one's thoughts on God with the strength and power of the heart and mind. Thus one's thoughts will be bound up with God, with a strong and powerful bond, as it is bound up with the physical things that one sees with one's own eyes. (A. Unterman, ed., *The Wisdom of the Jewish Mystics*, New Directions, 1976, 57f)

Adrian van Kaam:

If he cannot listen to the subtle manifestation of rich reality in his environment, he will necessarily try to impose his wilful codes on others. If a person is not open to reality and does not obey the voice of reality, a terrible distortion takes place. Sooner or later he will turn the whole relationship around: Instead of listening to reality in people and events, he becomes convinced that reality in people and events should listen to him. (A. van Kaam, *The Art of Existential Counseling*, Dimension Books, 1966, 80)

Huston Smith:

The opposite of the will to control is the wish to participate. (H. Smith, *Beyond The Post-Modern Mind*, Crossroad, 1982, 143)

Karl Rahner:

Prayer is the raising of the heart and mind to God in constantly renewed acts of love. (Karl Rahner, *On Prayer*, Paulist Press, 1968, p.8)

Charles de Foucauld:

To pray is to think of God, loving him. (Charles de Foucauld cited by Fabio Giardini, "Prayer, Prayers and Prayerfulness" in *Angelicum*, LXII, 1 (1985), p.78)

Simon Tugwell:

Prayer is keeping company with God. (Simon Tugwell, *Prayer, Volume I: Living with God*, Veritas Publications, 1974, p.vii)

Vladimir Lossky:

Prayer is a personal relationship, an encounter of the human being with God. (Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, James Clarke and Co., 1973, p.203f)

What image or phrase best describes my prayer life?

Is there any action I need to take at this time to deepen my loving communion with God?

Is there anyone that I talk with at depth about prayer and related matters?

What is happening with me and God?

THE PRAYER OF INCOMPETENCE

There is another kind of prayer which is, I think, the prayer of many of us. It does not follow any method, because method does not help. There is no awareness of prayer. Now, that is a state on which most of us can talk fairly eloquently. It is the "prayer of incompetence." And this is I think the normal experience of many of us. A method does not help: images or ideas seem to be obstacles, and yet when we abandon these we find we still have no awareness of God. It is at this point that we are tempted to give up...

What is the point of this? We are meant, I think, to learn many lessons when we are left in this state, but there are two in particular. And the first is to realize that in prayer it is the giving which matters rather than the receiving: that we are going through this exercise (it is an unfortunate word but you know what I mean) for the sake of God first rather than for the sake of ourselves. In other words, we are prepared to be just kneeling or sitting or walking, without very much happening and we are prepared to go on in that state, waiting - (and we may wait for years) - waiting as one who has to grow in humility and in the realization of the limitations of the human soul: that it must be God who gets into touch with us, not vice versa. That is the first lesson to be learnt.

The second lesson is that there is no progress in prayer without progress in faith, a purification of faith. And this entails the removal of all the props which depend on human endeavor, human reasoning, signs and the rest. It is the naked faith which is a terrifying experience and yet is the meeting point ultimately between God and ourselves in the depth of our being. This experience of the purification of faith is not normally one which comes early in religious life. It comes late... We must learn to wait.

We may wonder sometimes what is the result of our fidelity to prayer. From day to day there is little result that we can see or assess. Only when one looks back over the years does one come to realize that our conviction concerning the things of God are, despite all, clearer than they were. And I think, finally, that the most important result of fidelity to prayer is that, despite everything, we want to go on praying...

I have talked about this prayer of "incompetence" because I am convinced that it is a state in which many people find themselves: one which can depress and make them think prayer is not for them. But it is, I suspect, a common experience and we should accept it as a state in which God often wishes us to be. It is a good state and probably much better for us than prayer in which we are aware of God's presence-whatever that may mean. It is a valid state of prayer provided that in our lives we are fulfilling our part.... (Cardinal Basil Hume, O.S.B. "The Living Spirit" The Tablet, October 8, 1983.

PARABLE OF A MAN AND HIS PRIESTHOOD

(Clare, a more than middle aged aunt, whose husband has died, talks with Christine, her young niece who has been married for one year and is thinking of a divorce:)

'If you're thinking about this proposed divorce, Christine, I have something to say about it, too. And I have a right to say it, because I've watched you grow up, and I've loved you and cared for you almost as much as your mother and grandmother have, so if you think it's interfering, then so be it. I'm going to interfere. You made your choice. You had lots of dates in high school and college, and Todd was the one you wanted. You knew him as long as I knew your uncle Geo and longer than your mother knew your father. You had time to think about his peculiarities and about the life it seemed like he was going to lead. You knew that changing him was unlikely, because I heard your mother say something about that to you, and I heard you say that you'd take him as he is. I heard that! Now things don't seem to be going your way, and you want to get out. You think you can make another choice, one that won't demand as much accommodation or sacrifice. Well, you're wrong. Let me tell you, none of our lives has turned out the way we thought it would, or wanted it to. If the preacher had said during my wedding, 'Clare, do you take this man to worry about money with, to have miscarriages with, to argue about childraising with, to lose in middle age,' do you think I would have said yes? Of course not! When I was twenty three I wanted your uncle Geo to be rich and healthy and happy, always handsome like he was then. But that's not life and marriage is life! You know what getting married is? It's agreeing to taking this person who right now is at the top of his form, full of hopes and ideas, feeling good, looking good, wildly interested in you because you're the same way, and sticking by him while he slowly disintegrates. And he does the same for you. You're his responsibility now and he's yours. If no one else will take care of him, you will. If everyone else rejects you, he won't. What do you think love is? Going to bed all the time? Poo! Don't be weak. Have some spine! He's yours and you're his. He doesn't beat you or abuse you, and you've made about the same bargain. Now that you know what it's like to be married, now that all the gold leaf has sort of worn off, you can make something of it, you can really learn to love each other.

(Jane Smiley, *At Paradise Gate*, Washington Square Press, 162f.)

SESSION TEN

THE CALL TO BE

Thomas Merton:

Everyone of us is shadowed by an illusory person: a false self. This is the man I want myself to be but who cannot exist, because God does not know anything about him. And to be unknown of God is altogether too much privacy. My false and private self is the one that wants to exist outside the reach of God's will and God's love - outside of reality and outside of life. And such a self cannot help but be an illusion. We are not very good at recognizing illusions, least of all the ones we cherish about ourselves - the ones we are born with and which feed the roots of sin. For most of the people in the world, there is no greater subjective reality than this false self of theirs, which cannot exist. A life devoted to the cult of this shadow is what is called a life of sin. All sin starts from the assumption that my false self, the self that exists only in my own egocentric desires, is the fundamental reality of life to which everything else in the universe is ordered. Thus I use up my life in the desire for pleasures and the thirst for experiences, for power, honour, knowledge and love, to clothe this false self and construct its nothingness into something objectively real. And I wind experiences around myself and cover myself with pleasures and glory like bandages in order to make myself perceptible to myself and the world, as if I were an invisible body that could only become visible when something visible covered its surface. But there is no substance under the tings with which I am clothed. I am hollow, and my structure of pleasures and ambitions has no foundation. I am objectified in them. But they are all destined by their very contingency to be destroyed. And when they are gone there will be nothing left of me but my own nakedness and emptiness and hollowness to tell me that I am my own mistake. The secret of my identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God. ... Ultimately the only way I can be myself is to become identified with Him in whom is hidden the reason and fulfilment of my existence. ... Therefore there is only one problem on which all my existence, my peace and my happiness depend: to discover myself in discovering God. If I find Him I will find myself and if I find my true self I will find Him. (Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, Anthony Clarke, p.27f)

St Augustine:

He who on his pilgrimage groaneth not, shall not rejoice as a citizen, because there is no longing in him for the heavenly Jerusalem. (St. Augustine on Psalm 148:4)

Man must first be restored to himself (St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book VIII, Ch. 8).

Richard Sennett:

Emotional 'diseases' can be a product of human strengths, strengths that come to be misused in a life, rather than being absent or weakened. (R. Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life*, Vintage Books, 1971, 23).

Shirley Sugerma:

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 Sugerma, *Sin and Madness: Studies in Narcissism*, Westminster Press, 54f.).

Søren Kierkegaard:

The Christian heroism (and perhaps it is rarely to be seen) is to venture wholly to be oneself, as an individual person, this definite individual person, alone before the face of God, alone in this tremendous exertion and this tremendous responsibility. (Søren Kierkegaard, "Preface" to *Sickness Unto Death*, Walter Lowrie trans, Princeton University Press, 1974, p.142).

... but the self that did not become Caesar is the thing that is intolerable. (Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, Walter Lowrie trans, Princeton University Press, 1975, p.152)

But in spite of the fact that a man has become fantastic in this fashion, he may nevertheless (although most commonly it becomes manifest) be perfectly well able to live on, to be a man, as it seems, to occupy himself with temporal things, get married, beget children, win honor and esteem - and perhaps no one notices that in a deeper sense he lacks a self. About such a thing as that not much a fuss is made in the world; for a self is a thing the world is least apt to inquire about, and the thing of all things the most dangerous for a man to let people know that he has it. The greatest danger, that of losing one's own self, may pass off as quietly as if it were nothing; every other loss, that of an arm, a leg, five dollars, a wife, etc., is sure to be noticed. (Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, Walter Lowrie trans, Princeton University Press, 1975, p.165).

Adrian van Kaam:

Spiritual formation cannot be forced, only prepared for. Hence its means cannot be those of conquest, but only of facilitation and preparation. (Adrian van Kaam, *Studies in Formative Spirituality*, I, 2 (1980), 303)

To what extent is my life an inside out process, one of increasing freedom?
Where are the elements of "false self", the places where healing grace needs to reach at this time?

SESSION ELEVEN

GROWING IN SELF-AWARENESS (PART ONE)

Jean Vanier:

Christian doctrine on the wounded heart, or original sin, appears to me the one reality which is easily verified. It would be an error to believe that if there were no oppressive parents, if there was no oppressive society, then we would have only beautiful children, loving, happy, integrated within themselves. No, in the heart of each of us, there is division, there is fear, there is fragility; there is a defence system which protects our vulnerability, there is flight from pain, there is evil and there is darkness. (J. Vanier, *Man and Woman He Made Them*, St. Paul Publications, 1985, p.18)

William F. May:

T.S. Eliot once said, there are two types of problems we face in life. In one case, the appropriate question is, what are we going to do about it? In the other case, the only fitting question is, how do we behave toward it? The deeper problems in life are of the latter kind. In the helping professions, the dividing line between these two questions falls roughly between the more glamorous systems of cure and the humbler action of care. But unfortunately, as Americans (given philosophically to pragmatism and culturally to technology) and especially as Americans in those professions that get tinged with a messianic pretension, we are used to tackling problems in terms of the first question; and we are bereft when that question is inappropriate to the crisis. If all we can say is, what are we going to do about it?--then dying indeed (and our own death as well) is even more intensively a blow to professional self-esteem. But this is not the only question we need to ask. The question remains as to our mode of behaviour toward an event which that behaviour admittedly will not successfully dissolve. In extremity, it may not be possible to do something about a tragedy, but this inability need not altogether disable us humanly before it. Members of the helping professions belong to a network of care and not simply to an apparatus for cure. (William F. May, "The Sacred Power of Death in Contemporary Experience", in Alien Mack (Ed.), *Death in American Experience*, New York, Schocken, 1973, pp.120-121)

St Teresa of Avila:

Keep in mind that I could not exaggerate the importance of this. Fix your eyes on the Crucified and everything will become small for you. (Teresa of Avila, trans Otilio Rodriguez and Kieran Kavanaugh, *The Interior Castle*, VII:4,8 in *St Teresa of Avila: The Collected Works*, Volume II, ICS Publications, 1980, p.446f)

“Let us now turn to our castle with its many mansions. You must not imagine these mansions as arranged in a row, one behind another, but fix your attention on the centre, the room or palace occupied by the King. Think of a palmito, which has many outer rinds surrounding the savoury part within, all of which must be taken away before the centre can be eaten. Just so, around this central room are many more, as there are also above it. The things of the soul must always be considered plentiful, spacious and large; to do so is not an exaggeration. The soul is capable of much more than we can imagine, and the sun that is in this royal chamber shines in all parts. It is very important for any soul that practices prayer, whether little or much, not to hold itself back and stay in one corner. Let it walk through these dwelling places which are up above, down below, and to the sides, since God has given it such great dignity. Don’t force it to stay a long time in one room alone. Oh, but if it is in the room of self-knowledge! How necessary this room is - see that you understand me - even for those whom the Lord has brought into the very dwelling place where He abides. For never, however exalted the soul may be, is anything else fitting for it; nor could it be even were the soul to so desire. For humility, like the bee making honey in the beehive, is always at work. Without it, everything goes wrong. But let’s remember that the bee doesn’t fail to leave the beehive and fly about gathering nectar from the flowers. So it is with the soul in the room of self-knowledge; let it believe me and fly sometimes to ponder the grandeur and majesty of its God. Here it will discover its lowliness better than thinking of itself, and be free from the vermin that enter the first rooms, those of self-knowledge. For even though, as I say, it is by the mercy of God that a person practices self-knowledge, that which applies in lesser matters applies so much more in greater ones, as they say. And believe me, we shall reach much greater heights of virtue by thinking upon the virtue of God than if we stay in our own little plot of ground and tie ourselves down to it completely.

“I don’t know if this has been explained well. Knowing ourselves is something so important that I wouldn’t want any relaxation ever in this regard, however high you may have climbed into the heavens. While we are on this earth nothing is more important to us than humility. So I repeat that it is good, indeed very good, to try to enter first into the room where self-knowledge is dealt with rather than fly off to other rooms. This is the right road and if we can journey along a safe and level path, why should we want wings to fly? Rather, let’s strive to make more progress in self-knowledge. In my opinion we shall never completely know ourselves if we don’t strive to know God. By gazing at His grandeur, we get in touch with our own lowliness; by looking at His purity we shall see our own filth; by pondering His humility, we shall see how far we are from being humble.

“There are two advantages in this. Firstly, it is clear that anything white looks very much whiter against something black, just as the black looks blacker against the white. Secondly, if we turn from self towards God, our understanding and our will become nobler and readier to embrace all that is good: if we never rise above the slough of our own miseries we do ourselves a great disservice. We were saying just now how black and noisome are the streams that flow from souls in mortal sin. Similarly, although this is not the same thing – God forbid! It is only a comparison – so long as we are buried in the wretchedness of our earthly nature these streams of ours will never disengage themselves from the slough of cowardice, pusillanimity and fear. We shall always be glancing around and saying: ‘Are people looking at me or not?’ ‘If I take a certain path shall I come to any harm?’ ‘Dare I begin such and such a task?’ ‘Is it pride that is impelling me to do so?’ ‘Can anyone as wretched as I engage in so lofty an exercise as prayer?’ ‘Will people think better of me if I refrain from following the crowd?’ ‘For extremes are not good,’ they say, ‘even in virtue; and I am such a sinner that if I were to fail I should only have further to fall; perhaps I shall make no progress and in that case I shall only be doing good people harm; anyway, a person like me has no need to make herself singular.’

“Oh, God help me, daughters, how many souls the devil must have ruined in this way! They think that all these misgivings, and many more that I could describe, arise from humility, whereas they really come from our lack of self-knowledge. We get a distorted idea of our own nature, and, if we never stop thinking about ourselves, I am not surprised if we experience these fears and others which are still worse. It is for this reason daughters, that I say we must set our eyes upon Christ our Good, from Whom we shall learn true humility, and also upon His saints. Our understanding, as I have said, will then be ennobled, and self-knowledge will not make us timorous and fearful; for although this is only the first Mansion, it contains riches of great price, and any who can elude the reptiles which are to be found in it will not fail to go farther. Terrible are the crafts and wiles which the devil uses to prevent souls from learning to know themselves and understanding his ways.”

(Teresa of Avila, trans Otilio Rodriguez and Kieran Kavanaugh, *The Interior Castle*, I:2,8-9 in *St Teresa of Avila: The Collected Works, Volume II*, ICS Publications, 1980, 291-95.)

Adrian van Kaam:

Whether I am a child or an adult, a simple person or a hero, a prisoner or a free citizen, I am always a potentiality for transcendence in many ways. If I were to 'freeze' myself into one mold by repression of the aspiration to transcend what I currently am, I would die to authentic living. The most sordid crime against our humanity is to destroy what we basically are: transcendent selves. (Adrian van Kaam, *The Transcendent Self*, Dimension Books, 1979, 167f)

How do I ensure that I am constantly growing in self-knowledge?
How can I use the moments of frustration, distress and agitation as opportunities for self-knowledge?
What might be the greatest obstacle in my life at this time to self-knowledge?
How would I teach someone else to grow in self-knowledge that is more than merely rational?

SESSION TWELVE

GROWING IN SELF AWARENESS (PART TWO)

Jean Vanier:

As I feel more and more the injustice, the inequalities and the exploitations of this world, I understand better why so many people throw themselves into political activity which aims to destroy the power-structure of our society. I understand better why people who are frightened of losing their possessions and power try to defend themselves and the structures which support them. Our world is moving towards universal conflict, pushed by the jealousies and hatred which come from fear. Jesus came to destroy hate and to lead all men into fraternity, universal love and peace. But this means that we must all reject our individual and group egoisms; we must all learn to die to ourselves and, reborn in the Spirit, to live for our brothers and for God our Father. I believe that the world will only change as people's hearts change and as people open themselves to love and tenderness. Our political and economic structures reflect our inner fears; they can only be changed as hearts change. This does not mean that we must not struggle against injustice on a political level, for we must. But above all we must become sources of love for others; we must become attentive to the little people, the wounded, the fragile and the lonely people. It is as this current of life grows stronger that structures will change. (J. Vanier, *Be Not Afraid*, New York, Paulist Press, 1975, pp.viii-ix)

William Lynch:

Our refusal (to be absolutes/gods) will anger the sick for a time, but it will be nothing compared to the hatred for the one who ascends the throne. That will be hatred of those who have taken away the souls of men. We can get along without our souls for a little while in life, but not for long. The time often asked for us today, by so many forces in our culture, is much too long. That is one reason, perhaps the greatest, why so many are so sick. It will always be true therefore that the hope of the sick lies in destroying their idols and restoring their own souls. As for the well, the question is: how can they help? If they have good will and wisdom, too, let them at least stay off the mighty throne of God. Such is the need and such the demand of men for gods and absolutes, that it will often be wise to descend slowly but firmly from the throne. It is a pity that this must be. But the fact that there is one God and no more is for all of us, the well and the ill, the most difficult proposition in this world. (William Lynch, *Images of Hope*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1974, 125)

Anne Morrow Lindbergh:

I do not believe that sheer suffering teaches. If suffering alone taught, all the world would be wise, since everyone suffers. To suffering must be added mourning, understanding, patience, love, openness, and the willingness to remain vulnerable. All these and other factors combined, if the circumstances are right, can teach and can lead to rebirth. But there is no simple formula, or swift way out, no comfort, or easy acceptance of suffering. 'There is no question', as Katherine Mansfield wrote, 'of getting beyond it' - 'The little boat enters the dark fearful gulf, and our only cry is to escape - "put me on land again." But it's useless. Nobody listens. The shadowy figure rows on. One ought to sit still and uncover one's eyes'.

(Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *Hour of Gold, Hour of Lead: Diaries and Letters of Anne Morrow Lindbergh, 1929-1932*, New American Library, 1973, 179f)

Simone Weil:

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 motive? (Simone Weil, *The Simone Weil Reader*. Ed. George A. Panichas (New York: David McKay, 1977), p. 351)

Thomas Merton:

To say I am made in the image and likeness of God is to say that love is the reason for my existence, for God is love. ... Love is my true identity. Selflessness is my true self. Love is my true character. Love is my name. (Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1972), p.60)

Who am I? ... I am one loved by Christ. (T. Merton, "Conference on Prayer," *Sisters Today*, XLI (1970), p. 5)

H.F.M. Prescott:

... have you thought that He stained Himself, soiled Himself, being not only with men, but Himself a man ... And it wasn't that He put on man like a jacket to take off at night, or to bathe ... But man He was, as man is man, the maker made Himself the made; God was un-Godded by His own hand ... He was God from before the beginning, and now never to be clean God again. Never again. Alas! ... Hosanna!" (H.F.M. Prescott. *The Man on a Donkey*, Vol. 2 (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1952), pp. 510-511)

Is there any aspect of my self that I avoid or tend to deny?
What might I need to do at this time to facilitate greater self-knowledge?
What's happening with me at this time?

ALL THINGS WORK TO THE GOOD

Indeed, each time we attempt to force a solution of our difficulties in a quick, easy way we refuse to enter the school of life. This is especially true of the problems of sin and imperfection. Our personal inclinations to certain types of sin and imperfection will be with us as long as we live. They are rooted in our unique nature and in the dark recesses of our past. To be sure, we must try to overcome them in the current of our existence, but we must also humbly accept the fact that possibly we shall never be wholly rid of them in spite of our efforts. It may be that we must live with a certain imperfection to the end of our life; that we must patiently try to cope with it in countless ways while never succeeding in eliminating it. A certain sin may persecute us until our last breath, humiliate us in the eyes of others, escape our understanding, and fill our eyes with tears. This fact we must accept.

The Lord will never ask how successful we were in overcoming a particular vice, sin, or imperfection. He will ask us, "Did you humbly and patiently accept this mystery of iniquity in your life? How did you deal with it? Did you learn from it to be patient and humble? Did it teach you to trust not your own ability but My love? Did it enable you to understand better the mystery of iniquity in the lives of others? Did it give you the most typical characteristic of a truly religious person--that he never judges or condemns the sin and imperfection of others?" The religious man knows from his own life that the demon of evil can be stronger than man even in spite of his best attempts; he knows that it is the patience, humility, and charity learned from this experience that count. Success and failure are accidental. The joy of the Christian is never based on his personal religious success but on the knowledge that his Redeemer lives. The Christian is the man who is constantly aware of his need of salvation. Acceptance of the mystery of iniquity in our project of existence is a school of mildness, mercy, forgiveness, and loving understanding of our neighbour.

(Adrian van Kaam, Religion and Personality (Revised Edition), Dimension Books, 1980, pp.14-15)

SESSION THIRTEEN

WHEN THE BULLET TRAIN STOPS

Simone Weil:

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. ... God waits like a beggar who stands motionless and silent before someone who will perhaps give him a piece of bread. (Simone Weil, 'The Things of the World' in George A Panichas, The Simone Weil Reader, David McKay Company Inc., pp.424f)

Derek Worlock:

The contrast between the grand ceremonial of the past and new demands of the Council was evident as the procession of Bishops entered St Peter's. The entire length of the basilica up to the papal altar under the cupola had been transformed into a mighty council chamber with tiers of seating raised high on either side, and with tribunes aloft for religious superiors and periti. This constituted an unforeseen practical difficulty: where to put the cardinals' secretaries and train-bearers who could no longer occupy their privileged position sitting on the floor at the feet of their masters. For there was no more floor. As we arrived at the doors of the basilica, papal masters of ceremony tucked scarlet silk trains over cardinalatial arms, and then clapped their hands at us in the vain hope that we might vanish. We were driven hastily around the back of the tiered seating and up into the tribunes from which we were swiftly evicted by the self-righteous periti. Next we were tucked into a corner near the diplomatic corps and ecumenical observers, who were having a splendid time with their cameras. ... Then Mgr Willebrands came along, shook my hand, and called out to the Swiss Guard: 'They cannot remain here'. Thus cardinals' train bearers were significantly the first victims of renewal and ecumenism. (Archbishop Derek Worlock, 'The Sharing Church', in The Tablet, October 9, 1982, pp.1005f)

Jean Monnet:

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. (Jean Monnet, Memoirs, Trans. R. Mayne (New York: Doubleday, 1978), p. 521)

Graham Greene:

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 recognise 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.' (G. Greene, The Power & the Glory, Penguin, 1982, 199f)

Noel Dermot O'Donoghue:

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 Ordinarie*, Templegate, 1979, 74)

Jean Danielou:

I have no liking for Christians who will not touch the facts of human existence for fear of soiling their hands. The Christians who struggle to make Christianity effective in the world, even at the cost of painful blows, those admire. I love that Church that plunges into the thickets of human history and is not afraid of compromising itself by getting mixed up with men's affairs, with their political conflicts and their cultural disputes. I love that Church because it loves men 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, that Church of the poor which is denounced for its weaknesses by pharisees whose hands are clean but who can point to no single person they have saved. (Jean Danielou, *Prayer as a Political Problem*, Burns & Oates, 1967, p.55)

SESSION FOURTEEN

THE CHURCH A RESTLESS PEOPLE

Rembert Weakland:

When a monk enters a monastery, what is asked of him is "Are you truly seeking God?" The question isn't "Have you found God?" The question is "Is he seeking God? Is his motivation highly involved in that search of who and what God is in relationship to us?" It's not philosophical - it's existential. And Merton, to me, was a great searcher. He was constantly unhappy, as all great searchers are. He was constantly ill at ease, he was constantly restless, as all searchers are - because that's part of the search. And in that sense he was the perfect monk. Contemplation isn't satisfaction - it's search. (Rembert Weakland in Paul Wilkes, ed, *Merton By Those Who Knew Him Best*, Harper and Row, 1984, p.163)

St Augustine:

You are great O Lord and greatly to be praised: great is your power and to your wisdom there is no limit. And man, who is part of your creation, wishes to praise you, man who bears about within himself his mortality. who bears about within himself testimony to his sin and testimony that you resist the proud. Yet man this part of your creation wishes to praise you. You arouse him to take joy in praising you. For you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you (St Augustine, *Confessions*, Book I, Chapter I).

Michael Casey on Bernard of Clairvaux:

That the human being was made for spiritual life is inferred from the fact that nothing else is able to satisfy his questing heart. Bernard asserts the traditional view that only God is able to fill the vast void which the human being experiences within himself and that it is only in heaven that he will be fulfilled. If this truth is accepted, then it follows that everything else has only a relative value (Michael Casey, *Athirst for God: Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Cistercian Publications, 1988, p.184).

Desire for God may be defined, in the first instance, as that movement of being of that carries the person toward God. It is the tendency to self-transcendence, although it is doubtful whether Bernard would have been at ease with such grand language. It is that mysterious force, which, when accepted, communicates an inner integrity to a person's life, irrespective of how prominently 'religion' may figure in either outlook or behaviour. Desire for God is, first and foremost, an ontological reality (Michael Casey, *Athirst for God Spiritual Desire in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Cistercian Publications, 1988, p.187).

St Bernard of Clairvaux:

No saying which can contribute to goodness, the practice of virtue or excellent behaviour, ought ever to be listened to carelessly, since this is the means by which the salvation which comes from God is revealed. When a pleasing and acceptable word comes your way, put aside all repugnance and listen to it with desire, for in this word the bridegroom himself is believed to come, and to come quickly. This is to say that he himself desires to come, for it is his desire which creates yours. The fact that you wish to give the word entry derives from the fact that he himself is in a hurry to come in. We are not the first to love but, as Scripture says, 'He first loved us' (St Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermons on the Song of Songs, 57:6).

To be drawn by the bridegroom is to accept from him that desire by which he himself is drawn, the desire for good actions, the desire of producing fruit for the bridegroom. For such a one the bridegroom is the whole of life and to die is gain (St Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermons on the Song of Songs, 58:1).

For Bernard submitting to this desire leads to wisdom (cf Casey p.296 plus Sermon 85)

How do I deal with my own restlessness?

Can I tell the difference between restlessness as such and the responses - formative or deformative - to that restlessness?

Do I detect any signs of settling into a comfortable routine in my own life?

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