

The Heart Of Christianity

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my wife, Helen, for all her loving support of my work. She is my listening-post when I hit a block, my cheerleader when I feel overwhelmed and finally, she's the reason I have been able to give my writing a voice.

Helen created my website, www.findingoneness.com, and she patiently edits and formats my books. They would never see the 'light of day' without her perseverance, problem-solving and computer knowledge. Without her, you, dear reader, would not be reading my work.

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PROLOGUE

MOUNT ATHOS AS STEPPING STONE

My friends and I truly appreciate the grand endeavor Robin Amis undertook in *A DIFFERENT CHRISTIANITY* to understand and report the work of the past and still continuing on Mount Athos. But we were startled by what he writes at the end of his book: "probably no more than 10% of monks and nuns even in and around Mount Athos" have made the Inner Christian Tradition "part of their very being." The number led me to question the efficacy of the effort, not of Amis, but of the practices undertaken by these well-meaning monks and nuns. Perhaps we shouldn't be startled. Maybe 10% is great and we should be grateful for that! How many truly virtuous people do we know anywhere at anytime? I don't know and I am merely questioning.

As rich and varied as Robin Amis' work is, and as much as readers and I have gained from it, I think that insufficient time and treatment have been given to the central message of Christ: love. If Amis has faithfully represented the endeavor of Mount

Athos, and I believe he has, then I question not Amis' work, but that of the Athos endeavor itself. Although the declaration is made in the book that "The love of the soul is its salvation," and some treatment is made of "the sanctification of Love," I feel that as a spiritual establishment attempting to explore the "Inner Christian Tradition," more attention need be paid to the dominant teaching of the Old and New Testaments: love of God and love of neighbor, and to the fuller outgrowth, personally and socially, of those commandments. I don't see love being given the prominence it deserves. Not only does love excel in Scripture, its preeminence is found in Christian tradition, such as in the teaching of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, "When the soul loves, it is more properly itself than when it gives life." Love is not only the goal to be reached, it is to be practiced from the beginning and all through life. Hence, I will advert to love frequently and throughout my writing.

In this book I want to show how some germinal ideas found in A DIFFERENT CHRISTIANITY have been enlarged and developed by renowned spiritual teachers past and present. These are Meister Eckhart, Krishnamurti, Shankara, Ken Wilber, Rumi, Peter Russell, Evelyn Underhill, two lesser known figures, and last and most importantly, Jesus. With the treatment of each, I will give the sources cited.

I believe they all point to something incredible, desirable, and reachable. When fully realized, the incredible satisfies the labor and wanderings of the intellect; the desirable fulfills the heart's quest for unconditional love; and the reachable is attained in God made human in Jesus Christ for this very purpose. I don't doubt that these goals may be reached by different means in other traditions. I have studied and practiced what these others offer, with very satisfying personal results. But here I wish to emphasize what I know best and what has given me the greatest rewards. Mysticism, in particular the word itself, is often a turn-

off for many people. As I use it, it means internal work, primarily contemplation. As such, it has objective criteria, but they also are within.

In some cases, especially with the New Testament and Jesus, the writings serve as a foundation for some of what Amis taught. I will refer to Jesus intermittently throughout. I will also give special attention to John's Gospel and Epistles, not only for their unique portrayal of Jesus, but also for the primacy of love evident there. Since the Johannine writings are such a treasure trove, unique and comprehensive, I will make them a special project that can stand alone as the invaluable guide that they are. I will try to open that treasure chest for the riches it contains. (I am indebted to Ray Brown for much of the following and will give at the end of this paper a list of his works that I use.)

When I see the high esteem with which history has honored the Fourth Gospel, I think we cannot spend too much time in unearthing its jewels. A quote from the time of St. Augustine serves this purpose: "He (John) is the first among the evangelists in penetration of the depths of the divine mysteries....In the figure of the four animals of Ezekiel chapter one, and of Revelation chapter four, John is compared to the eagle which flies higher than the other birds and gazes at the sun's rays with undazzled eyes. He rested on the Lord's breast at the Last Supper and drank a draught of heavenly wisdom better than that received by the others from the source itself, the Lord's heart. His concern was to entrust us with Christ's divinity and the mystery of the Trinity," (MEISTER ECKHART, THE ESSENTIAL SERMONS, COMMENTARIES, TREATISES, AND DEFENSE, Paulist Press, Inc., Mahwah, NJ 07430, 1981, p.122).

Before proceeding as indicated, I need to comment further on the Mount Athos material. Amis characterizes hesychia as

stillness and spaciousness. That may be all it is and that could be enough. But questions naturally arise around this experience. My own observation is that in the stillness and spaciousness there is a great calming or quieting of all activity that brings an extraordinary peace. At the same time I am vividly aware of myself being in a state of complete openness. It led me to ask after the meditation, what am I open to? It would seem openness to the Infinite. I realize that this is my own subjective experience. Others could have the same or very different experiences.

If it is to stay that way--experiencing stillness and spaciousness--do I do anything to make it perdure? Or is that bringing effort needlessly into the picture? If effort is to be ruled out, then I am to simply stay with witnessing the spaciousness and stillness? There may be many experiences on the way to or while in the still space, all of which are to be surpassed to stay with pure awareness.

I don't dispute that clear space can be a sign of being touched by God or of dwelling in God, as Amis indicates. If it is true, it points to the possible unanimity of mystical experiences, for great clarity, stillness, and spaciousness are common occurrences in many spiritual traditions. It makes me wonder about other similar rapturous happenings. While in deep meditation there are experiences of the impossibility of thought; of the cessation of time; of the unavailability of comprehension because consciousness is nondual; of the awareness of nothing but pure bliss upon bliss.

I wonder especially about the observation of and participation in light in all its multifarious forms. The light of daybreak is often a common and joyous experience. I have always been fascinated by the light abiding in a mist as it

overhangs the countryside, such as that in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

For the serious meditator light is more than what is seen; it is a feeling; it creates emotion. It is such a many-splendored thing. It can be cold or warm, unexpected and surprising. So often it is exhilarating and full of wonder. It definitely has an intangible quality. Hypnotizing, it draws the person in and he doesn't know why. What he does know is that it makes him feel full and safe. If a man is full, he is satisfied, no matter how much there still is out there; he doesn't even avert to what's out there. For some, it has been the emotional wounds that they have suffered that lets the light in. It's often accompanied by wonder and bliss. It's like nothing he knows, and he is simply content to rest in its presence. And that is the beautiful mystery of the experience.

The celestial nature of light strongly suggests more than a purely human experience. I will point out the commonness and power of light below in Peter Russell's and Evelyn Underhill's work, but especially in that of Meister Eckhart. I will also look at biblical references to light, especially in the teaching of Jesus.

God, like a rose, is just as sweet by any other name. The door is open. And doesn't Kabir's words make us sit up and wonder! "Behold but One in all things; it is the second that leads you astray." From the practical side, isn't the experience to be judged by what it does for the person? Is he or she better for it? Does it move the person to greater good? To better thoughts? To unselfish love?

I am using the above Robin Amis' Mount Athos material in this PROLOGUE as a launch that keeps us centered on interior realization as the main concern of this whole enterprise. Part One shows other thrusts by different authors into the depths of

exploring man's spiritual nature. Part Two takes us to the revelation of the heart of Christianity: God's love for us incarnated in Jesus, primarily but not exclusively shown in John's Gospel. My purpose is to mine the riches of John's Message which has been called "the most splendid treasury of Christian spirituality ever written."--Raymond E. Brown. Part Three reprises material from Part Two but recast into themes for meditation. The works and words of Jesus need to be made contemporary and personal. Part Four is an attempt to show a Medieval example of the continuation of the Paraclete's work. For that, I have chosen a distinguished mystic, Meister Eckhart, for he has written abundantly on John's Gospel and Christian revelation. Part Five contains reflections of others and personal comments centering on how the Gospel message has been taken and applied in more recent times. The Conclusion highlights one of Eckhart's statements which I consider one of the most astounding statements in Christian spirituality: "the innermost and highest part of the soul creates and receives God's Son and becoming-God's-Son in the womb and heart of the heavenly Father." My overall hope is that the writings lead toward direct personal experience and interior transformation, the same goal which I see Jesus wanting us to undertake.

PART ONE

EXPLORING MAN'S SPIRITUAL NATURE

Krishnamurti

I cannot help but wonder about the great common feature always present in all that we do: awareness. Awareness can be very limited or as unbounded as space. There is great power in "choiceless awareness," as Krishnamurti calls it. He gives a priceless evaluation to help us in this regard in his book, **FREEDOM FROM THE KNOWN**, Harper & Row, New York, 1969. Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was a prodigious speaker and writer on philosophical and spiritual subjects. Born in India, in his early life he was groomed to be the new world leader, but rejected that mantle, saying that no one has the power to be the authority over another. He disbanded the organization that had cultivated him.

In real meditation, he says, awareness reveals there is a central image put together by all the other images, and this central image is the observer, the experiencer, the censor, the

evaluator, the judge who wants to conquer or subjugate the other images or destroy them altogether. The other images are the result of judgments, opinions and conclusions by the observer, and the observer is the result of all the other images—therefore the observer IS the observed.

What takes place when the observer is aware that the observer is the observed? Krishnamurti warns: "Go slowly, go very slowly, because it is a very complex thing that we are going into now. What takes place? The observer does not act at all. The observer has always said, 'I must do something about these images,...I like, therefore I must hold. I dislike therefore I must get rid of. But when the observer realizes that the thing about which he is acting is HIMSELF, then there is no conflict between himself and the image. He is THAT. He is not separate from that. When...the observer realizes that he IS that, then there is no like or dislike and conflict ceases."

"Then you will find that there is an awareness that has become tremendously alive. It is not bound to any central issue or to any image—and from that intensity of awareness there is a different quality of attention and therefore the mind—because the mind is this awareness—has become extraordinarily sensitive and highly intelligent."

Krishnamurti has taken me into a higher state of consciousness, but that is not all. The more I can concentrate on a subject, the more piercing my awareness becomes. He has made it easier to see how to unite the actions of my faculties into the central being that I am. And when I am so integrated, then I can more readily join with others and other things. Thus, the path to Oneness opens.

I want to stay with Krishnamurti for a while because he sees the paramount importance of ever keeping oneself open—

open to the Ever-Greater God in one's life. The title of his book, **FREEDOM FROM THE KNOWN**, suggests that we often become subservient to what has been propagated by others. By his title he is pointing, in his own way, to what Amis so strongly advocates: to direct, immediate experience and to trust the intimate knowledge meant for me only.

He says, "It is a most extraordinary thing that although most of us are opposed to political tyranny and dictatorship, we inwardly accept the authority, the tyranny of another to twist our minds and our way of life....The question of whether or not there is a God or truth or reality, or whatever you like to call it, can never be answered by books, by priests, philosophers or saviours. Nobody and nothing can answer the question but you yourself and that is why you must know yourself." The main thing here is not that others may be wrong, but that I have not made truth my own. There is no path to follow but one's own, which makes truth a living thing. "A dead thing has a path to it because it is static....If you try to study yourself according to another you will always remain a secondhand human being."

"You may see the truth of this intellectually but can you actually apply it so that your mind no longer projects any authority, the authority of a book, a teacher, a wife or husband, a parent, a friend or of society?...Having realized that we can depend on no outside authority in bringing about a total revolution within the structure of our own psyche, there is the immensely greater difficulty of rejecting our own inward authority, the authority of our own particular little experiences and accumulated opinions, knowledge, ideas and ideals. You had an experience yesterday which taught you something and what it taught you became a new authority—and that authority of yesterday is as destructive as the authority of a thousand years...."

"To be free of all authority, of your own and that of another, is to die to everything of yesterday, so that your mind is always fresh, always young, innocent, full of vigour and passion. It is only in that state that one learns and observes. And for this a great deal of awareness is required, actual awareness of what is going on inside yourself, without correcting it or telling it what it should or should not be, because the moment you correct it you have established another authority, a censor."

Krishnamurti says there is a central image inside us, the observer or witness, put together by all the other images, who wants to eliminate all those other images. These other images are the result of judgments, opinions and conclusions by the observer, He adds that the observer is also the observed.

Without questioning that this may be so, I would like to submit that what he says can be understood in two ways. First, it could be that the amalgamation of images is a step in the direction of moving toward a higher consciousness. The goal is always toward unification and oneness....

Shankara and Ken Wilber

Or secondly, the combining of images could be the human side of a correlation whose divine side is the indwelling of something we noted earlier. Our interior functions in a certain way, which does not preclude a divine concomitant action. I quote here from Shankara, (CREST-JEWEL OF DISCRIMINATION [VIVEKA-CHUDAMANI], translated by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isharwood, Vedanta Press, Hollywood, CA, 1978). "We recognize, somewhere inside us, that Christ, in his actions and in his words, shows us something unworldly in a literal sense, something coming from beyond the world we know, so that it was perfectly consistent that he taught us:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.

If any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him" (I John 2:15).

"The Atman dwells within, free from attachment and beyond all action. A man must separate this Atman from every object of experience, as a stalk of grass is separated from its enveloping sheath. Then he must dissolve into Atman all those appearances which make up the world of name and form. He is indeed a free soul who can remain thus absorbed in the Atman alone....The fool thinks, "I am the body." The intelligent man thinks, "I am an individual soul united with the body." But the wise man, in the greatness of his knowledge and spiritual discrimination sees the Atman as reality and thinks, "I am Brahman."

I have quoted from an ancient mystic, Shankara; I would like now to quote from a modern mystic, Ken Wilber. This quote comes from his book, *THE EYE OF SPIRIT*, (Shambhala, Boston & London, 1998). His last chapter begins, "Always Already...The Brilliant Clarity of Ever-Present Awareness....The realization of the Nondual traditions is uncompromising: there is only Spirit, there is only God, there is only Emptiness in all its radiant wonder. All the good and all the evil, the very best and the very worst, the upright and the degenerate—each and all are radically perfect manifestations of Spirit precisely as they are. There is nothing but God, nothing but Goddess, nothing but Spirit in all directions, and not a grain of sand, not a speck of dust, is more or less Spirit than any other." This sounds astounding, but higher consciousness can take one to heights undreamed of. Beyond ordinary comprehension, pure unadulterated awareness understands the ultimate purpose of things.

The intellect, which can easily deceive us into thinking that it is the witness or observer, wants to rule. It has difficulty playing second fiddle, in letting emotion or love run the show. But Scripture, with the Athonite material in its wake, affirms that the intellect is not the prime indicator of the Way. The mind must be enveloped in love, which needs to be the final arbiter of decision making in our human journey. If there is any question, we have Christ's two commandments on love plus the scriptural affirmation that God is love and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him.

For love to rule, Krishnamurti says total self-abandonment is necessary. "Love...is only possible when thought comes to understand itself and comes naturally to an end....Thought cannot possibly cultivate love....Love is always active present....to go beyond thought and time...is to be aware that there is a different dimension called love. When you love, is there an observer? There is an observer only when love is desire and pleasure."

"But you don't know how to come to this extraordinary fount—so what do you do?"

Krishnamurti continues to elaborate on how we get to true love. "If you don't know what to do, you do nothing, don't you? Absolutely nothing. Then inwardly you are completely silent. Do you understand what that means? It means you are not seeking, not wanting, not pursuing; there is no center at all. Then there is love."

I need to quote here from Eckhart Tolle because it so closely ties in with what Krishnamurti has just said: "Stillness is the language God speaks, everything else is a bad translation."

John Newton

Everyone has his or her own way of seeing things. I would like to mention how others have recognized they were on the right path, or what they were doing to get there. The hymn, AMAZING GRACE, has lifted many souls, not only the author's, John Newton, to heights of joy and gratitude.

John Newton (1725-1807) was a sailor in England's Royal Navy and served as a captain of slave ships. In a severe storm when his ship was filling with water, Newton awoke in the middle of the night and cried out to God to save him. Newton cited the experience as the beginning of his conversion to Christianity. He later shuddered at the role he played in the slave trade, and championed the cause for the abolition of slave trading. He lived to see its abolition in 1807. His book of hymns had a great influence on English hymnology. His hymn, "Faith's Review and Expectation" came to be known by its opening phrase, "Amazing Grace."

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fear relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed.

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
to a true believer's ear.
It soothes his sorrows and heals his wounds,
and drives away his tears.

Grace is always a gift. It can never come unless I am in a receptive mode. "Amazing Grace" shows how varied the action of grace can be: a feeling of being found, seeing anew, causing fear, relieving fear, a realization of preciousness or of sweetness, soothing at times and healing at other times, and, finally, removing sorrow. This listing is no way exhaustive. It is easy to see from the examples that grace is not just a good thought. It is also a movement of the heart with feelings playing a large role. I have always had some misgiving about calling it grace. The name makes it sound as though it is an object rather than an influence to be absorbed. If I regard it as a thing, I could be removing God's presence from my life. God is always the instigator, and never removed from His action, or grace.

A Child

Another striking example of awareness' recognition focuses on a two year old child. Two adult friends were talking about small children and the strange things they sometimes do. One told the other about what she read in the Prologue of a book she had. The author recalls the events immediately following the birth of one of her children. Just after the new arrival, the older child wanted to hold the baby. When the parents put the baby in his arms, he said he wanted to be ALONE with the sibling. The parents thought that was strange and denied the request.

Several months passed and the child kept asking to be alone with the baby. His persistence finally wore down the parents. They decided to let the two be alone in a room where they could stand at the door to listen to what was going on. They were flabbergasted at what they heard. The two year old said to the younger. "Tell me what God is like, cause I'm starting to forget."

This wasn't a religious family, and in fact the child hadn't really been introduced to even the idea of God yet. So how do we explain that? I don't think we have to explain it. Like so many legends and stories, it carries a powerful message. That message is that I must do whatever is necessary in order to experience again what God is like. Whatever interests me can point me to the growth of my soul. I am never far off if I just try to be a good person in my particular surroundings.

Rumi

A fine example of recognition I take from Rumi's short poem. It had no title other than beautiful illustrations where I found it (THE ILLUMINATED RUMI, translation and commentary by Coleman Barks, Broadway Books, New York, 1997, p. 36).

I have lived
On the lip of
Insanity, wanting to
Know reasons, knocking
On a door.

It opens.

I've been knocking from the inside!

The last line points to a blazing realization I can have: I am at the center of what I want to know. I need look no further than inside myself.

The Paraclete

This example of recognition I take from John's Gospel: "The Father will give you another Paraclete to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot accept

since it neither sees nor recognizes him; but you do recognize him since he remains with you and is within you" (John 14:16-17). For Jesus, the spiritual world was more real than this earthly one. How real is it for us?

Three Stumbling Blocks

Here I'd like to continue showing a broad base for what Amis has so appropriately provided us. His three renunciations correspond to how the Evangelist John sees what must be done to live the true interior life, the kind of life Jesus led and holds out to his followers. John uses a pair of opposites, seeming extreme to the modern mind, but well attested biblically: "The man who loves his life destroys it; while the man who hates his life in this world, preserves it to live eternally" (John 12: 25). Similar passages may be found in Luke 14:26 and Matthew 10:37. John condemns the love of one's life in this world; elsewhere we find condemnations of love of darkness (3:19) and love of glory among men (12:43).

In Johannine dualism these three elements—human glory, darkness (ignorance), and this world—are different facets of the realm of evil; a love of anyone of them represents an unwillingness to love Jesus above all else. Both John and Amis see these three as obstacles to the inner life: Ignorance and love for this world are self-explanatory, while love of human glory is pride in the content and activity of the human mind.

It is important to see in my own life what smacks of worldly desire even in an unpretentious way. For example, living under the gun of time can be a huge drawback. It often keeps our attention on "the next thing," and when we are into that thing, our attention immediately goes to "the next thing." We lose the present of the "presence." A close friend of mine expressed it this way: "The past is history; the future is mystery; NOW is a

gift, that is why it is called the present." A key notion of APATHEIA which Amis brings out is freedom from the past and the future, freedom from being dragged into time.

The touchstone of Christianity is always Christ, his life and words aiming at each one of us to have a personal, intimate and direct experience of the divine presence. How much can one of God's messengers absorb and reveal about the Mystery of God? I believe Jesus Christ, human and divine, was the greatest among the leaders and founders of religions. The same question applies to us. How much can I absorb and enact about the Mystery of God? Following Him, I am left with three great loving admonitions that lead to the goal: 1) Watch, which activates our intrinsic nature of awareness to gain its highest state; 2) Pray, which is based on the Almighty Power of God acting everywhere all the time; 3) Change, which the other two help bring about. The goal of all: Love, which is what God is, and is, therefore, what we must become because we are one with God.

My experience is that our spiritual endeavors are helped immensely if there is softening, an ease to what many see as hardships on the spiritual path. Some need to ripen slowly like fruit; warmth and softness can sift thru the hard nuts of spiritual discipline. The quiet whisper of a felt sense opens and enlivens our interior. Normally we seek an internal satisfaction, something that makes us feel good. There are as many spiritual paths as there are people, and some may not need this mellowing of the way. But I feel many crave the feeling of goodness of the Good Samaritan, or the wonderment of the Samaritan woman, or the gradual and beautiful "seeing" of the man born blind, or the personal endearment of a conversation with Jesus. The heart is warmed by divine truth. I also think what is necessary is absolute trust in the Awesome Power of God. This is discovering that God can do anything on our behalf, not to ease our way, but to

give us the wherewithal to deal with anything that crosses our path. Believing in this way requires vigilant prayer.

How can God attract all things to Himself unless He gives something to each culture that draws people to Him? God uses the ambient culture to draw men back to Himself, all the while respecting man's free will. Once God has our attention, the process is the same for each of us. God's almighty power and endless love can fit into the tiniest of places and the briefest of moments. But God honors free will, perhaps the most God-like faculty we have, because only it can embrace unconditional love, the goal for each of us. Free will may embrace many "false gods" on the way before it realizes that it was ego making the decisions.

Unconditional love is eternal because that is what God is, and only what lasts forever is real. God in His infinite capacity prefers to let man choose what he thinks will take him to God, and let's man bear the consequences. All is One, and I am a member of the all-inclusive Divine. Some prefer to say that all is one eventually.

We can and must save the world. God gave and is giving us the power. Do we have the confidence? The founders of religions, mystics, gurus, spiritual leaders, all say what we must do. It's what we do every day in all places that raise us up to God's level. To use one of Amis' images, each good action I perform is like a plank I hammer into place in the ark (like Noah's) that saves me from disaster.

Peter Russell's FROM SCIENCE TO GOD

If we were to look at the world and try to understand it and try to do something about its many deplorable conditions, where would we start? There are many scientific endeavors and

other disciplines attempting to do that very thing. We are fortunate because, for spiritual sojourners, the entire world exists in each of us. I would like to turn now to Peter Russell and draw from his book, *FROM SCIENCE TO GOD: A Physicist's Journey into the Mystery of Consciousness*, (New World Library, Novato, CA, 2005). I want to expand the horizon of the spiritual practitioner, giving him or her a varied panorama for exploration in what I hope are many points of interest for study and meditation and practice. The author has an honors degree in physics and experimental psychology from Cambridge, England, and a post graduate degree in computer science. He studied meditation and Eastern philosophy in India, and conducted research into the neurophysiology of meditation at the University of Bristol, England.

I'm referring to Russell's work for two reasons. First, he has given us "an integration of the scientific paradigm that is dominant in the world now and the spiritual traditions represented in paradigms dominant in the past....For many of us it is a fulfillment of a dream we didn't know we had" (Michael L. Ray, author of *CREATIVITY IN BUSINESS* and professor emeritus of Stanford University). My second reason for recommending his book is that he shows the developing understanding of the spiritual life that we can pursue and enjoy, wherein consciousness plays such an important role. Eckhart Tolle said, "Peter Russel's book is not only eminently readable but also a vitally important contribution to the awakening of human consciousness."

These two approaches from Russell, along with Amis' work, give a more comprehensive approach to the path a spiritual sojourner may take in today's world. Russell turned from an atheistic position and, with the help of scientific investigation, accepts and practices what mystics and spiritual leaders have long held true. His book helps us see the way.

I want to quote much of Russell verbatim so as to be clear on the connection between rational thoughts and contemplative experiences, between science and mysticism. We name it God and call it science. Behind the names and in reality, do they not comingle and coalesce? Applicable here is the realization of Nondualism: Only Spirit, only God, only Emptiness exists in all its glorious wonder; similarly pertinent is the warning of Kabir “Behold but One in all things; it is the second that leads you astray;” and finally, we see how an insightful poet like Shelley, writing in a different context captures a universal truth:

“Nothing in the world is single;
All things by a law divine
In one spirit meet and mingle,
Why not I with thine?—”

Man’s movement toward the truth is seldom an orderly march; more often it is a slow crawl with many missteps. But the very possibility of man bringing together science and God is a cause for awe and wonder. And wonder is the beginning of wisdom.

I’ll start with Russell’s comments on light. We know how common “the experience of light” is to meditators. Russell quotes the tenth-century Christian mystic St. Simeon: “a light infinite and incomprehensible...one single light...simple, non-composite, timeless, eternal...the source of life.” Russell then goes on to narrate his own experience: “The more I explored this inner light, the more I saw close parallels with the light of physics. Physical light has no mass, and is not part of the material world. The same is true of consciousness; it is immaterial. Physical light seems to be fundamental to the universe. The light of consciousness is likewise fundamental; without it there would be no experience.

Russell continues: "I began to wonder whether there was some deeper significance in these similarities....Do physical reality and the reality of the mind share the same common ground—a ground whose essence is light?" After questioning himself in this way, he concludes that it was obvious that he would not answer such questions through mere argument and reason. He knew he had to turn to meditation." As both Eastern philosophy and mystical writings make very clear, knowledge of subtler levels of consciousness comes not from reading, or studying the experience of others, but from one's own direct experience. So I began to look into meditation and other spiritual practices."

In advanced consciousness "there is awareness—one is wide awake—but there is no object of awareness. It is pure consciousness, consciousness before it takes on the various forms and qualities of a particular experience. 'Yoga is the cessation of the modifications of mindstuff'—Patanjali....there is the light of pure consciousness, but nothing else. It is the faculty of consciousness without any content."

Here Russell gives some of his own reflections along with quotes from other sources:

"....In physics, light turns out to be absolute. Space, time, mass, and energy are not fixed as we once thought they were....Similarly, in the realm of mind, the faculty of consciousness is absolute. It is the common ground of all experience—including that of space and time. Consciousness itself...is unchanging, eternal."

"....These parallels suggest there may be some deeper relationship between the light of physics and consciousness. Could they share a common ground—a common ground that

manifests in the physical realm as light, and in the realm of mind as the light of consciousness that shines in every being?"

"....Light underlies everything that happens. This is true in the physical world, where every interaction involves the exchange of photons. And it is true in the subjective realm, where light of consciousness is the common ground of every experience."

"....I am not suggesting that light IS God, but that light may be the first manifestation of the underlying ground of all existence, the subtlest level of creation, the closest we can come to that which lies beyond all form. In the realm of conscious experience, the pure self—the inner light that lies behind the countless forms arising in the mind—is where we touch the divine. This explains why many of those who have explored deep within and discovered their true nature have made one of the most contentious and confusing of all mystical claims—the assertion that "I am God."

"....Yet when mystics say, "I am God," or words to that effect, they are not talking of an individual person. Their inner explorations have revealed the true nature of the self, and it is this that they identify with God. They are claiming that the essence of self, the sense of "I am" without any personal attributes, is God."

In support of his position, Russell quotes from three mystics. Sri Ramana Maharshi said, "I am' is the name of God...God is none other than the Self." The twelfth century, Ibn-al-Arabi, one of the most revered Sufi mystics, wrote: 'If thou knowest thine own self, thou knowest God.'" Shankara, the eighth-century Indian saint, whose insights revitalized Hindu teachings, said of his own enlightenment: "I am Brahman....I dwell within all beings as the soul, the pure consciousness, the

ground of all phenomena....In the days of my ignorance, I used to think of these as being separate from myself. Now I know that I am All."

"This sheds...light on the Biblical injunction "Be still, and know that I am God." Russell sees the passage "as an encouragement to still the mind and know, not as an intellectual understanding but as a direct realization, that the 'I am' that is your essential self, the pure consciousness that lies behind all experience, is the supreme Being, the source of all....God appears in each and every one of us as the most intimate and undeniable aspect of ourselves, the consciousness shining in every mind....Consciousness is the source and creator of everything we know."

As Russell uses the famous quote from the Psalms as a springboard to go deeper into the consciousness of what I really am, so Amis used it to explain the nurturing of conscience for further growth. Amis said conscience is a fruit that can only grow in special soil, in a deeper stillness, when our wants are stilled: "It is of this that it was said, 'Be still and know that I am God.' "

"If we identify God with the faculty of consciousness, then the view that consciousness is in everything becomes the view that God is in everything....science and spirit can, and I believe eventually will, be reunited. Their meeting point is consciousness. When science sees consciousness to be a fundamental quality of reality, and religion takes God to be the light of consciousness shining within us all, the two worldviews start to converge."

"This meeting of science and spirit is crucial, not just for a more comprehensive understanding of the cosmos, but also for the future of our species. Today, more than ever, we need a

worldview that validates spiritual inquiry, for it is the spiritual aridity of our current times that lies behind so many of our crises."

"When we consider the writings of great saints and sages, we do not find many claims for God being in the realm of space, time, and matter. When they talk of God—the Holy Spirit, the Divine Light, the Beloved, Yahweh, Elohim, Brahman, Buddha nature, the Being behind all Creation—they are usually referring to a profound personal experience. If we want to find God, we have to look within, into DEEP MIND—a realm that Western science has yet to explore."

"I believe that when we delve as fully into the nature of mind as we have into the nature of space, time, and matter, we will find consciousness to be the long-awaited bridge between science and spirit."

After seeing the depth and expansiveness of light and of consciousness that Russell has laid out for us, I think it is possible to see them as a bridge between the spiritual and physical, between the inner and outer worlds. God is formless, and it seems light/consciousness is the closest we can come to experiencing formlessness. Men and mystics may try to explain the nature of the light they experience, but I believe what is more important is the certainty and satisfaction it endows. Their consciousness is infused with light, and the rapture that often follows needs no words, no proof. Their primary aim is not to explicate or analyze, but to share and kindle a spiritual and intellectual vision. A spiritual culture caters to experience rather than fixed affirmations. We will discuss light more fully below under "Jesus" who is the "Light of the world." There we will also see how various mystics enjoyed the experience of light.

In all that Amis has given us, consciousness is the governing principle of every endeavor the sojourner makes, what he or she is aware of and can make his or her own. And Russell identifies deep consciousness with pure love. Love is, of course, of different kinds. We are not speaking here of self-centered love (eros), but of unconditional love (agape). We can be conscious of anything and everything. Our task is to love what we are conscious of.

Russell says that "unconditional love is the love that springs forth when the mind has fallen silent, and for once we are free from fear, evaluating, and judgment. Like the peace we seek, this unconditional love is always there at our core. It is not something we have to create; it is part of our inner essence. Pure consciousness—consciousness not conditioned by the needs and concerns of the individual self—is pure love. I, in my true essence, am love."

Unconditional love applies not only to our regard for people, but to everything in our life. I am not saying we are to love wars, rapes, murders, etc. In spite of all atrocities, God will not compromise our own freedom. Few comprehend the intrinsic, eternal greatness of the free will with which we are endowed. At any moment, anywhere, I can accept or resist. In the hundreds of choices facing me each day, almost all staying within, I always have the option to take the higher road or not. It may not come across as a banner headline in my life, "I will not serve," but the option is always there, printed large or small.

It has been said that God created the world without us, but He will not save the world without us. The suffering that men cause will end when love is deep enough in us and broad enough to include mankind. Man has great difficulty staying focused on the one thing required of him: love. Certain men have come to realize that "God is love, and they who abide in

love abide in God, and God abides in them." Men and women have come to an awareness of everything that we now know about God, or how would we know it? It is a credit to the endeavors of people like you and me. That growth has to continue in regard to knowing both God and our deepest nature.

I believe the will wants to follow the road of unconditional love. Free will does trust consciousness, but it doesn't always take the better, the more loving course. To do that, I need to turn my attention from doing first to watching first. The focus is inside. I can sense a great change in my bearing when I choose to witness first and not immediately act out. I need to pay more attention to what is going on in my own interior, and not let it constantly be determined by external circumstances.

Amis had made the point that in the development of reason, humanism, and then the physical sciences, the inner tradition had been effectively forgotten or lost. This is another way of saying that we have been conditioned out of our interior, and inside is where love abides. Things don't just happen. I happen to things. And above all, I am what is happening! Love, consciousness, and free will make up what I essentially am. Are these what I see myself as?

I was ready to conclude that if I stay with these, what I essentially am, that will take me to my destiny. And then I thought of being or existence. Is that not more basic to my nature? It occurred to me how easy it is to lock myself into a mind-set, will-set, or emotional-set, in thinking that now I have the answer. When I constrict myself to a determined format, I am also limiting God because He builds on what I am. My only limitation is what I put upon myself. God and I are ultimately and essentially One. If I listen with my heart to the words of Jesus, I can hear the voice of God calling me by name.

I have spent much time on the spiritual path that Amis has laid out for the serious believer. His way comes across to me as a grand offering that the sojourner can freely accept if he or she chooses. I see it as a benign sentencing that must be carried out in some form because much of it is basic to Christianity and human development.

This self-imposed sentencing is necessary for several reasons: we are entrapped by our own ego, by the world in which we must live, and by the control of our own intellect. We let our mind be our master instead of our heart. And the mind is a beautiful servant but a tyrannical master. The East has good reason for putting the mind on the same level as the senses.

The intellect, however, is needed for the work to be done. First, I have to apply the ascetical practices to myself. But secondly, do I apply them to myself reluctantly or with love? Again, love can be practiced at all levels of our development. We have to ask ourselves, "Is my intellect sturdy enough to survive living in the heart?" "Can I let my heart overcome my intellect?"

The many practices of the monks of Mount Athos that Amis covered so well all aim at inner-self-realization accomplished through personal experience. The on-going task consistently opens the journeyman to a larger self, which really is his own deeper self-expanding. It can also be called death (to the ego) and resurrection (of the true self). There are many stages in the development of the soul till it reaches its true self climaxed in nondual awareness, where pure consciousness is pure love, and the soul is one with God. "The soul is in itself a most lovely and perfect image of God"—St. John of the Cross.

After Amis I gave considerable attention to a modern scientific view of our interior journey; Russell expands the role

of the spiritual life to include the dominant place that light and consciousness can play in it. I brought Scripture repeatedly into the picture so that we may build our life on the firmest foundation possible. So we have these three: 1) the spiritual "sentencing," 2) the scientific, 3) the source from scripture.

There is a three-fold reason for considering light fully. First, from a modern scientific point of view, Russell sees light as underlying everything that happens, both in the objective and subjective world. Secondly, since light is such a common phenomenon encountered in the world's spiritual traditions, it would be fruitful to see how various mystics have experienced light. And third, with light having a base in both the Old and New Testaments, I will treat the subject below in discussing John's Gospel since Jesus says, "I am the Light of the world" (John 8:12).

So many good people say so many good things on how a deeper interior life can handle the world's deplorable conditions. For example, it is possible to have a loving acceptance of things since they are a part of life we have to endure. The acceptance aims at life, not at the evil deeds. For my own mental health, I have to find a way that things and happenings make sense. Einstein said one of the most basic choices we have to make is deciding whether the world is a friendly place or not. Saints and mystics explain the role of evil in the world: how it serves the larger purpose of karma, of the importance of human development, and of how God brings good out of evil.

Many good people live to correct these conditions, and they deserve high praise and our support. But they need to act without hate in their heart, or they too become part of the problem. The Oneness of God includes and allows all that is going on in the world because His love is unconditional. He does not separate Himself from, nor is He to be separated from, the

murderer or the atrocity or the pain or the suffering. In attempting to make my own love unconditional, in no way do I approve of another's evil actions. Unconditional love is love of the being behind the actions.

All three, Amis, Russell, and Scripture emphasize love. Amis: "The love of the soul is its salvation." Russell: "Pure consciousness...is pure love. I, in my true essence, am love." Scripture: "God is love, and the person who abides in love abides in God and God abides in him" (1 John 4: 16). I need to come up with the most comprehensive picture of God and life that I can. An example would be: a loving God who creates and acts only out of love for all his creatures. Then I can say, "It's all OK; it's all God." If I hold that as an abiding sense, as my habitual outlook, similar to what the mystics demonstrate, then life can be bearable and acceptable. Such a portrait of life was the life that Jesus lived and what he expected from his followers. It is difficult to understand the finer workings of God, yet I prefer to believe in and live as well as I can the dictum: "God is love."

I turn now to the Johannine writings for the heart of Christianity: the love of God for us revealed in the life-giving acts and words of Jesus.

PART TWO

REVELATION OF THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY

Jesus Christ

Because of the suffering common in the world, I see that as another reason to project it against the backdrop of a greater reality functioning in our universe. It is enlightening to see how a great mystic, the Evangelist John, saw the torment of Jesus, and how he presents that as life-giving to the Christian. Moreover, through John's Gospel we have the same opportunity to encounter Jesus as did the Evangelist's first hearers/readers, for that work was written precisely to make Jesus present to people of all times (20:31). In fully hearing and "seeing" Jesus, we are hearing and "seeing" God, so that whoever believes in His Son receives God's own life. What God gives is His Being, and His Being is Love. In the following lengthy treatment of John's writings, I will try to substantiate the claim made earlier about his Gospel that Raymond E. Brown so concisely summarized: "the most splendid treasury of Christian spirituality ever written." I will attempt to bring to light the underlying subtle

gems hidden in John's personal examples that can surface only with repeated readings and reflections.

The Beginning

In taking Jesus and his words as our primary source, there is an essential nature of Jesus that we must accommodate as best we can. In this our world, Jesus will always be a stranger from above, from another world. His vision, his thoughts, his words, will always be different. They will even be different from ours, who choose to follow him. It is in this very difference that Jesus challenges us to look beyond ourselves and our world, to see another and higher level of values, those of his Father.

To start with, John is the only writing we have that has Jesus himself speak about his previous life with God. John prepares us for Jesus' announcements by paraphrasing Genesis. The Old Testament had begun, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). As at the beginning God directed his attention toward earth, so in the new beginning God directs His attention toward man: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory of an only Son coming from the Father, filled with enduring love" (John 1:1-14).

"Beginning" here is not, as in Genesis, the beginning of creation, for creation comes in verse three: "Through him all things came into being, and apart from him not a thing came to be." Rather the "beginning" refers to the period before creation and is a designation of the sphere of God, revealing the very essence of God as love, and a love going outward to man. It means, as saints have subsequently said, "We have been loved from before the beginning." God is love directing His attention toward man because Word implies an audience and seeks an

encounter, and that is what God is before the foundation of the universe. Word comes out of a speaker, and it implies a listener. The question then becomes, "Does the one who hears respond and how?" In three short phrases, "Word" is mentioned three times. No pun intended, but God is "grounded" in and for man. I will take up "encountering" later, but first I want to draw out fuller implications of being God's Son.

God's Son

When we speak of Jesus as God's Son, we must realize that the title means more than identifying Jesus divine nature. We know the human love between parent and child, and as intense as it can be, it is a dim reflection of the love that lives between the Heavenly Father and Son. In experiencing earthly realities, we tend by way of comparison to think of heavenly realities in terms of what we know on earth. On the other hand, Jesus knew heaven firsthand and sought out earthly things that may be compared to heavenly realities. Thus, heaven to him was more real or true than earth, and God's love was the standard by which our love was to be measured.

Christians owe John a debt of gratitude, for narrating such a divine act highlights the preciousness of the Incarnation. There have been theologians who so esteemed the intensity of love in the Incarnation that they thought perhaps that alone may have saved the world even if Jesus had never been crucified.

When I read and reread the Prologue to John's Gospel, I can't help but think of Jesus' words when the Jews confronted him regarding his origin. Jesus had told them that "Abraham rejoiced at the prospect of seeing my day." This claim caused the Jews to object, "You're not even fifty years old. How can you have seen Abraham?" Jesus answered, "I solemnly assure you, before Abraham even came into existence, I AM." It's as though

Jesus is giving his personal approval and corroboration to the pronouncement of the Prologue, "In the beginning was the Word...And the Word became flesh." Of course, Jesus never read the hymn that we now call the Prologue, but Jesus knew who He was and where He came from. He was with his Father, God, from the beginning before creation. It shows us that relationship and identity can be joined in a way beyond the grasp of the ordinary mind. It indicates further the end of duality.

The Book of Signs and the Book of Glory

Roughly half of John's Gospel (1:19-12:50) is presented as THE BOOK OF SIGNS. In it he gives the account of the public ministry of Jesus where in sign (primarily miracles) and word he shows himself to his own people as the revelation of his Father. Addressed to a wide audience, it provokes a crisis of faith--some believed and some refused to believe. The other half of his Gospel (13:1-20:31), is THE BOOK OF GLORY, addressed to the restricted audience of those who believed. In it, to those who accept him, Jesus shows his glory by returning to the Father in "the hour" of his crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ascension. Fully glorified, he gives his disciples a Holy Spirit (20:22) that begets them from above (3: 3, 5), so that God becomes their Father and Jesus their brother (20:17).

Moreover, the signs of the first Book anticipated what Jesus would do for men once he was glorified. The second Book describes the glorification, that is, "the hour" of passion, death, resurrection, and ascension wherein Jesus is lifted up to the Father to enjoy again the glory that he had with the Father before the world existed (17: 5). These differences are apparent in the first verse of the BOOK OF GLORY: "Jesus was aware that THE HOUR HAD COME for him to pass from this world to the Father. Having loved HIS OWN who were in the world, he now showed his love for them to the very end" (13:1).

The miracles are a work of revelation intimately connected with our salvation and spiritual life. Spiritual deliverance is primary, and the symbolic element is stronger than that portrayed in the Synoptics. Here in John there is little emphasis on the material results of the miracle and great emphasis on the spiritual symbolism. If Jesus heals the official's son and grants him life (4: 46-54), the explanation that follows this miracle makes it clear that the life which Jesus communicates is SPIRITUAL life. If Jesus restores the blind man's sight, the interchange that follows (9: 35-41) shows that Jesus has given him spiritual sight and reduced the Pharisees to spiritual blindness. If Jesus gives life to Lazarus, the remarks of Jesus (11: 24-26) show that the restoration of physical life is important only as a sign of the gift of eternal life.

The prophetic aspect of the signs of Jesus consists in this: the spiritual life and sight which have been attached to physical miracles will be poured forth without such intervention once Jesus has been glorified and the Spirit has been given. Thus, the miracle is a qualitative sign (a material action pointing toward a spiritual reality), but also a temporal sign (what happens before THE HOUR prophesying what will happen after the hour has come). That is why the signs of Jesus are found only in the first book of the Gospel (chs. 1-12). The miracle is to be understood as the sign of the presence of God in Christ.

Jesus' message is clear: his true follower does not need the intervention of a miracle; he can relish the God-like life that Jesus communicates to him through the Spirit. In addressing Thomas (20:29) after this disciple proclaimed Jesus "My Lord and my God!," Jesus praises those who believe in him without seeing signs. He says, "You have believed because you have seen me. Happy those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus goes even further in 14:12: "The man who has faith in me

will perform the same works I perform. In fact, he will perform far greater than these."

In the Evangelist John's thought, Jesus during his lifetime was the tabernacle of God embodying divine glory (1:14), and toward the end of his life in a covenantal setting he promises to give to his followers the glory that God gave him. In Deuteronomy the Tabernacle (site that housed the Ark) was the place where the God of the covenant had set His name. "So now the name of God given to Jesus has been entrusted to his followers. The Lord God who spoke on Sinai assured His people that He was in their midst (Exodus 29:45; Numbers 11:20; Deut 7:21, 23:14). Jesus, who will be acclaimed by his followers as Lord and God (20:28), in the last words that he speaks to them during his mortal life prays that after death he **MAY BE IN THEM**"

What the Evangelist has said so far sets the scene for what is to be played out in the life and death of Jesus. We can proceed only step by step, word by word, but it is good to keep in mind the divine/human being, so far portrayed, who comes face to face with his fellow human/divine beings. To continue, John saw three prevailing themes in Jesus' teaching that could inspire and are meant to transform us: life, light, and love. I would like to expound on each of these.

God as Life

We said Jesus prayed that he may be in us; in so doing he is rewording the presence of divine life as our life. "Life" is a favorite word in John. The Fourth Gospel may be called the Gospel of Life, for 20:31 proclaims the chief purpose for which the Gospel was written: "But these (signs) have been recorded so that you may have faith that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this faith you may have life in his name."

"Eternal life" appears seventeen times in John and six times in 1 John. In talking about life, John does not refer to natural life, yet it is natural life which must have originally suggested the use of "life" as a symbol for a special gift of God. Natural life is man's greatest possession; "life" therefore is a good symbol to indicate the most precious of divine gifts outside man's reach. Since man thinks analogically of God, it was appropriate to speak of God's "life" on the analogy of man's life. God's greatest act of friendship to man was described in terms of man's receiving a share in God's life. The relation of this symbolism to that of becoming God's children is obvious, which will be the next subject to consider in our spiritual plan: Sons and Daughters.

With this background in mind, what does John mean by "eternal life?" This is the life by which God Himself lives, and which the Son of God possesses from the Father (5:26, 6:57). The Son has a specific orientation toward men, for he is the divine Word spoken with the purpose of giving eternal life to men (1:4; 1 John 1:1-2) and it is for this purpose that the Son has come among men (10:10; 1 John 4:9). As far as men are concerned, Jesus is the life (11:25, 14:6, Rev 1:18); his words are spirit and life (John 6:53). Belief in him is the way in which men can receive God's life (3:16, 5:24, 20:31). How is this life communicated? Natural life is given when God breathes His spirit or breath into the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7); so eternal life is given when Jesus breathes forth God's Holy Spirit upon his disciples (John 20:22). The Spirit is the life-giving force (6:63), and the Spirit can only be given after Jesus has conquered death (7:39).

For John, "eternal life" is qualitatively different from natural life, for it is a life that death cannot destroy (11:26). The real enemy of eternal life is not death but sin (1 John 3:15, 5:16). For our Evangelist, "eternal life" is the life of the Age to Come given here and now. The eternal life of the Christian has come to

him now through the action of the Son of God who became man in time. One can possess this eternal life only if one is a branch on the vine which is Jesus (15:5). The concise statement that John gives, "Eternal life consists in this, that they know you the only true God and the one whom you have sent, Jesus Christ" (17:3), is rooted in a historic event. Here "know" means to be in a vital and intimate relationship with the Father and Jesus, and such a relationship comes through committing to Jesus and taking his words to heart.

God's Life Makes Sons and Daughters Eternally

While glorying in God's life that He instills in us, a natural corollary to that is that we are Sons and Daughters of God our Father. This is the next point in our spiritual summary of John's Gospel: "I am Son/Daughter" of God Himself. Just as a child is an issue from its parents, so I as Son am an effusion from God. As the issue takes on the nature of its parents, so I take on the nature of God. Without making an exact duplication, what needs emphasized here is that, like Christ, I originate in God. And I keep my originality! Jesus was the Word of God, yet in his human nature he had to come to the awareness of who he was. My ever deepening Self-realization leaves me in awe of what I really am.

The power that drives my divinization is how God made me coupled with what Jesus did. As my role in this process develops, so the more God occupies my mind. And that means my understanding of God is ever deepening. If I keep saying with conviction and trust, "I am Son," full implications of Sonship dawn on me. I share in the "amness" of God. Those implications are singular and unique to me, just as they were for Jesus. I am one with everything, yet playing multiple roles. My oneness means I can see oneness everywhere. "Behold but One in all things; it is the second that leads you astray"-- Kabir.

The words of Jesus inspire me to realize the power he puts in me:

"Let me firmly assure you,
the man who has faith in me
will perform the same works that I perform.
In fact, he will perform far greater than these,
because I am going to the Father
and whatever you ask in my name
I will do,
so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.
If you ask anything of me in my name,
I will do it" (John 14: 12-14).

God's power in us is there for us, but it is easy to misunderstand the conditions incumbent upon its use. Praying in Jesus' name means praying in union with Jesus. Because the Christian is in union with Jesus and Jesus in in union with the Father, there can be no doubt that the Christian's requests will be granted. The context of union with Jesus means that the requests are no longer concerning the petty things of life. They are requests in harmony with the Christian life and in continuation of the work by which Jesus glorified the Father during his ministry.

An example may be taken from Mary, Jesus' mother, as representative of many of us who believe in Jesus but only with a limited understanding of what he really brings us. Jesus met his mother at Cana (John 2: 1-11). She knew of Jesus' unique power and asked that he put it at the service of her friends at a wedding. She was thinking on the level of family and friends and their needs, that is, the level of this earth, so an act of kindness was expected of Jesus. Mary, however, does accept Jesus' will ("Do whatever he tells you"). In saying this, she illustrates discipleship and the representative role in which John has cast her. We look for earthly help as if it were more real than the graces Jesus

brings us from God. Turning the water into wine was a sign of replacement. It prefigures the significance of the coming grander replacements of temple and Jewish feasts and practices.

God as Light

In John's Gospel there is a strong contrast between light and darkness, between truth and falsehood. Ultimately God will destroy evil, and then wickedness will disappear before justice, as darkness before light. In Johannine thought God is light and in Him there is no darkness (1 John 1:5). The Word who is God (John 1:1) comes into the world as the light of the world (8:12, 9:5) bringing life and light to men (1:4, 3:19). The coming of light was made necessary by man's sin which brought darkness over the world, a darkness which has been striving to overcome the light left to sinful man (John 1:5). Thus, for John, the leader of the forces of light is the uncreated Word, while the leader of the forces of darkness is the Prince of this world, which Luke (22: 53) speaks of as the Reign of Darkness when Jesus is arrested.

By way of response to the coming of the light, men line up as sons of light or sons of darkness according to whether they come to the light radiant in Jesus or turn away. What separates is the acceptance or rejection of Jesus. Toward the end of Jesus' ministry and in the last days of his life, the term "world" is increasingly used for those who turn away from Jesus, and so "world" and "darkness" practically become synonymous. At the moment when Jesus is handed over to death by Judas at Satan's instigation, darkness becomes most intense (13:27); then John dramatically comments, "It was night" (13:30). It was still dark on Easter morning when Mary came to the tomb (20:1), but this was all changed by Jesus' resurrection.

As faith in Jesus begins to overcome the world (1 John 5:4), 1 John 2:8 exclaims, "The darkness is lifting and the real light is already shining," Christians must walk in this light by their pure way of life and by their love for one another (1 John 1: 6-7, 2: 9-10). Ultimately in the heavenly Jerusalem there will come a day when light will have triumphed completely and there will be no more darkness, for it was a created reality from the beginning. "And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb...and there shall be no night there"(Revelation 21: 23-25).

The dualistic contrast between light and darkness in John's Gospel is strong, but just as pronounced is the notion of realized eschatology (final things) that Jesus initiates. John doesn't omit future and apocalyptic eschatology, but his emphasis is on what Jesus does now in our life. Wisdom in the Old Testament is said to be a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty, a reflection of the everlasting light of God.

The Fourth Gospel stands apart from the other Gospels in presenting Jesus as incarnate wisdom descended from on high, indeed, from another world, to offer people light and truth. John's unremitting purpose is deepening the faith of believers. In Old Testament literature, Wisdom is said to be a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty, a reflection of the everlasting light of God and lights up the path for people. Jesus, the divine Word, is divine Wisdom come among us, the creatures he created. This is why Jesus speaks in a solemn, poetic, sacred style. It is no surprise then that he speaks of himself frequently in the first person, "I am...."

A clear example of Jesus' being utterly different can be seen from the exclamation of the police attendants to the chief priests and Pharisees. Jesus had said, "I myself am the bread of life. No one who comes to me shall ever be hungry, and no one

who believes in me shall ever again be thirsty" (John 6: 35). This is no simple human way of speaking. When the police who were sent to arrest Jesus came back empty-handed, the explanation to their superiors was, "Never has a man spoken like this" (John 7: 36).

These words were truer than they could have realized. Jesus spoke as the divine Word, divine Wisdom, become flesh. Some may wonder why Jesus is called "the Word" rather than "Wisdom." The key is in the dynamic connotation of WORD. One could possess wisdom without that affecting others. WORD, however, involves not only the speaker but also an audience to be addressed. Thus when we say in our hymn, "In the beginning was the Word...and the Word was God," we are describing a God who was bringing into being a creation that He would address, that He would be concerned about, that He would love, and that ultimately by incarnation He would become part of.

John makes a pointed remark on Jesus being the light of the universe and passing that light on to his followers: "I am the light of the world. No follower of mine shall ever walk in darkness, rather that person will possess the light of life" (John 8: 12). To stress the point, at the pool of Siloam, Jesus repeats himself, "I am the light of the world," before giving sight to the man born blind. The man bowed down to worship Jesus and believed in him (John 9: 1-38). John sees Jesus as the supreme example of divine Wisdom active in history. Indeed, for this evangelist, Jesus is personified Wisdom itself.

God as Love

Light and life are prevailing themes in Johannine writings, but the most dominant and most important theme is love. I cannot emphasize enough the role that love plays in our spiritual/human journey. I believe it is the central message of

Christ, in the example he set, in the commandments he gave, and in the Scriptural accounts of his life and teachings. Since love is the bedrock of Christ's teaching and therefore the indisputable core of Christianity, I will give extensive time and space to this subject.

Seeing the different faces of love as John describes them, I am reminded of an updated version of the Beatitude, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5: 5). Closer to the Aramaic meaning, it would read, "Blessed are they who soften what is rigid within, they shall receive power and strength from the universe." Love is God's given softener for our hardness. Love touches the varied yearnings of the heart whose longings are quenched when it allows itself to be touched by God's outstretched hand of compassion. His compassion then flows into me, and I am changed.

Johannine usage prefers the use of verbs for the concept of "love." For example, the noun, AGAPE, appears 30 times, while the verb, AGAPAN, appears 71 times. Love must be LOVING. This is "the unique love made possible through Jesus--a spontaneous, unmerited, creative love, opening the way to fellowship with God and flowing from God to the Christian and from the Christian to his neighbor." Another way of putting it is that Johannine AGAPAN-AGAPE represents "an outgoing, effect-producing, gift-giving love. It is a love that is restless until it shows itself, as in the statement, 'God loved (AGAPAN) the world so much that He gave the only Son' (John 3:16; I John 4: 9).

And in Jesus this love pressed on to find its culminating effectiveness in dying and rising for men: 'He now showed his love for them to the very end' (John 13:1). It is a love even to the point of death (15: 13). Thus God's whole saving relationship to men can be expressed in the statement, 'God is love' (I John 4:

8,16). The ideal Christian is presented in terms of love as the Beloved Disciple.

The Dynamic of Love

Promises in Return for Loving

There is an assurance that John gives for the presence of God in our life. A statement about loving Jesus and keeping his commandments/word(s) occurs three times (John 14: 15, 21, and 23); and in each instance there is a promise that a divine presence will come to those who meet the demand.

In 14:15-17 it is the Paraclete/Spirit who will come to dwell with the disciples: "If you love me...the Father will give you another Paraclete to be with you forever." In 14:18-21 it is Jesus who will come to dwell within the disciples: "I shall not leave you orphans: I am coming back to you...Whoever keeps the commandments that he has from me is the man who loves me." In 14: 23-24 it is the Father who will come along with Jesus to make a dwelling place within the disciples: "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. Then my Father will love him, and we shall come to him and make our dwelling place with him."

There is a triadic pattern here placing in rough parallelism the Spirit, Jesus, and the Father (with Jesus). The three types of divine indwelling have been woven into a unit that begins and ends on the theme of loving Jesus and keeping his commandments. Most likely, in the final stages of Johannine theology, all these in-dwellings were thought to be accomplished through and in the Paraclete. The Paraclete is the presence of Jesus while Jesus is absent; and since the Father and Jesus are one, the presence of the Father and Jesus is not really different from the presence of Jesus in the Paraclete.

Jesus' demand to be loved is perfectly at home in the covenant atmosphere of the Last Discourse and the Last supper. There is a parallel between the demand of the covenant God of Sinai to be loved exclusively by His people (Deut 6: 5) and the demand for exclusive love on the part of Jesus who is God's visible presence among men, establishing a new covenant with them.

I think we have here the most solid basis for the conviction of our oneness with God. But Jesus spells out three times the condition necessary: "If you love me...." While the Paraclete/Spirit is not corporeally visible, Jesus declares and repeats it is love that ends duality and brings about our union with God. Certainty of God's loving presence in me as me gives me the strength and willingness to act with love in all I do.

Peter's Loving Turn-around

An example of the primacy of love in John's Gospel and in our spiritual life is demonstrated by the way Jesus handled the three denials of Peter. Peter had said to Jesus, "I will lay down my life for you" (John 13: 37), and his actions later prove him cowardly when he denies Jesus three times: to the high priest's maid, to an unidentified observer at the fire sight, and then to one of the high priest's servants (John 18: 17-27).

When the risen Christ appears to Peter, there is a threefold pattern in the encounter of question, answer, and response (John 21: 15-23). I am abstracting here from the kind of authority conferred upon Peter in this scene, whether that of discipleship, apostleship, or other. Whatever power is awarded, it required the restoration of love for Peter's rehabilitation to be complete. Jesus' thrice repeated question, "Do you love me?" and Peter's threefold "You know that I love you" appears to be a

symbolic undoing of Peter's threefold denial of Jesus. Devoted love is of the essence.

Peter's repentance would be implicit in his pathetic insistence on his love and in the anguish that the thrice-repeated question causes him: "Peter was hurt because Jesus had asked him for the third time, 'Do you love me?'" So he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know well that I love you" (John 21:17). Instead of boasting that he loves Jesus more than others, a chastened Peter rests his case on Jesus knowledge of what is in his heart. Jesus shows himself merciful despite Peter's betrayal. Only indirectly does the episode refer to Peter's denials and rehabilitation; the direct import of the threefold question and answer is not so much that Jesus doubts Peter but that Peter's love for Jesus is earnest.

Faces of Love

Since love is the essence of Christianity, and perhaps of all religions, we especially need to turn to John's First Epistle where the subject is given in-depth treatment. To start with, the ambiguous phrase, "the love of God," more often means God's love for us, rather than our love for God. In 4:7 at the beginning of this unit the author says clearly, "Love is from God," putting emphasis on God as the source rather than the object of our love. In 3:1 the author had spoken of "the love the Father has bestowed on us in enabling us to be called God's children;" here it is made explicit that begetting by God is what makes love possible (4:7). In 3:10 the author had stated that anyone who does not love his brother "does not belong to God;" here he specifies that such a lack of love indicates that a person has known nothing of God (4:8).

We see first that love begins in God. Secondly, it is God's love for us that makes loving possible in us. "Finally, he

dramatizes as effectively as has ever been done in any literature the contradiction between love for God and hate for a fellow human being: 'The person who has no love for his brother whom he has seen cannot love the God he has never seen' (4:20). The result is that this third treatment of love in I John is the one that has been the most cited in Christian reflection and literature on the subject."

The idea that love is from or belongs to God who is love dominates this part of I John. Like truth, light and life, "love" is a reality from above, even as is divine begetting and, indeed, Jesus himself. This is an application of the general principle that human beings are in the likeness of God, but now that likeness is not through creation but through faith and love.

Love the Criterion for Knowing God

John also presents love as a criterion for the knowledge of God (1 John 4:7), a claim made understandable by the parallel role of faith and love in this work, for faith is related to knowledge in Johannine thought. The author says, "Everyone who loves...knows God." It is not an external but an existential criterion; only through keeping the commandment to love one another does one gain knowledge of the God who is love. This is true to the Old Testament picture where covenant love is characteristic of God, and the absence of this love on earth is equated with an absence of the knowledge of God (Hosea 4:1).

We find that the author in verse eight of this same chapter moves from his previous affirmation, "Love is from God," to the claim "God is love." He is not attempting a precise definition of God, but describing God in relation to human beings. And He seeks from each human a reciprocal relationship. If God is love toward us, it is because He is love in Himself. The statement, "God is love" (4:8, 16), may be the most famous

saying in the New Testament. St. Augustine rapturously writes, "if nothing else in praise of love was said in the rest of the Epistle, nay in the rest of Scripture, and we had heard from the mouth of the Spirit of God only that one statement, 'God is love,' we would not have to look for anything else." This does not mean that there was no divine love before the coming of God's Son into the world. God IS love; he did not become love at the Incarnation but only revealed what He already was.

Something further might be added here. If "God is love" describes God in relation to human beings, it means that "I am loved!" If I know that I am loved, it has ever deeper vibrations. If I take such unselfish love to heart, it changes my whole being. It is akin to falling in love while knowing another has fallen in love with me. This same love is behind any descriptive term for God, such as "Father" or "Mother." God is a loving Father and a caring Mother.

What is new in this revelation of God as love is that He has given His unique and beloved Son, even as Abraham was willing to give Isaac. The reference in verse 10 to this giving or sending "as an atonement for sins" shows that the author is thinking not only of the Incarnation but also of the death of Jesus, even as previously in 3:16: "This is how we have come to know what love means: for us Christ laid down his life." "No one can have greater love than this: to lay down one's life for those one loves" (John 15:13).

Three Revelations Springing from Love

We can speak of a triple revelation: first, that God has an only beloved Son; second, that He is willing to send or give this Son, even to death; third, that He is willing to do this for us, "for our sins," and "that we may have life through him." Similarly, the author of the Odes of Solomon (3:3-4) exclaims, "I should

not have known how to love the Lord if He had not continuously loved me. Who is able to discern love except one who is loved?"

When the author says in 1 John 4:9 that "God's love was revealed in us," we can take it literally that it is "revealed in us" and not simply as a synonym for "revealed to us." When he says, "God sent His Son...that WE MAY HAVE LIFE THROUGH HIM" (4:9), he shows that divine revelation includes what happens WITHIN Christians.

The love of God incarnate in Jesus must become incarnate in Christians; and love, which is received in and with divine life, must, like that life, be active. The author could easily have said, "If God so loved us, we in turn ought to love God." But while divine love has an element of reciprocity, it is primarily outgoing to others, in imitation of God Himself. This is part of the revelation "in us" just discussed. God's commandments are His words coming from His inner being. He gives the commandment to love because He is love. The Word that became flesh and the word that says we should love one another are intertwined in Johannine thought.

In 4:12 we read, "No one has ever seen God. Yet if we love one another, God abides in us; and His love has reached perfection in us." The author dares to make divine indwelling dependent on and expressed by our loving one another. Because love reaches perfection by our loving one another, divine indwelling in some ways is a greater intimacy than seeing God.

Perfect Love

The fact that the Word was with God already before creation implies a God who is outward-looking, for a word needs an audience. This God is Who He is when He is speaking and acting; and He is love when He is loving. His love is not

PERFECTLY what it should be until it begets children in His image who themselves love. In John 17:23 Jesus prays to his Father for those who believe in him, "that they may be brought to perfection as one; thus the world may come to know that you sent me and that you loved them even as you loved me." In other words, love is brought to perfection in the believer when the believer is brought to perfection in love. Jesus himself, the embodiment of divine love, showed his love for his own to the very end (John 13:1) by laying down his life for them. This was the perfection of divine love in Jesus. A previous passage in I John (3:16) has already called for an imitation of that example: "For us Christ laid down his life; so ought we in turn to lay down our lives for the brothers."

Love reaches its perfection in the abiding in each other that binds God and the Christians (4:17). Love that is truly expressive of the God who sent His only Son must be effective in us in terms of loving others; then "we are the same as Christ is" (4:17), a Christ who loved us enough to die for us and who continues as a Paraclete in the Father's presence as an atonement for our sins (2:1-2). In 2: 28-3:1 the confidence of the Christian was related to "the love the Father has bestowed in enabling us to be called God's children;" here it is related to a love that has reached perfection in a divine indwelling that makes us "just the same as Christ is." These are two different ways of expressing the same result of love,

Love Casts Out Fear

In 1 John 4:18 the author develops the theme of Christian confidence by speaking eloquently of how love excludes fear. I Peter can urge, "Love the brotherhood and fear God," but I John assures the readers that there is no need for fear at all. NO fear is presented positively in the Johannine writings. When love has been perfected in divine indwelling, how can one

be afraid of the God who already abides in the heart? To be afraid of God is already to be suffering the punishment of a negative judgment. Neither in this world nor on Judgment Day can a Christian be judged negatively by a God who dwells lovingly within. Warnings are for others; we are God's children. This is not arrogance, since our status and way of life comes from God ("We love because He loved us first").

The basic theme set in 4:20-21 is that love for God and love for brother are two facets of the same love ("The person who loves God must love his brother as well"), so that where one is missing, the other is missing. The reason as given clearly in 5:1-2 is that one's "brother" is a child of the God from whom love comes, and God the Father expresses concern for His children by having each child love the other. The Johannine author does not speak of two commandments, nor does he give priority to love for God. The one commandment involves both love for brother and love for God; and if there is a practical priority, it is with love for brother.

Love the Criterion for God's Indwelling

In 4:12 the author spoke of God's abiding in us, and in 4:13 offers a criterion for the mutual indwelling of God and the Christian, which is the Spirit: "Yet if we love one another, God abides in us; and His love has reached perfection in us. This is how we know that we abide in Him and He abides in us: in that He has given us of His own Spirit." In 3:24 the Evangelist had said, "Now this is how we can know that God abides in us: from the Spirit that he gave us." In 4:1-6 he identified God's Spirit as the motivating force for BELIEF in Jesus Christ: "Everyone who confesses Jesus came in the flesh reflects the Spirit which belongs to God." It is not surprising, then, to find a reference to the Spirit here on love as well. The ability to see Jesus as the Son of God and the Savior of the world is part of the work of

Paraclete/Spirit. Jesus has gone to the Father and the world can see him no longer; but the Paraclete proves the world wrong about him (John 16:10).

Through this Christology we have come to know and believe the extent and depth of God's love--a love to the very end (John 13:1) in self-giving for others (15:13). This is not merely an intellectual knowledge, for the love that God has is "in us" (I John 4:16) in the sense that it has confirmed us to His Son by making us His children, and the way we live is a manifestation of God's love. Experience of that love makes the Johannine Christian grow in knowledge and belief. Herein is fulfilled Jesus' prayer for future believers in John 16:16: "And to them I made known Your name; and I will continue to make it known, so that the love You had for me may be IN THEM, and I may be in them."

To truly live we need (eternal) life, light, and love, and we possess all three because God has shared his very own life with us. We have seen how the Johannine school expounds on all three of these. I would like now to step out of the Gospel for a spell to note how various mystics have experienced and interpreted these same three. It hardly needs mention that the life of Christ, which we have been pursuing, has formed the basis for Christian mystics through the ages. We see the continuation of the Paraclete's work in their adaptation and application. It is the personal construction of the project Jesus laid out for us, and I will let the individuals speak for themselves. After exploring some of them, we will return to the Johannine Jesus.

God's Life in the World

Evelyn Underhill in *MYSTICISM*, (New American Library, New York, 1974), is an excellent summarizer. She begins, rather tersely, "Life, the Son, hidden Steersman of the

Universe; the Logos (Word), Fire, or cosmic Soul of Things. This out-birth or Concept of the Father's Mind, which He possesses within Himself, as Battista Vernassa was told in her ecstasy, is That Word of creation which, since It is alive and infinite, no formula can contain: the Word eternally "spoken" or generated by the Transcendent Light."

This life "is at once the personal and adorable comrade of the mystic's adventure and inmost principle, the sustaining power, of a dynamic universe; for that which intellect defines as the Logos or Creative Spirit, contemplative love KNOWS as Wonderful, Counsellor, and Prince of Peace.

Since Christ...IS Divine Life Itself--the drama of Christianity expressing this fact and its implications "in a point"-it follows that His active spirit is to be discerned, not symbolically, but in the most veritable sense, in the ecstatic and abounding life of the world. In the rapturous vitality of the birds, in their splendid glancing flight: in the swelling of buds and the sacrificial beauty of the flowers: in the great and solemn rhythms of the sea--there is somewhat of Bethlehem in all these things, somewhat too of Calvary in their self-giving pains."

The mystic accepts and transmutes to a more radiant life those two profound but apparently contradictory definitions of Reality: Eternal Becoming, God immanent and dynamic, striving with and in His world, the un-resting "flux of things," the crying aloud of that Word sounding through all things everlastingly, is here placed once for all in true relation with pure transcendent and unmoved Being, the Absolute One. This Absolute is discerned by mystic intuition as the Unity in whom all diversities must cease; the Ocean to which that ceaseless and painful Becoming, that un-resting river of life, in which we are immersed, tends to return: the Son going to the Father.

Love Settles God in Us and We in God

Underhill cites the experiences of dozens if not hundreds of the world's saints and mystics, and is herself a mystic to many of her readers. She says "light is ineffable and uncreated, the perfect symbol of pure undifferentiated Being." Augustine reminds us that it is above the intellect, but known to him who loves. This Uncreated Light is the "the deep yet dazzling darkness" of the Dionysian school, "dark for its surpassing brightness." Dante called it supreme brightness, wherein he saw multiplicity in unity, the ingathered leaves of all the universe: the Eternal Father, or Fount of all things. "For well we know," says Ruysbroeck, "that the bosom of the Father is our ground and origin, wherein our life and being is begun."

Enlightened souls speak of the Reality they experience in either immanent or transcendent terms. All experiences are governed by temperament, by the influences of heredity and environment. The Shining Light may ever be the same, but the person through whom it passes has been molded and conditioned. Sometimes there is the personal perception of the Inward Light, awesome yet intimate; others may be thunderstruck by awareness of the Absolute, origin of all that is. Unearthly mysteries hide in the soul's secret silence, yet speak eloquently to an ear attuned to heavenly music. A mystic joy arises from "seeing" the Absolute binding the universe with love. One may feel inundated by a glory surpassing all beauty. A common ground, however, is not love for joy, but love for love.

There is a reason we have one-sided and varied reports on these illuminating experiences. And it is from him or her we get the report. In these experiences I see an extension of consciousness in two directions: the intuitional and the transcendental energies are vastly expanded. Their piercing perception bring the far-sighted future into the here-now. There

is a primal harmony the mystics have tapped into, and they invite us to share their vision.

Underhill has some pertinent comments on how Divine Truth has appeared to its lovers. The various aspects of their engagements may be summarized under the principles of emanation and immanence and are enshrined in the Greek and Latin names of God. The root meaning of DEUS is day, shining, the Transcendent Light; the true meaning of Theos is supreme desire or prayer--the Inward Love. Together they form a remarkable definition of that Godhead which is the object of the mystic's desire: Divine Love immanent in the soul spurs on that soul to union with the transcendent and Absolute Light, the source, the goal, and the life of all created things.

It is obvious that there are limitations on how well we can know the experience of another. There is the first stage of the experience itself. The second stage is the experiencer him or herself trying to explain the happening. The third stage would be anyone trying to digest what happened. In the mystic realm, the knowledge is further curtailed since the unfathomable infinite can never fully reveal itself under the limitations of our earthly existence, particularly of thoughts and words. Consequently, the mystic often seeks a new and vital image which can well be beyond the vocabulary of formal religion. At the same time it may serve to conserve the original power of the experience and spark the imagination to more vivid life. The mystic himself usually comes to realize that even heavenly food cannot satisfy his "hunger for the Absolute."

Human work must be joined to grace. The order of unfolding of the mystic's power is normally Recollection, Quiet, and Contemplation. Others may state it as the Purgative, Illuminative, and Unitive stages. The eye that looks upon time must be supplanted by the spiritual eye that looks upon eternity.

Not only must that eye be opened, it must be trained so that it may endure to gaze steadfastly at the Uncreated Light. I have found in my own, and my friends' meditations, that if I can stay with the witness, effort ceases. I drop into a deeper level of myself and the self-expands. It is obvious that here the will plays a dominant role. Watching represents a willingness and an openness; light/illumination and other wonderful things can happen.

Underhill asks the basic question of our pursuit: What is the essence or nature of this mystic illumination? First of all, it imparts certitude, which cannot be under estimated. Light or illumination is symbolic yet descriptive. The mystic experiences a kind of radiance, a flooding of the person with new light. "A new sun rises above the horizon, and transfigures their twilight world."

In one short paragraph Underhill summarizes the experiences of four recognized mystics. Whitman calls it "Light rare, untellable." Mechthild of Magdeburg named it, "The flowing light of the Godhead." St. Hildegard said, "The Living Light speaks," which she described as more brilliant than the brightness round the sun. And finally, St. Teresa called it an "infused brightness, a light which knows no night; but rather, as it is always light, nothing ever disturbs it."

Underhill says there are three main types of experience that appear again and again in the history of mysticism; nearly always in connection with illumination, rather than any other phase of mystical development. They may be regarded as its main characteristics, but they cannot cover all the ground.

1. A joyous apprehension of the Absolute: that which many writers call "the practice of the presence of God." A distinction may be made in that this is the

"betrothal" rather than the "marriage" of the soul, since it is not immersed in its Origin.

2. This clarity of vision may be enjoyed in regard to the physical world. William Blake says, " the doors of perception are cleansed" so that "everything appears to man as it IS, infinite."

3. Alongside this two-fold extension of consciousness, the energy of the intuitional or transcendental self may be dramatically increased.

Illumination tends to appear mainly under one or all of these forms. The manifestation of the ineffable and unfathomable includes the actuality of something mysterious and wonderful taking place. It might be said that the application of light in one's life is a clearer sight of how God works, and especially seeing one's own role in His plan. God's light conveys wisdom, so we can see more of how He works and of how we are to act.

Sometimes in meditation light is simply there after great awareness. At other times it is just present when seeing myself in a good act. Seeing light often coincides with feeling bodily lightness.

Here is where light touches upon the most important step in our spiritual plan: love. Light is spawned by love. She calls the Inward Light the fire of mystic love while quoting St. John of the Cross:

"Blest night of wandering
In secret, where by none might I be spied,
Nor I see anything
Without a light to guide

Save that which in my heart burnt in my side.

That light did lead me on,
More surely than the shining of noontime.

Lover to lover's sight,
Lover to loved, in marriage of delight.

Next I would like to quote Meister Eckhart's understanding of light. I quote at length from one of his sermons because it captures graphically the wonder of light in the soul of the devoted follower. It goes beyond "theologizing" to explain how light can expand consciousness into deeper realization:

"Sometimes I have spoken of a light that is uncreated and not capable of creation and that is in the soul. I always mention this light in my sermons; and this same light comprehends God without a medium, uncovered, naked, as he is in himself; and this comprehension is to be understood as happening when the birth takes place. Here I may truly say that this light may have more unity with God than it has with any power of the soul, with which, however, it is one in being. For you should know that this light is not nobler in my soul's being than is the feeblest or crudest power, such as hearing or sight or anything else which can be affected by hunger or thirst, frost or heat; and the simplicity of my being is the cause of that. Because of this, if we take the powers as they are in my being, they are all equally noble; but if we take them as they work, one is much nobler and higher than another."

"That is why I say that if a man will turn away from himself and from all created things, by so much will you be made one and blessed in the spark of the soul, which has never touched either time or place. This spark rejects all created things, and wants nothing but its naked God, as he is in himself. It is not

content with the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit, or with the three persons as far as each of them persists in his properties. I say truly that this light is not content with the divine nature's generative or fruitful qualities. I will say more, surprising though this is. I speak in all truth, truth that is eternal and enduring, that this same light is not content with the simple divine essence in its repose, as it neither gives nor receives; but it wants to know the source of this essence, it wants to go into the simple ground, into the quiet desert, into which distinction never gazed, not the Father, nor the Son, nor the Holy Spirit. In the innermost part, where no one dwells, there is contentment for that light, and there is more inward than it can be to itself, for this ground is simple silence, in itself immovable, and by this immovability all things are moved, all life is received by those who in themselves have rational being" (Meister Eckhart, *ibid.*, p. 198).

I think Eckhart's message here is to let the light teach us. He speaks of light as a noble power, a living entity. I may not be able to decipher what the light offers, but that in itself puts me face to face with the incomprehensible, unfathomable God; and a new learning curve can begin in the dark light. I may feel closer to people and my environment and simultaneously more distant. The closeness comes from gradually recognizing that I and those are one, and the distancing comes from realizing there is so much more of reality to comprehend. I need to stay open to the Ever-Greater God.

God's Love in the World

Underhill calls love the principle of attraction, which seems to partake at once of the transcendental and the created worlds. I like to regard love as foundation, the basic ground of what we are. The Father, the origin of all, generates the Logos (Word) as the Object of His thought. "He contemplates Himself and all things in an eternal Now," says Ruysbroeck, who

continues his explanation which I paraphrase: Then this personal Spirit of Love represents the relation between the two, and constitutes the very character of God. The heavenly Father, with all that lives in Him, is actively turned towards His Son as to His own Eternal Wisdom. And that same Wisdom, with all that lives in it, is actively turned back towards the Father. And of that meeting between the Father and the Son is born the Holy Spirit, their mutual Love.

Proceeding from Light and Life, the Father and Son as one are implicit in both the Absolute Source and the dynamic flux of things. This divine spirit of desire is found enshrined in our very selfhood, and is the agent by which that selfhood is merged in the Absolute Self. Meister Eckhart says "the love wherewith we love is the Holy Spirit....All those motives by which we are moved to love, in these is nothing else than the Holy Spirit."

There are outgrowths from God's Own Nature which I will call spiritual applications. Traditional Christianity sees the Incarnation as the historical birth and life of Jesus. Mystic seers see not only the temporal and passing aspects of the Incarnation, but they also perceive a perpetual Cosmic and personal process. For them the Incarnation is an event renewed in the body of everyone who is on the way to the fulfillment of his original destiny.

Ruysbroeck puts it this way: "From our proper Ground, that is to say from the Father and all that which lives in Him, there shines an eternal Ray, the which is the Birth of the Son." On this perpetual generation of the Word, Eckhart speaks in his Christmas sermon, "We are celebrating the feast of the Eternal Birth which God the Father has borne and NEVER CEASES TO BEAR in all Eternity: whilst this birth also comes to pass in Time and in human nature. St. Augustine says this Birth is ever

taking place." And Eckhart concludes, "But if it takes place not in me, what avails it? Everything lies in this, that it should take place in me." Here the twofold character of this Mystic Birth is exhibited.

I need to see if the ongoing Incarnation is taking place in me: every movement toward goodness, like using my paper towel to wipe the sink clean in a public rest room; every thought of love, like seeing someone belittling a child but not judging. I just need to open myself to the possible. I know in ordinary life how empowering it is when I feel I can do something, when at last I think it is possible to accomplish a task. The same holds true in the spiritual realm. Just to feel something is possible lifts my spirit.

Eckhart concludes, "This change, this upsetting, is called re-birth....To be RE-BORN means to return to a world where the spirit of wisdom and love governs and the animal-man obeys." "If you would truly know how these things come to pass," says St. Bonaventure, "ask it of grace, not of doctrine; of desire, not of intellect; of the ardours of prayer, not of the teachings of the schools; of the darkness, not of the day, not of illumination, but of that Fire which enflames all and wraps us in God with great sweetness and most ardent love, The Fire which most truly is God."

Dionysius reflects the same idea when he instructs his pupil, Timothy: "I counsel that in the earnest exercise of mystical contemplation thou leave the senses and the operations of the intellect and all things that the senses or the intellect can perceive...and so shall be led upwards to the Ray of that Divine Darkness which exceedeth all existence."

In trying to encapsulate the mystic's experience Underhill says that "the end which the mystic sets before him is

conscious union with a living Absolute....the Uncreated Light in which the Universe is bathed, which he can only describe to us as DARK....In the mystic this union is conscious, personal, and complete." In quoting St. John of the Cross she says, "It is God Himself who is then felt and tasted." It has also been said that a nameless SOMETHING is "great enough to be God, small enough to be me."

Before leaving Underhill, she stresses that in bright contemplation "the soul is full gladsome and jolly. Utter peace and wild delight, every pleasure-state known to man's normal consciousness, are inadequate to the description of her joy. She has participated for an instant in the Divine Life; knows all and knows nought. She has learnt the world's secret, not by knowing, but by being: the only way of really knowing anything."

In concluding this section on the experiences of several mystics, their writings may seem ponderous or abstract or difficult to comprehend. In contrast, I would like to quote another mystic who writes in an entirely different vein. St. Thomas Aquinas is probably the greatest theologian the Catholic Church has produced. Differing from his elevated intellectual style that we see in his theological treatises, Aquinas takes a whimsical turn in his poem entitled, ON BEHALF OF LOVE, to give a concrete example of love in practice, identifying spirituality with love.

ON BEHALF OF LOVE

*Every truth without exception--no matter
who makes it--is from God.*

*if a bird got accused of singing too early
in the morning,*

*if a lute began to play magically on its own
in the square*

*and the enchanting sounds it made drove a pair of lovers
into a wild public display of
passion,*

*if this lute and bird then got called before the inquisition
and their lives were literally at stake,*

could not God walk up and say before the court,

"All acts of beauty are mine, all happens on behalf of love"?

*And while God was there, testifying for our heart's desires,
hopefully the judge would be astute enough
to brave a question
that could go,*

*"Dear God, you say all acts of beauty are yours,
Surely we can believe that. But what of all the actions
we see in this world,
for is there any force in existence greater than the power
Of your omnipresent hand?"*

*And God might have responded, "I like that question,"
adding, "May I ask you one as well?"*

*And then God would say,
"Have you ever been in conversation when children entered
the room, and you then ceased speaking because your
wisdom knew they were not old enough
to benefit—to understand?"*

*As exquisite is your world, most everyone in it
is spiritually young.*

*Spirituality is love, and love never wars with the minute,
the day, one's self and others. Love would rather die
than maim a limb,
a wing.*

*Dear, anything that divides man from man,
earth from sky, light from dark, one religion from another...
O, I best keep silent, I see a child
just entered the
room."*

This poem is from LOVE POEMS FROM GOD, Penguin Compass, New York, NY 10014, p 123-124. The author, Daniel Ladinsky, describes the last days of Aquinas, "Near the end of his life he had a divine revelation while celebrating mass in the chapel of St. Nicholas in Naples that caused him to state, 'I can no longer write, for God has given me such glorious knowledge that all contained in my works are as straw--barely fit to absorb the holy wonders that fall in a stable' " (p 122). Three months later he died at the age of forty-nine.

Encountering Jesus in John

To return once more to the Evangelist, we saw in discussing the Prologue that Jesus is the "Word" of God, and that the dynamic connotation of Word implies an audience and seeks an encounter. John gives us the beautiful stories of the encounters with Jesus of the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, and Lazarus. Interaction or encounter is an essential part of the life of Jesus. It is the entry to receiving God's life, not only in Jesus' time but for all people of all time.

John does not use language of thinking about Jesus or meditating on him, but the need of encountering him. When we read about the personal encounters of various individuals with Jesus, we note how they often misunderstand Jesus. In seeing their difficulty we frequently offer our own solution, and bang! We are hooked into a dialogue with Jesus! We may even be surprised by him when he continues to speak from above. Then

we have encountered Jesus! In looking at the goodness of Jesus, the way Jesus treats people, accepting them where they are, the way he lived and died on the cross, can we help but admire and love him? Goodness attracts us to loving. Encountering Jesus must spill over into loving him for his life and death to have an effect on our own. Love is what God is and what our deepest nature is.

I wish to recount three extraordinary encounters with Jesus. As a master story-teller, John proceeds to show how Jesus' message was received by various individuals.

The Samaritan Woman

The first of these is that of the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42). Her dialogue with Jesus illustrates how different road blocks obstruct the way to faith in Jesus. Early in his ministry, passing through Samaria, Jesus came upon Jacob's well and sat down to rest. When a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." The woman, thought to be impure by the Jews, could not understand how a Jew could ask her for a drink. This was the first block in dealing with Jesus: "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (Jews, remember, use nothing in common with Samaritans). It sounds like a defensive reaction coming from knowing first-hand the social inequality of life. Jesus was not going to enter into a conversation about the whole world of injustice.

Jesus would offer something that could help her catapult her present disparity: "If only you recognized God's gift, he would have given you living water." Jesus meant water that gives life, a water symbolic of revelation. She thought he meant flowing, bubbling water. Here we have the second obstacle: misunderstanding Jesus. She thought he meant ordinary drinking water and contemptuously asks him if he thought he was greater

than Jacob who provided the well (4:12). Jesus avoided the issue of who was greater, refusing to be sidetracked from his main goal. He explained that he was speaking of the water that springs up to eternal life, a water that will permanently end thirst. The woman saw a great convenience in this, not having to come every day to draw water. People will always be attracted to a religion that makes life more comfortable.

Jesus let her know that he was aware of her five husbands and present live-in companion, who was not her husband (4:16). And still, Jesus did not reject her or criticize her. Surprised by the knowledge Jesus had of her situation and realizing he was a religious man, she sought to escape by asking him whether to worship in the Jerusalem Temple or on Mount Gerizim (4:20). When confronted by a probing question, people are often adept at bringing up some old religious controversy to avoid making a decision. Jesus again refused to be sidetracked. A time was coming and was already here when cults at both sites were being replaced by worship in Spirit and truth. Cleverly the woman tried one more ploy by shifting any decision to the distant future when the Messiah would come (4:25). Jesus did not let her escape. His "I am he" finally confronted her. Does she believe or not?

Still not fully convinced, the woman goes off to the nearby village and poses to the villagers the question: "Could this be the Messiah?" (4:29). The villagers came and encountered Jesus for themselves so that their faith was not dependent on her observation but on personal contact (4:42). They told the woman, "No longer is our faith dependent on your story. For we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is really the Savior of the world" (4:42). By being instrumental in bringing others to believe, the woman's own faith came to completion--very often the case. At last she drank of the water of life.

The Man Born Blind

The second encounter is that of the man born blind (9:1-41). Here, as elsewhere in John, the main character can serve as a representative of everyone. The opening announcement captures the attention for all to hear: "I am the light of the world," and gives notice that more than physical sight is involved. The story demonstrates how faith expands for this man amid his trials.

There are at least four steps in his progress, each involving an encounter. Jesus healed him on the Sabbath by putting mud on the man's eyes and telling him to go wash in the pool of Siloam (This name means "one who has been sent"). When questioned by the onlookers, the man born blind knew only that "the man they call Jesus" healed him (9:11). Step one: he knows who healed him and the door is open.

He was then brought before the Pharisees who pressed him with questions on how he had got his sight. He told them, "He put mud on my eyes and I washed and now I see." Some of the Pharisees asserted, "This man is not from God because he does not keep the Sabbath." Others countered, "How can a man perform such signs and still be a sinner?" They were sharply divided. Then they addressed the blind man again, "Since it was your eyes he opened, what have you to say about him?" He replied, "He is a prophet." With greater awareness, possibly springing from the bewilderment of the Pharisees, the man born blind advances to the conclusion that Jesus is "a prophet" (9:17). Step two: he realizes Jesus is not an ordinary man but someone special.

In the next phase, the man enters into heated argument with the Pharisees when they summoned him again and questioned him. "Just what did he do to you? How did he open

your eyes?" There's a sense of justified exasperation in the man's reply, "I told you once and you didn't pay attention. Why do you want to hear it all over again. Don't tell me that you too want to become his disciples?" Scorning him they retort, "You are the one who is that fellow's disciple; we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but we don't even know where this fellow comes from." The religious side of the man surfaces as he objects to their claims: "We know that God pays no attention to sinners, but He does listen to someone who is devout and obeys His will....If this man were not from God, he could have done nothing" Now it is the Pharisees' turn to get exasperated: "What," they exclaimed. "You were born steeped in sin, and now you are lecturing us?" Then they threw him out of the synagogue. Step three: he recognizes that Jesus was a man "from God."

When Jesus heard about the man's expulsion, he sought him out and said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "Who is he sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus replied, "You have seen him, for it is he who is speaking with you." "I do believe, Lord," he said and bowed down to worship him. Then Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment: that those who do not see may be able to see, and those who do see may become blind."

Step four: the man born blind comes full circle. Now he sees beyond what physical sight can give him and exclaims, "I do believe." This story tells how a man sunk in darkness comes to see the light, not only physically but spiritually, all by the hands of "the one who has been sent." A series of testings may be necessary before sight really comes.

One might ask why Jesus presents himself under the title of the Son of Man. It is fitting when we note that the theme of judgment runs through the episode and ends on that note, and

judgment is a frequent setting for the figure of the Son of Man. Luke 18:8 said, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" Here in John, the Son of Man finds faith in the former blind man.

No other story in the Gospel is so closely stitched together. The consummate artistry brings out not only the external steps taken by the various parties, but more importantly, how they acted according to their developing beliefs. The former blind man is gradually having his eyes opened to the truth about Jesus, while the Pharisees are becoming more inflexible in their failure to see the truth. The Evangelist masterfully draws his portraits of increasing insight and hardening blindness. Three times the man with regained sight, who is truly gaining knowledge, humbly confesses his ignorance (12, 25, 36). Three times the Pharisees, who are plunging deeper into abysmal ignorance of Jesus, state confidently what they know of him (16, 24, 29). From these pages the blind man emerges as one of the most appealing figures in the Gospels. Clever and fluent, his confutation of the Pharisees in verses 24-34 stands out as one of the most cleverly written dialogues in the New Testament.

From all that has been said, it is obvious that the Evangelist has contributed a great deal of his own ingenuity to the reporting of the scene. A storied miracle has been shaped into an ideal tool at the service of Christian apologetics and into an ideal instruction for those about to be baptized. The primary lesson that the Evangelist meant to convey is the acting out of the triumph of light over darkness. As the Old Testament prophets used symbolic actions to dramatize their message, so Jesus as we have seen acts out here the truth he proclaimed in 8:12, "I am the light of the world."

In addition to the light/darkness, sight/blindness drama, the Evangelist had a second purpose in presenting this story to

his readers: an apologetic lesson. In verses 28-33 we have in capsule form the violent polemic between the disciples of Moses and the disciples of Jesus in the late first century. The "we" that is heard on the lips of the Pharisees is really the voice of their logical descendants, that is, the Jews at the end of the first century who have once and for all rejected the claims of Jesus of Nazareth and who regard his followers as heretics. The "we" on the lips of the former blind man is the voice of Christian apologists who think of the Jews as malevolently blinding themselves to the obvious truth implied in Jesus' miracles. The story of the man born blind appears seven times in early catacomb art, most frequently as an illustration of Christian Baptism. (The most recent scholarship working with the convergence of probabilities points strongly to the date between 90 and 110 for the writing of the final form of the Fourth Gospel).

In addition, we can also learn lessons when we see the larger picture which helped shape the story. The Pharisees took offense because Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Not only did he heal on the Sabbath, he further violated it by toiling to knead clay on the Sabbath. The Hebrews were slaves in Egypt and had to work with clay to make bricks for the Pharaoh. With that background, kneading clay would justly be classified as servile work and forbidden on the Sabbath. Right here the dispute arises. Would kneading a single wad of clay to open a blind man's eyes be similarly classified? Is it putting the letter of the law before the spirit?

A crisis of conscience could arise, and genuinely religious people might argue either way. As one who has come from God, Jesus challenges our earthly perceptions of God at any time. He challenges us and cautions us about applying religious judgments from the past, without distinction, to NEW situations. Positions regarded as definitive traditions are true, but

in regard to the issues that were in mind when they were formulated. Coming from above, Jesus raised new religious issues and inevitably caused offense to those who attempted to solve those issues quickly on the basis of previous situations. Jesus always acts out of love, and aims to free us to act out of the same motivation.

With Jesus in the center of the picture, the man born blind was brought step by step to sight physically and spiritually. In sharp contrast the opposing religious authorities could see physically but gradually became blind spiritually. They protested Jesus' accusations saying, "Surely we are not to be considered blind too?" Jesus told them, "If only you WERE blind, then you would not be guilty of sin. But now that you claim to see, your sin remains." The drama ends in a grand finale, not only for the man born blind but also for the Pharisees. The episode reveals the dramatic skill of the Evangelist at its best.

Everything in John's Gospel is for our edification. Of interest also were those who refused to commit themselves one way or the other and make a decision. The blind man's parents knew the truth about their son's healing, but they refused to say anything about what Jesus had done for him lest they be thrown out of the synagogue. John judges that failure as grave; it's a serious failure in terms of proclaiming Jesus to the world and being witness to him as we are all called to do. John reminds his hearers of what Jesus said, "You too should bear witness because you have been with me" (15:27).

The Raising of Lazarus

While the Samaritan woman and the man born blind enter into conversations with Jesus, the encounter with Lazarus (11:1-44) is different in that Lazarus never says a word to Jesus, or anyone else, and appears only at the end. And while the

Samaritan woman illustrated an initial coming to faith, and the man born blind showed man's incipient faith acquiring depth only after testing, the Lazarus story illustrates the deepening of faith that comes through an experience of death. To understand this, we have to look to others in the scene. By the reactions of Lazarus' sisters, Martha and Mary, we can see the deepening comprehension they personify. Jesus used blindness for his teaching in John 9, of which we are reminded in 11:37. Here Jesus uses life and death to teach about earthly and heavenly realities.

Martha is the chief dialogue partner with Jesus in the drama. She already believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God, and that her brother Lazarus would rise on the last day. Still, her faith was inadequate. First, like Jesus' mother at Cana, she implicitly put a demand on Jesus at the human level of friendship: "If you had been here, my brother would never have died" (11: 21). That attitude is shared by some of the Jews present, "Couldn't he have done something to keep this man from dying?" (11: 37).

Second, Martha hesitated when Jesus ordered Lazarus' tomb opened. Jesus could and did bring Lazarus back to earthly life, but the symbolism is more difficult to connect with Jesus' ultimate purpose. Jesus came from the world above to give life that cannot be touched by death, so that those who believe in him would never die (11: 26). A man brought back to mortal life is not necessarily better or closer to God than those who have not yet died. True faith has to include a belief in Jesus as the source of unending life. A further difficulty arises in that such immortality could not come in Jesus' public ministry; it had to await Jesus' own resurrection.

The story of Lazarus' death had within itself signs of the deeper life still to come, yet the symbolism seems more obscure

than was apparent in the stories of the Samaritan woman and the man born blind. We don't know whether Martha and Mary come to understand fully Jesus' words, "I am the life" (11: 25). A further question arises in hearing that Jesus shuddered when he saw Mary and her Jewish friends weeping (11: 33, 38). Twice we are told that he was moved with the deepest emotions. Was he in sympathy with their grief? Or was he disappointed that even his faithful followers could not grasp that the life he brought reduced the importance of death?

The finality of death and its uncertainties cause trembling also among those who have spent their lives professing Christ. Doubts can arise as we encounter death. No matter how often we renew our faith, there is the supreme testing by death. Human companionship stops at the grave. No human support goes with one to the tomb. One enters alone. Whether the death of a loved one or one's own death, it is the moment where one realizes all depends on God. Although the raising of Lazarus was a tremendous miracle bringing to culmination Jesus' ministry, it was still only a sign. Accepting the sign requires faith. The life to which Lazarus was raised is natural life; Jesus meant it to symbolize eternal life, the kind of life that only God possesses and that Jesus as God's Son made and makes possible. The conclusion is that we possess God's life that death cannot touch.

On this same subject, Paul gives a powerful passage when he says that the last enemy to be destroyed is death (1 Corinthians 15: 26). When confronted with the visible reality of the grave, all need to hear and embrace the bold message that Jesus proclaimed: "I am the life." Despite all appearances, "Everyone who believes in me shall never die at all."

In all three encounters Jesus uses human means to illustrate divine realities. To the Samaritan woman Jesus did not

speak of earthly water only to get thirsty again, but of the water that springs up to eternal life. With the man born blind Jesus was not referring to a physical sight that people can possess without being able to perceive anything they cannot touch, but to an insight into heavenly realities. In the case of Lazarus Jesus was not simply renewing a life that ends in the grave, but offering eternal life.

Johannine Tradition

When the apostles died, there probably was great attention paid to the question of who would succeed to their authority. Such a transfer would be important to communities familiar with the shepherding of an apostle. But the tradition of the Evangelist was different in several ways. In the Johannine establishment, the stress was that Jesus alone is the Good Shepherd, which created a distrust about all others who would be human shepherds. "The one who enters through the gate is shepherd of the sheep....Truly I assure you, I am the sheepgate....I am the model shepherd: the model shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10: 2,7,11).

Our Evangelist stressed "disciples" and never mentioned "apostles." Likewise, he never used the word "church" in his "Gospel Message." He was more at home with the term "community" since Jesus prayed that those who believe in him might be "one" (John 17:11, 21, 22).

More importantly, the Johannine community was primarily concerned with Jesus' gift of the life of God, eternal life, not with any charisms that involved different roles in the community. Paul in his writings besides listing apostles listed the many various roles played by individuals. Evidently they were fighting one another, for he had to compare the community to a body that needed different parts (1 Corinthians 12: 4-31). The

Johannine Evangelist takes a simpler comparison, that of the vine symbolism (15:1-6) that ignores different roles: Jesus is the true vine planted by the Father, and all others are branches. The only distinction is between the branches that remain on the vine and thus receive life, and those that do not. The really important distinction that affects eternal life is between those who are disciples and those who are not. In the judgment of the light come into the world, the essential issue is not one of authority or role but whether one believes and becomes a disciple. Those who do believe have the fundamental treasure that matters above all else.

Church or Community

There is also a difference between the Johannine outlook and the other Gospels regarding church or community and the sacraments. For example, Matthew 16:18 has Jesus saying, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." The pronouncement comes after Peter declares who Jesus is, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Because of Peter's recognition, Jesus says that he is a happy man! "Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but my Father in heaven." It can be argued that the rock of faith comes from being able to recognize who Jesus really is, as Peter had done. Faith comes ultimately from the grace of heavenly intercession.

Be that as it may, John casts Peter in a different light from how he is seen in the other Gospels. Our Evangelist never uses the word "church" in his "Gospel Message" because he is more at home with the term "community" since Jesus prayed that those who believe in him be "one" (17: 11, 21, 22). In regard to Peter himself, already at the time of the writing of the Fourth Gospel most Christians already gave him a unique place. So what in John's Gospel corresponds to Peter's esteemed position? Although this Evangelist recalls that Jesus gave Simon Peter a

special role in feeding the sheep (John 21: 15-17), he uses Peter as the most important figure to be contrasted with "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

The Beloved Disciple is unlike Peter; he was not assigned by Jesus to a similar pastoral feeding role. This did not stop Jesus from loving him more than he loved Simon Peter. Peter tended to supervise things and he fretted about the Beloved Disciple who did not fit into a neat system of authority. When Jesus told Peter to follow him, the Apostle turned around and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following. Then Peter asked, "But Lord, what about him?" Jesus replied, "Suppose I would like him to remain until I come. How does that concern you? Your concern is to follow me." Jesus had a special concern for the Disciple (John 21: 20-22).

Matthew, Mark, and Luke give the impression that Peter was always the one who spoke for the Twelve. That well may be (John 6:68), but at the Last Supper on the night before he died it was to the Beloved Disciple, not to Simon Peter, that Jesus revealed that Judas was the one who would betray him (13: 21-27). Three times Simon Peter denied being a disciple of Jesus (John 18: 17, 25-27), while the Beloved Disciple remained faithful the whole time. And if it were not for this Disciple, Simon Peter could not even have followed Jesus into the high priest's palace where he made his denials (John 18:15-16).

Other examples can be cited illustrating the faithfulness and love of the Beloved Disciple. When all the other male disciples had fled, he stayed near Jesus' cross (John 19:26-27) and witnessed his death (19:34-35). Later, when he and Peter went to the tomb and found the body gone, the Disciple believed on the spot that Jesus was risen (20:8), while Peter needed an appearance of Jesus before he could believe. Finally, Simon

Peter could not recognize Jesus standing on the shore of the Sea of Tiberius without the help of the Beloved Disciple (21:7).

While Peter may have had a primacy in being the first among the Twelve and may have been the chief example of shepherding the sheep, there is another primacy, the primacy of love. We see from the examples the importance of love, the love of someone for Jesus and the love of Jesus for one of us. "Upon you I found my church" may reflect a deep and necessary outlook, but it also conveys the notion of Jesus as a past figure who once upon a time established the Christian community but is not with us anymore.

In the Johannine outlook, Jesus is not a figure of the past; he is alive and well and ever active in the midst of us. He is the shepherd who calls and knows each of us by name; he leads out to pasture, feeds and protects us (10:3-16). He is the vine pumping life into each of us who believe (15:4-6).

When Jesus was dying on the cross, we don't know if the word "church" entered his mind. But we do know he was thinking of leaving behind a family of disciples (19:25-27). Jesus came from Mary's womb, and now he gives her a new son, the Beloved Disciple. From that moment on Jesus' mother was the Beloved Disciple's mother. To the question found in other Gospels, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" (Mark 3:33; Matthew 12:48), Jesus gave the answer from the cross. His mother and brothers are the believing community of disciples represented by the mother of the Beloved Disciple and the Disciple himself. To this community Jesus handed over his Spirit. (John uses "handed over," not "gave up" or "let go" as in the other Gospels.) This is the vital image of communication of life, not the static image of foundation.

Jesus promised that after he departed the Paraclete Spirit would be sent (16:7). All important is the remembrance that Jesus did not die alone or defeated. Rather, he was victorious, for he completed all that the Father had given him to do, culminating in his CALLING INTO BEING A COMMUNITY OF GOD'S BELOVED CHILDREN TO WHOM HE GAVE HIS OWN LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT.

At the end of Jesus life we have one of the most solemn testimonies of the Beloved Disciple. From the pierced body of Jesus hanging on the cross there came forth not only blood but also water (19:34-35). This is the fulfillment of Jesus' great promise about the outpouring of the Spirit: "From within him shall flow rivers of living water" (7:38-39).

Sacraments

In regard to the "sacraments" of baptism and the eucharist, it is to be noted that Jesus never baptized anyone, and that the evangelist does not record the "institution" of the eucharist. "Sacraments" do not appear in the Evangelist's "Gospel Message" nor anywhere in the New Testament, and only appeared several centuries later.

Although their "institution" may have stemmed from Jesus himself, as we glean from the other Gospels, the "institutional" sayings do not do enough to tie baptism and eucharist to Jesus. In Matthew 28:19, the risen Jesus tells his disciples to baptize all nations, and in Luke 22:19 Jesus commanded, "Do this in commemoration of me." These passages came at the end of Jesus career on earth and they tell YOU what to do. YOU are to baptize and YOU are to commemorate Jesus. From the pointed direction to others, one could get the impression that baptism and the eucharist are community actions. But what about the activity of Jesus? It just might be that

the other three Gospels missed the point that the Johannine Evangelist wants to stress: what Jesus said and did during his lifetime are signs, not only of heavenly realities but also of the so called "sacraments."

In a dramatic scene, John shows symbolically that both of these sacraments, baptismal water and eucharistic blood, have the source of their existence and power in the death of Jesus: "When they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. However, one of the soldiers stabbed at Jesus' side with a lance, and immediately blood and water flowed out" (John 19:33-34).

In what may be explicit or implicit references to baptism, the insistence is on divine action. The Jews claimed the importance of birth from a Jewish mother. Jesus explains to Nicodemus that our parents give us only natural life. To be a child of God one needs to be begotten or born from above of water and Spirit (John 3:3-6). To the Samaritan woman Jesus promised a fountain of water springing up to eternal life, while he is the one giving the living water. Later in the same scenario water is not mentioned, but the town's people "through his own word came to the faith....For we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is really the Savior of the world" (John 4:4-39). With the woman as with the townspeople Jesus is the actor performing God's work. In the healing of the man born blind, as most often in the "Gospel Message," Jesus is the one sent (John 9:7).

That Jesus is the actor and agent of God's work is even more pronounced in regard to references or allusions to the eucharist. When Jesus says, "This is my own flesh for the life of the world," the Evangelist puts this immediately after Jesus multiplied the loaves and fishes. In so doing he brings out the double sign value of that miracle. The physical bread multiplied

by Jesus to feed the crowd during his ministry was a sign of how he would feed believers of all times with God's own wisdom. It was also a sign of how he could feed them with the eucharist. Life received through water and the Spirit is fed in this double way (John 6:1-71).

John may be giving us a very important "message" in not recounting the institution of the eucharist as the other three Gospel writers and Paul had done. In Paul's own time disputes arose in Corinth regarding eucharistic meals. Some fellow disciples of Jesus were being judged unworthy to partake in the eucharistic meal. Ideally, those who eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood should have the same self-giving generosity that he had. Why in Corinth was this tremendous self-giving of Jesus, the giving of his flesh and blood, the source of divisions? We are not told.

But we do know that in place of telling us about the institution of the eucharist, our Evangelist gives us the beautiful story and example of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. Jesus is giving us the outlook we must have not only in receiving the eucharist but to one another as his disciple. If we are not willing to wash another's dirty feet, we have not understood self-giving. That is why Jesus made the foot washing so necessary: "If I do not wash you, you will have no heritage with me" (John 13:1-20). If most followers of Jesus imitated the washing of the feet instead of the breaking of the bread, would they have overlooked the spirit of self-giving to the extent they have in disputes over the eucharist?

In trying to expose the thinking of the Evangelist, I have been following rather closely the descriptions given by Raymond E. Brown in his insightful and delightful small book, *A RETREAT WITH JOHN THE EVANGELIST*. I would like to

close this section of my narrative by quoting a paragraph of how Brown imagines the Evangelist would answer our questions:

"I do not offer a model to be imitated in our (Johannine) attitudes on all these issues. Simply incorporate our attitudes into your larger picture and let them leaven the way you live and think. Your Translator tells me that from reading my "Gospel Message," he judged that I marched to a different drummer--an interesting metaphor. Yes, perhaps we (Johannine Christians) did, but I humbly submit that you should incorporate our melody into the way you march."

Paraclete/Spirit: the Spirit of Truth

Another key area of Christian tradition distinctive to the Fourth Gospel is that of the Holy Spirit. Certainly the Holy Spirit is found in many places in the New Testament, but our Evangelist's treatment is different. There, the neuter meaning of the Greek word PNEUMA dominates. And so we have interpretations: a mighty wind moves the apostles to preach at Pentecost; the source of charisms or special powers; something that cries out in our hearts. In those other writings nothing is found comparable to Paraclete/Spirit, the Spirit of Truth found only in the Johannine tradition. Only this latter community gave the Spirit the personal title PARAKLETOS (a noun in the masculine gender; references to Him then must be with personal pronouns). In the "Gospel Message" the Paraclete is described in five passages, all in Jesus' long discourse at the Last Supper, often accompanied by the designation "Spirit of Truth" which also is peculiarly Johannine language.

St. Jerome several hundred years later transliterated the word into Latin as PARACLETUS, hence the English PARACLETE. There are various aspects to its original meaning. In the Greek of the time, parakletos meant "one called

alongside," particularly one called to help in a legal situation: a defense attorney. The courtroom atmosphere can be seen in English translations like "Advocate, Counselor."

In fact, there is a legal tone to some of what Jesus said about the Paraclete, although more exactly the picture is that of a prosecuting attorney. Jesus was going to die on a cross--judged guilty and convicted in the eyes of the world. Yet after his death, the Paraclete would come and reverse the decision by convicting the world and proving Jesus' innocence (16: 8-11). He would prove that Jesus did not sin; the world sinned by not believing in him. Jesus is demonstrated as the one who is just or righteous as shown by the fact that he is not in the grave but with the Father. The judgement by his enemies that put him to death did not defeat him; it defeated his great adversary, the Prince of this world and his power. That vindicating spirit has the role of a paraclete, and Jesus now looks for the Holy Spirit as his Paraclete.

Actually there is another role for "one called alongside." Those who are suffering or lonely sometimes need to call in someone to console or comfort them. This aspect of the Paraclete is caught by English translations such as "Comforter" and "Consoler." At the Last Supper where His disciples were sorrowful because he was departing, Jesus' promise was consoling that someone like him was coming to take his place.

Jesus at the Last Supper was also realistic. In addition he prepared his disciples for the coming of the spirit because the world would hate them who have received the Spirit of Truth (15: 18-19); the world would not accept them because it neither sees nor recognizes that Spirit (14: 17). They would be expelled from the synagogue and even put to death (16: 2). Yet because Jesus would be with them, they would have peace. "In the world

you will have trouble; but take courage, I have conquered the world" (16: 33).

There is a major emphasis in the "Gospel Message" on the likeness of the Spirit to Jesus that enables the Spirit to substitute for him. That is why the Spirit cannot come until Jesus departs. The similarity of function is stunning. Both come from the Father; both are given or sent by the Father; both are rejected by the world. Jesus declares that he does nothing on his own; whatever he says or does is what he has heard or seen with the Father (5:19; 8:28, 38; 12:49). Likewise the Paraclete will speak nothing on his own; he will take what belongs to Jesus and declare it; he will speak only what he hears from Jesus (16:13-15). While Jesus is on earth and the Father is in heaven, whoever sees Jesus has seen the Father (14:9). When Jesus has gone to the Father, whoever listens to the Paraclete will be listening to Jesus. In sum what Jesus is to the Father, the Paraclete is to Jesus. In many ways, then, the Paraclete fulfills Jesus promise to return.

In one baffling comment (16:7) Jesus informed us that it was BETTER that he go away, for otherwise the Paraclete would not come to us. How in the world could the presence of the Paraclete be better than the presence of Jesus? The difference obviously is in the two presences. In Jesus the Word became flesh; the Paraclete does not become flesh. In Jesus God's presence in the world occurred one time in one place. It was a corporeal presence that could be seen and touched. The Paraclete's presence is not visible, not confined to any time or place. It means that his presence is not limited by time or place; it means that the Paraclete dwells in every one of us who loves Jesus and keeps his commandments. Thus, there are no second-class citizens; the Paraclete is just as present in you and me as disciples as he was in those disciples of the first generation.

That fact looms large when we realize one of the chief actions of the Paraclete. He is "the Spirit of Truth" who supplies guidance along the way of all truth (16:13). Jesus had many things to say that his disciples could not understand in his lifetime (16:12); but then the Paraclete comes and takes those things and declares them to us (16:14-15). In other words, the Paraclete solves problems by supplying new insights into the revelation brought by Jesus.

It raises and answers the question of how Jesus' followers of later ages get God's guidance for dealing with entirely different issues. The Paraclete who is present to every time and culture brings the revelation of the Word made flesh and declares it anew, facing the new circumstances. The Johannine message places emphasis on the indwelling Paraclete, the guide to all truth, given to every believer. "The anointing that you received abides in you; so that you have no need for anyone to teach you" (1 John 2:27). In fact, authoritative teachers whose only strength is to hold on to the tradition, may tend to regard all new ideas as dangerous. The Spirit is a vibrant guide and would seem better adapted to face the things to come.

We survive with a principal living link to Jesus. Many of those who had walked with Jesus and heard him did not understand him (14:9). Only the gift of the Spirit after Jesus had been glorified (7:39) taught Jesus' followers the full meaning of what they had seen (2:22; 12:16); and their witness was the witness of the Paraclete speaking through them (12:26-27). The Evangelist's profound reinterpretation of the ministry and words of Jesus was the work of the Paraclete. Once the eyewitnesses had gone, the Paraclete does not cease his activity for He dwells within all Christians who love Jesus and keep his commandments. The Paraclete is the link of future generations to Jesus, so that in an essential way, all Christians are as close to Jesus as those who saw and heard him.

Many Christians then and now look forward to the second coming. That expectation lost its importance when the early Christians realized more profoundly that many of the features associated with it were already realities of the Christian life, for example, judgment, divine sonship, and eternal life. In a very real way, the resurrected Jesus actually had come back during the lifetime of his companions, for he had come in and through the Paraclete. Through the Paraclete, Jesus is present within all of us who are believers: our Advocate, our Consoler, our Guide to all truth.

The Meaning of Faith in John's Gospel

To take seriously an encounter with God requires faith, but faith is a word that is so bantered around that we can lose the sense of what it really means. Merriam-Webster defines it as "strong belief in something for which there is no proof." Since proof is wanting, it is sometimes called "blind faith" as though the believer does not know what he is doing. We need to understand what faith really means, faith in Jesus as John's Gospel sees it. It comes as a surprise to most people that faith does not show up in his Gospel!

The Greek word for faith is PISTIS, which NEVER appears in John's Gospel! Not once! John prefers the verb PISTEUEIN, which appears in his writings 98 times, compared to the noun, showing that the evangelist is not thinking of faith as an internal disposition, but as an active and on-going commitment. John is faithful to Jesus in appealing not just to the mind but more to the heart. Letting the heart lead means trusting, engaging, committing, These divine/human movements to trust, engage, and commit are the basic meaning of what FAITH or BELIEVING is in John's Gospel.

Faith is connection that never ends, but it must come from my depths. I must earn and own my participation. This is the engagement and commitment John means by PISTEUEIN—Do I trust enough to commit myself?

Faith is always active; it is always personal! To encapsulate the underlying meaning and purpose expressed in the Prologue: God would never have spoken if He didn't want to be heard and answered. I engage Jesus and commit myself to him, trusting that it will take me to a higher place. Trust is discoverable within, which Jesus is trying to elicit. Trust is not a belief but an experience. Believing does include a certain knowing. But in the biblical sense, knowing, following its Hebraic origin, means direct, immediate experience with intimacy. I might say that the intellect can lead us to the water, but once there, it must let the heart drink its fill.

From all that the Evangelist has given us, is it too much to take in? Too much for the intellect to handle? Is the intellect sturdy enough to survive living in the heart? Only the individual person can bring it all together, and the instrument is love. Jesus as a human being reached up into the heavens and pulled God down to where he was and what he was doing at the time, with His Father concurring at every step of the way. I might call Jesus' followers "love-crazed settlers," for they have settled on love as their standard of living. Just as Jesus, we all have a geographical and temporal location and identity. What do we do with it?

If reflection on Jesus and encounter with him are to help us with our own lives, our attention must include more than his coming into the world. It must include the way he lived and the way he died. Otherwise he would not be sharing in and exemplifying a truly human life. Believing that the "Word" was made flesh is not enough to be a true disciple of Jesus. Brown

recognizes the value of the other Gospels to round out our picture of the human side of Jesus' life. For that purpose I would like to quote verbatim a paragraph from his book, **A RETREAT WITH JOHN THE EVANGELIST**:

"It is to the other Gospels that we must turn to get a picture of Jesus' life of loneliness: how often he had no place to lay down his head (Matthew 8:20), how as he journeyed he and his disciples were refused hospitality (Luke 9:52-53), how his own townspeople tried to kill him (Luke 4:28-29), how Herod wanted to kill him (Luke 13:31). John does not tell us the nitty-gritty of Jesus ministry or indeed much about the suffering on the cross (mockery by crowds, chief priests and criminals; his crying out to God in agony). One of the great gifts of having four Gospels in our New Testament canon is that they complement each other."

Love the Core of the Synoptic Gospels

What Brown does not mention here about the Synoptics, however, is the supreme and a unparalleled value they place upon the value of love. In finishing this Part Two of our work, we see that they, too, hold the love of God and of neighbor above all other considerations. It is the solid rock of the New Testament. The passage in question regarding love is virtually the same in each of the Synoptics, and each time it's the answer to a different situation.

In Mark (12: 28-34), one of the scribes came up and put a question to Jesus, "Which is the first of all commandments?" Jesus replied, "This is the first: **LISTEN, ISRAEL, THE LORD OUR GOD IS THE ONE LORD, AND YOU MUST LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR MIND AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.** The second is this: **YOU MUST**

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. There is no commandment greater than these." The scribe replies. "Well spoken, Master, what you have said is true....this is far more important than any holocaust or sacrifice." Jesus, seeing how wisely he had spoken, said, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." We see here that Mark contrasts love with any holocaust or sacrifice, and includes the closing remark of Jesus that love brings the lover close to the kingdom of God.

In Matthew (22: 34-40), the Pharisees got together to disconcert Jesus and put the question to him, "Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?" Jesus gives the same answer: love God and your neighbor as yourself. In this instance, since the Pharisees were strict adherents to the Law, Jesus indicates that the Law and the Prophets must be subservient to love; "On these two commandments hang the whole Law, and the Prophets also."

In Luke (10: 25-28), our third Synoptic writer, a lawyer tried to embarrass Jesus: "Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" In this case, Jesus challenges the man who should be familiar with the Law, "What is written in the Law? What do you read there?" The lawyer gives the correct answer regarding love of God and neighbor. Jesus responds, "You have answered right, do this and life is yours."

In these cases, we see love as greater than any sacrifice, superior to the Law and the Prophets, and the source of eternal life. Love is superior to the rituals and practices of the Old Testament and as the begetter of life everlasting, it means that God not only is in the loving of the believer but also IS the believer. Love is a spiritual reality. Many people ask, what is spirituality? I think the simplest answer is that spirituality is love, as Thomas Aquinas said in the poem quoted earlier.

John goes even further, putting love in a covenant setting and renders it a personal pact between God and man. In John (13: 34-35), Jesus says to his disciples, "I give you a new commandment: love one another; just as I have loved you, you also must love one another." To understand the "newness" that Jesus joins to the commandment of love, the Evangelist sees this love in a covenant setting, a compact, between God and man. In the Old Testament the Ten Commandments were set in the covenant between God and Israel at Mount Sinai; they were the stipulations that Israel had to observe if it was to be God's chosen people. In speaking of love as the new commandment for those whom Jesus had chosen as his own (13:1, 15:16) and as a mark by which they could be distinguished from others (v 35), the Evangelist shows implicitly that he is thinking of this Last Supper scene in covenant terms. The Synoptic accounts of the Last Supper make this specific (Mark 14:24: "my blood of the covenant"; Luke 22: 20: "the NEW covenant in my blood; also 1 Corinthians 11:25.

Yet love is more than a commandment; it is a gift that comes from the Father through Jesus to those who believe in him. Jesus is the source of the Christians' love for one another. For John, Jesus love for men is constitutive of the community; the Johannine Jesus does not mention two commandments.

As we said earlier, the newness of the commandment of love is really related to the theme of covenant at the Last Supper. The early Christian understanding was that in Jesus and his followers was fulfilled the dream of Jeremiah (31: 31-34): "Behold the days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah....Deep within them I will plant my Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I will be their God and they shall be my people."

This new covenant was to be interiorized and to be marked by the people's intimate contact with God and knowledge of Him--a knowledge that is the equivalent of love and is covenantal virtue. The themes of intimacy, indwelling, and mutual knowledge run through the Last Discourse. The movement is from God's heart to my heart, from within the Infinite to within the creature, from love to love. In love, God becomes my conscience, my consciousness as I look out to see how I can be loving to everything that happens to me, or how I can happen to it. It's an interior realization or self-revelation. I know I'm different; I know I'm changed FROM WITHIN. If the individual soul achieves supreme love and knows it is One with God, is that not greater than some of the works Jesus performed, as he had promised some works by his followers would be?

The mark that distinguishes God's love expressed in the covenant from even the noblest forms of human love is that it is spontaneous and unmotivated, directed to men who are sinners and unworthy of love. Such a love challenges the world even as Jesus challenged the world, and leads men to make their choice for the light. Thus, as long as Christian love is in the world, the world is still encountering Jesus. The commandment to love is a response to the problem raised by Jesus' physical departure. Thus the picture of Jesus that John portrays has not only historic but also historical value. John manifests a conviction that if the faith of believers is intense, others will gain knowledge about Jesus. In that sense those who possess the Paraclete become witnesses to Jesus (15: 26-27). When believers share Jesus' glory by becoming one with God and Jesus, the world will come to know that God sent Jesus as a manifestation of love (17:22-23). Thus John's primary purpose of deepening the faith of believers has a secondary goal of thereby bringing others to make an act of faith.

PART THREE

KEY THEMES FROM JOHN'S GOSPELS FOR MEDITATION

In this Part Three, I wish to reprise data from the Johannine writings of Part Two but casting the information in a prayerful format for meditation. Absorbing the words and actions of Jesus can hardly be overdone if we want to capture their hidden diamonds and hold them in our hands. The love of Jesus for us and our love for him must become personal. We cannot get lost in intellectual manipulations. Nothing is to be left untouched by love. We need to inhale the love of Jesus for us, and exhale it in all our words and actions. This is what the thematic meditations aim at doing. The hope is to take what Jesus says and does and render those examples into personal and private realizations. There are five themes offered: Gratitude and Thanksgiving; Living Water; Oneness: God or Man or Both? Parcel 1; Oneness: God or Man or Both? Parcel 2; The Way to Life; Love's Reward. I suggest reading them slowly with frequent stops to dwell on what is said.

Behind the actions in these themes we see the compassion of God. Love begins with what God has done for us. That is what revelation is meant to show: God or Jesus reaching out, wanting to gather us to Himself. Jesus is filled with passion to have mercy on us, to see us stuck in our worldly wants, to lead us to a higher, fulfilling life. Compassion is the loving kindness he shows in all his works, so illustrated by these thematic writings. Here we want to stress the compassion of Jesus: love with a special purpose that heals and makes us want to be compassionate.

Gratitude and Thanksgiving

Gratitude and thanks begin with what God has done for us. But we need to make it personal, so I say, what God has done for you and me. The Prologue to John's gospel provides a see-through of what God enacts on our behalf: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Old Testament had begun, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." John compares and highlights the New Creation which opens the depths of God for our participation.

Commentaries on this passage have said it is beyond the power of man to speak as John does here. If that is so, then I must conclude that God Himself has spoken because it is beyond man's grasp to come up with such transcendental ideas and realities. So God takes us back to show us how it started. His words, "In the beginning," refer to pre-creation, and imply that there is going to be a creation, a beginning. If this story was going to concentrate on God Himself, there would be no beginning. In the wording itself, God is stressing not Himself but reaches out to gather us into His embrace.

The very title "Word" implies not so much a divine idea, but a divine communication. The Prologue does not state how the Word was, but what the Word does. The emphasis is on God's relation to men rather than on God in Himself. God is saying that the Word was with God in heaven before creation. In hymnic form God is presenting to us the history of our salvation. Later Jesus will characterize his message as a "word;" the Prologue shows that the messenger himself, Jesus, is the Word.

Right here the story excites my sense of gratitude. Most people love a good story. God is not only the Actor in this divine drama, but also the Story Teller to guide us. He speaks to us and for us. He as much says, "Come and see what I have done for you! Could you ever imagine such a climax as the Incarnation of God? Could you ever suppose that God, the Word, became flesh and walks the earth?" I would have to respond, Holy Moses! or better, Holy God! The creative word of God, the word of the Lord that came to the prophets, has become personal in Jesus who is the embodiment of divine revelation. The greatest story of all time begins here and will continue in the life and words of Jesus.

Our connection or relation to God's Word goes to even further and higher stages of intimacy. Anything created is intimately related to the Word, for it was created, not only through him, but also in him. To further the Prologue, "Through him all things came into being, and apart from him not a thing came to be. That which came to be in him was life, and this life was the light of men." "In him" declares a life of intimacy we could never dream of. It suggests not a relationship but an identity. The same unity that exists between the Word and his creation will be applied in John 15:5 to Jesus and the Christian: "Apart from me you can do nothing." We find the same idea in the hymn of Colossians 1:16: "For in him were all things created...all things were created by him and in him."

In my personal meditations as well as those of my friends, we often sought ways to connect the Absolute with the relative, the divine with the human. We were already convinced that all is one. We were accustomed to saying, "What is, is God." After studying the above meaning of the Prologue, we thought it may be better to say, "What is, is in God." Going beyond relationship, identity or oneness is again indicated. The story is not meant only to be heard. How to go from mental perception to interior conviction is a largely personal task. Whether one is a visual or auditory learner, to make an ideal one's own requires an openness and willingness to accept what is presented.

The Prologue does not say that the Word entered into flesh or abided in flesh but that the Word was flesh: "And the Word became flesh." In strongly realistic language the Prologue describes the Incarnation by stressing that the Word become flesh. The word "flesh" seems to have been associated with the Incarnation from the earliest days of Christian theological expression. Therefore, instead of supplying the liberation from the material world that the Greek mind yearned for, the Word of God was now inextricably bound to human history. Here again, if we accept the story, we cannot help but love God's undying pursuit to make us his own.

Jesus is Wisdom divine, pre-existent, now come among men, reaching out to them, teaching, and giving them life. Not the written Torah of old, but Jesus Christ is the creator and source of life and light. He is God's presence dwelling among us. The Prologue continues: "All those who did accept him he empowered to become God's children."

It is valuable to note here the progression of revelation. It is as though God is spoon-feeding us because we can absorb only so much at a time. The title, "the Word," was appropriate in vs. 1 because the divine being described there was destined to

speak to men. When the title is used for the second time in vs. 14, this divine being has taken on human form and has thus found the most effective way in which to express himself to men. Thus in becoming flesh the Word does not cease to be the Word, but exercises his function as Word to the full. The fact that Jesus was sent is all important; it is in itself a tremendous revelation of "the one thing that is necessary." It reveals that the Creator is here present to his creatures; and the Creator does not come empty-handed, for he gives light and life and love and resurrection.

When the Prologue proclaims that the Word made his dwelling among men, we are being told that the flesh of Jesus Christ is the new localization of God's presence on earth, and that Jesus is the replacement of the ancient Tabernacle. Near the end of the Prologue, it is interesting that the divine presence in Jesus is characterized as glory, and that "We have seen his glory, the glory of an only Son coming from the Father, filled with enduring love." Thus, it is quite appropriate that, after the description of how the Word set up a Tabernacle among men in the flesh of Jesus, the Prologue should mention that his glory became visible.

The theme of enduring covenant love that appears in vs.14 and is taken up in 16 fits well with the Tabernacle and glory references that we have just mentioned. The great exhibition of the enduring covenant love of God in the Old Testament took place at Sinai, the same setting where the Tabernacle became the dwelling of God's glory. So now the supreme exhibition of God's love is the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, the new Tabernacle of divine glory: "And of his fullness we have all had a share--love in place of love." The hymn comes to an end with the triumphant proclamation of a new covenant replacing the Sinai covenant.

Against this Old Testament background showing that even the greatest representatives of Israel have not seen God, John holds up the example of the only Son who has not only seen the Father but is ever at his side. It is the unique relation of the Son to the Father, so unique that John can speak of "God the only Son," that makes his revelation the supreme revelation. This whole endeavor, singularly portrayed in the Prologue, remains a unique contribution of Christianity. It is beyond all that has gone before, just as Jesus is beyond all that have gone before. For those who wish to go beyond the Prologue, who want to put flesh and blood on this structured model, Jesus, the Divine Story Teller, continues his and our history with insightful episodes. See his Conversation with Nicodemus and the Woman Caught in Adultery, both from John's Gospel. Two more famous episodes come from Luke's Gospel, that of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son/Prodigal Father.

We need to underscore that the thrust of the Prologue is directed at us. The unity we saw between God and Jesus now applies to God and the Christian. I am God's son as Jesus was, for ultimately, all is one. I don't see "the Word became flesh" so much that the revealer is only a man, but rather that God is present in the human sphere, in each of His sons and daughters. The transformation is for all mankind, one by one, with the work taking place within each. In a certain real sense I am Jesus. I can say this because I am God, not as He is but as I am. The glory of Jesus realizing his divine sonship is meant to unfold in each of us. I walk in his footsteps with the new imprint of my personal experience. It is not a mimicry of Jesus but a unique makeover of the exemplar. The two great instruments I have are witnessing and loving. Perfect love casts out fear because it allows all. What conquers the ego is something to love, something to be grateful and thankful for, greater than myself. And for this, the Prologue provides the blueprint. God is doing all this not to bolster my ego

but to render me more loving. Thoughts are never enough. Meditating and dwelling on what God has done can transform my interior, my spirit heart. Then my actions can follow my heart's lead, which has attuned to what God has done for me in Jesus.

(This reflection on Gratitude and Thanksgiving stems in large part from Raymond E. Brown's commentary on the Prologue in The Gospel According to John I-XII, pp 1-37, in The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 29.)

Living Water

In an episode from John's Gospel (4:4-25), when Jesus stops to rest at Jacob's well, he asks a Samaritan woman, "Give me a drink." Because Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans, the woman says, "You are a Jew--how can you ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" Jesus says, "If only you recognized God's gift and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would have asked him instead, and he would have given you living water."

After she questions Jesus further, he clarifies: "Whoever drinks the water I shall give him shall never be thirsty. Rather, the water I shall give him will become within him a fountain of water leaping up into life eternal." In wonder, the woman hopefully declares, "Give me this water, sir, so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

When Jesus reveals secrets from her present and past life, the woman acknowledges that he must be a prophet. She then says, "Lord, our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you people claim that the place where men ought to worship God is in Jerusalem." Jesus elaborates: "An hour is coming and is now here when the real worshipers will worship the Father in

Spirit and truth....God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know there is a Messiah coming. Whenever he comes, he will announce all things to us." (This term "Messiah" means "Anointed.") Jesus declared to her, "I who speak to you--I am he."

Using the symbol of water shows how naturally and realistically John thought of eternal life: water is necessary to natural life as living water is to eternal life. The living water is not Jesus himself but something spiritual that he offers to the believer who can recognize God's gift. Living water is not eternal life but leads to it: "a fountain of water leaping up into life eternal." In the scope of Johannine theology, there are two possible interpretations of "living water." It means the revelation which Jesus gives to men, or it means the Spirit which Jesus gives to men.

Both these explanations go back to the second century, and there are convincing arguments for both. Jesus refers to his revelation as "living water" because in John Jesus is presented as divine wisdom and as the replacement of the Law. "Living water" is the Spirit communicated by Jesus, for the gift of the Spirit was a mark of the messianic days, and the dialogue with Jesus leads the Samaritan woman to speak of the Messiah. It is interesting to note that medieval theologians understood "living water" as the Spirit and thought of it as grace. It is worth citing Thomas Aquinas' commentary on John: "The grace of the Holy Spirit is given to man inasmuch as the very font of grace is given, that is, the Holy Spirit."

There is reason to believe that both meanings are intended, for Johannine symbolism is often ambivalent, especially where two such closely related concepts as revelation and Spirit are involved. After all, the Spirit of truth is the agent

who interprets Jesus' revelation or teaching to men. In the passage of Aquinas cited, he also insists that Jesus' doctrine is the living water.

As the dialogue continues, the point of discussion shifts from the place of worship to the manner of worship. When Jesus says "the hour...is now here when real worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth," he is saying that the place or whereabouts of worship is no longer important.

It must also be said that Jesus is not contrasting external worship with internal worship. His statement has nothing to do with worshipping God in the interior of one's own spirit; for the Spirit is the Spirit of God, not the spirit of man, as vs. 24 makes clear, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth." One might even regard "Spirit and truth" equivalent to "Spirit of truth."

It is enlightening that Jesus is not highlighting worshipping God in the interior of one's own spirit. The Spirit involved here is the Spirit of God. It is that Spirit that is worshipping God in us, the Spirit in us as us. This is a challenge to our limited understanding of the nature of Spirit. I regard this as a classical acknowledgement that God and I are one. Although other traditions hold the same truth, it appears that this identity of God with me is clear and a pinnacle of Christian revelation.

I see St. Paul making the same identification as he cites God praying to God: "The Spirit too comes to help us in our weakness. For when we cannot choose words to pray properly, the Spirit himself expresses our plea in a way that could never be put in words, and God who knows everything in our hearts knows perfectly well what he means, and that the pleas of the saints expressed by the Spirit are according to the mind of God" (Romans 8: 26-27).

The Johannine themes are closely intertwined, some of which are spelled out later in his Gospel. Jesus is the truth in the sense that he reveals God's truth to men; the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus and is the Spirit of truth who is to guide men in the truth. "Spirit and truth" simply spell out what we saw already in discussing "living water" as revelation and Spirit."

Since it is the all-pervading "Spirit of God" that we are talking about in worship, it enlarges and deepens the fact of how true worship takes place. The worshiper is "in God." This is not hard to believe if I accept the fact that all are one. My friends and I often talk how difficult it is for many to recognize God's gift. Jesus intimates this problem from the outset of his dialogue with the Samaritan woman: "If only you recognized God's gift."

There is a portrait of St. Paul in a chapel in St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore, showing the Apostle with his head tilted lifting an ear to heaven. His eyes are opened wide and his lips slightly ajar in anticipation. He is waiting, watching, listening for the divine. That sublime painting reminds me of the quip: "We were given two ears and one mouth so that we may hear twice as much as we speak."

What appears to be true in looking at the world's great spiritual traditions is that higher consciousness and awareness of spiritual realities must be accompanied by an ethical component. These systems spell out elaborate codes of moral conduct for their followers because simple attention is not sufficient and can be self-centered.

Awareness coupled with goodness is the key. Goodness and Godness go together; my goodness is God acting in the world. Jesus effectively shows the concurrence: how my good work brings God into play. "If anyone chooses to do His will, he

will know about this doctrine--whether it comes from God." (Jo 7:17).

Mindfulness was not originally seen as simple attention, as important as that might be. It was mostly concerned with accomplishing equanimity: dealing with attraction and aversion. Clinging was seen as the enticement that often leads us astray: reaching out to pleasure and running away from pain. One can be aware of what is pleasing or displeasing, but stay independent of that, not needing matters to be other than they are. Equanimity is being even-minded, not a victim of powerful reactions, positive or negative.

With powerful reactions under control, equanimity allows for the entrance and development of love and joy. These qualities are not objects to be achieved; they are personal qualities that are boundless. Since they are limitless, it opens the way to the realization of the Spirit's presence in us. God truly gives us Himself. He gives not simply as a companion but as He is in Himself to be experienced internally.

There is so much in life that we cannot control. If I am constantly trying to change things, I miss out on so much of life that is asking only for acceptance. There is order and harmony in the seasons, in the earth providing shelter and food, in my body, in the animal kingdom, in my ability to love, in my life and death. Heartfelt acceptance brings appreciation. A philosopher has said that all the world's problems come from the inability to sit quietly in a room and do nothing. He is not saying, "Do nothing," but rather that if I cannot be quiet and still some of the time, than I could be contributing to the world's problems.

It has been said that belonging to our species is a given at birth, but one must work to become human. And many a wise man has added that you are not a full human being until you love

something greater than yourself. I like to think of God as a tree in seed as each one of us. All potential is there in the fertilized seed in my own womb. "Living water" is ultimately about life and growth. Jesus gives us a visual: the water he gives "will become within him a fountain of water leaping up unto eternal life."

In conclusion regarding Spirit, I think that Spirit ultimately means to stand in God's stead; Spirit means "I am God;" Spirit means "I Am;" Spirit means "God." That is, Spirit means only God exists. An offering from Joel S. Goldsmith demonstrates this: God is no far-off miracle worker. The Spirit of God, Infinity, Greatness, Goodness, can find outlet only as human consciousness, as your consciousness and mine. There is no God and me. There is only God manifested as individual being. God is our very own being. God fulfills Itself as our individual being. Goldsmith says to, "Enjoy watching the glory of the Father unfold as our individual experience."

Another culture gives the same enduring message. Says the Tao: "True enlightenment is the realization not that there is a Tao to follow but that we ourselves are Tao. That understanding comes from a simple breaking down of a wall, a shattering of the mistaken notion that there is something inherent in this life that divides us from Tao."

(Selections from Raymond E. Brown, The Gospel according to John I-XII, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol 29.)

Oneness: God or Man or Both? Parcel 1

There is a dispute in 5:17-30 of John's Gospel between Jesus and the Jews centering on whether Jesus is doing God's work or not. Jesus opens the dialogue that will become contentious:

"My Father is at work even till now,
and so I am at work too."

For this reason the Jews sought all the more to kill him--not only was he breaking the Sabbath (curing the cripple at Bethesda); worse still, he was speaking of God as his own Father, thus making himself God's equal.

This was Jesus' answer:

"I solemnly assure you, the Son cannot do a thing by himself--only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever He does, the Son does likewise.

For the Father loves the Son, and everything that He does He shows him. Yes, much to your surprise, He will show him even greater works than these.

Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and grants life, so also the Son grants life to those whom he wishes.

In fact, it is not the Father who judges anyone; no, He has turned all judgement over to the Son, so that all men may honor the Son just as they honor the Father.

He who refuses to honor the Son, refuses to honor the Father who sent him....

Indeed, just as the Father possesses life in Himself,

so has He granted that the Son also possesses life in himself.

And He has turned over to him to pass judgment because he is Son of Man--"

This discourse is one of the most exalted in the whole New Testament. Jesus is making claims unlike those of any other man, claims tantamount to divinity. Yet Jesus tells the Jewish authorities that there is nothing arrogant in what he has said, for he is completely dependent on the Father and claims nothing on his own. All this is summed up in 10:30: "The Father and I are one."

From Jesus' perspective, God is clearly doing the work the Son is undertaking. This is a man, a person like you or I, recognizing God performing. Meanwhile, the Jews see only a lowly human being operating.

Obviously, there is a chasm here between the two outlooks. I think most of us have eyes like the Jews, seeing only what is on the surface. What can fill the gap to see beyond the apparent? I think of the gap between a pine cone that I can hold in my hand, and a giant redwood almost 400 feet tall and 3000 years old. Or the gap between a serial killer and a Mahatma Gandhi. What this tells me is that the gap can be closed.

What's real is what's going on inside me. I cannot be aware of anything outside the domain of my own mind. This is not denying objective reality; it is saying that no matter what is out there, I can only understand it according to how I perceive it. I act on what I say it is. My mind is the reality. My perception creates my disposition, my outlook. That is the sole existing reality for each of us. It can obviously change at any time. We are so created with free will that my will is God's will. The two wills are joined in the sense that God allows what I choose to be played out. My will is God's will, at least for now.

I don't think any country, culture, or church will save us. It will happen one by one, soul by individual soul. There is no path to follow but one's own. The move towards goodness or love must be the way, and that can be directed towards all that may be experienced in heaven and on earth, towards all that must be done within and without. It is always a stretch to keep our feet on the ground with our head in the clouds.

Because of what Jesus says in passages like this, later theologians will conclude that the Father and the Son are of one and the same nature. I would like to raise the question, "What of God and man being of the same nature?" Could this be a moment of mystery where the Absolute meets the relative? Ultimately all is one, and nothing is real unless it lasts forever. So for the time being, God allows my will to be joined to His for whatever action I choose. And it may take eons for the short-sighted will to pass away. And only I can make it pass away (with God's concurrence). I think this is the human perplexity sparking Jesus' dialogue with the Jews.

(Parcel 1 of "Oneness: God or Man or Both?" contains selections from Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I-XII*, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, vol 29)

Oneness: God or Man or Both? Parcel 2

I find it enchantingly rich to delve into a mystery and explore it with my heart and mind to grasp from it all that I can, then let it go to take whatever course it will for my expansion. The mystery I want to deal with here is the oneness of God and man in Jesus. The Apostle John is particularly adept at pointing out in his writings the relations between Father and Son. It must be remembered that what facilitated him in this venture is that he knew Jesus intimately and loved him personally. John witnessed

the accomplished work of God becoming man. All the references below are taken from his Gospel.

As to the origin of the union, it is said that the Son comes from the Father (8:42); yet the Father who sent him is with him (8:29). It is an abiding relationship.

It is a reciprocal love that binds them together. The Father loves the Son (3:35); the Son knows the Father intimately (8:55, 10:15).

In his mission on earth, the Son can do only what he has seen the Father do (5:19), can judge and speak only as he hears from the Father (5:30). It is as though the Father is a living fellow companion.

The Father's presence is confirmed further in what Jesus teaches and the power he has. The Son was taught by the Father (8:28) and has received from Him powers such as that of judgment (5:22) and of giving and possessing life (5:21, 26, 6:57). It is amazing that a human being can have such ability and efficacy once the person realizes God's presence.

In all things, the Son does the will of the Father (4:34, 6:38) and has received a command from the Father that concerns his death and resurrection (10:18). The Son brings the Father's work to completion. There is a synchronicity of wills, even for what seems the most difficult of tasks.

All these relationships between Father and Son are described in function of the Son's dealings with men. Later theologians take this gospel material pertaining to the mission of the Son AD EXTRA and draw from it a theology of the inner life of the Trinity.

If we take the words of Jesus seriously, he casts you and me into this Father/Son relationship. In 10:30, "The Father and I are one," we find that the unity posited there also concerns men; for just as the Father and Son are one, so they bind men to themselves as one--"that they may be one, even as we" (17:11). This unity that is communicated to believers is what prevents anyone from snatching them away from either Father or Son. Paul puts it in lyrical form in Rom 8:38-39: "Neither death, nor life, nor angels...nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

As with Jesus, so with us. The mystery of encompassing/permeating divinity continues. We're only dimly aware of how Spirit divinizes a human being. His presence pervades everything and everyone but each in a different way. In the "Word made flesh" there is a coming down and a lifting up.

Mystics through the ages have experienced and tried to explain this oneness. I will quote a few here:

"Behold but one in all things; it is the second that leads you astray"—Kabir.

"You the one in all, say who I am. Say I am YOU"—Rumi.

"My me is God, nor do I recognize any other me except my God Himself"—St. Catherine of Genoa.

"There is only Spirit, there is only God, there is only Emptiness in all its radiant wonder"—Ken Wilber.

"Enjoy watching the glory of the Father unfold as my personal experience"—Joel S. Goldsmith.

The mystery of oneness is baffling, but Oh, what a glorious discovery to find it piece by piece in life! As a nun friend told me of her experience, "I am God, not as He is, but as I am." Or the realization Robert Kennedy, a Jesuit, came to after his Zen experience. All his life he had been trying to develop a relationship with Jesus. But after Zen he saw everything in a new light. He declares, "I am Jesus! Right now! With all my limitations!" He moved from relationship to identity. These examples say that nothing is like working out the oneness for oneself.

If we choose to follow this path, we will run into difficulties and obstacles. At that time, all will depend on how we respond to the problem. The stumbling block must become a stepping stone. It contains the challenge we need to face and go beyond the boundaries limiting us. Growth comes with learning, often learning the hard way. Each tiny expansion makes us not only wiser but stronger. In a sense, things have to be the way they are to bring about inner change. As someone has said, "It must needs be so."

The goal--oneness with God--must be kept in mind. The words of Jesus are forever true, "The first and greatest commandment is, 'Thou shall love the Lord your God with your whole soul, with all your heart, with your whole mind, and with all your strength.'" If this is God's commandment, then He must also make us capable of reaching that state. Love is not only a commandment; love is also a gift. Being follows love. We will become what we love, for love is overcoming. Many of us want what the mystics experienced, but few are willing to take the high hard road of tough love.

If at every turn, whether pleasant or difficult, I choose love, then I can't go wrong. A meditation that helped me was to pick out my biggest hurdle, a specific person or situation, and change my stance toward it. I know when I dislike someone, and I also know when I'm loving or not loving. What I needed to do first was to be very clear how I do see that person, without denying any negative thoughts or feelings. The goal is to accept what crosses my path. I am not to just love God, but to love the life that God has given me. Can I change my regard for Robert whom I don't like and avoid whenever I can? The boundaries are within, just as the breakthroughs and the unlimited expanse are within.

Energy follows attention, and that is why awareness is next to godliness. One day, my awareness becomes one with God's over-arching presence. We can then realize in the Spirit what we know to be true on a purely human level. It takes work to become a fully human, human being.

(Parcel 2 of "Oneness: God or Man or Both?" contains selections from Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I-XII*, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, vol 29.)

The Way to Life

Jesus' words, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6), is a brief formula for what he offers a follower. There is a progression widening in scope for each of the subjects he announces.

In saying "I am THE WAY," Jesus is not presenting himself primarily as a moral guide, nor as a leader for his disciples to follow. Here the emphasis is different from that of 16:13 where the Paraclete/Spirit is said to guide the disciples along the WAY of all TRUTH. Rather Jesus is presenting

himself here as the avenue of salvation, as in the manner of 10:9: "I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved."

This is so because Jesus is THE TRUTH, the revelation of the Father who is the goal of the journey. No one has ever seen the Father except Jesus (1:18). Jesus is telling us what he saw in the Father's presence (8:38); and Jesus makes men the children of God whom they can then call Father. Jesus is establishing his disciples in a new relationship to God. In calling himself the truth, Jesus is not giving an ontological definition but is describing himself in terms of his mission to men. The meaning is clear when interpreted in light of 18:37: "The reason I have come into the world is to testify to the truth." The Johannine formula does more than tell us what Jesus does, however: it tells us what Jesus IS in relation to men. Moreover, it reflects what Jesus is IN HIMSELF. John's emphasis on the "real bread," "the real wine" would be in vain if what Jesus is in relation to men was not a true indication of what he is in himself.

If Jesus is the way in the sense that he is the truth that enables men to know their goal, he is also the way in the sense that he is THE LIFE. Once again it describes Jesus in terms of his mission to men: "I came that they may have life and have it to the full" (10:10). The destination of the way is life with the Father; this life the Father has given to the Son (vs 26), and the Son alone can give to men who believe in him (10:28). The gift of natural life to Lazarus was a sign of the eternal goal behind Jesus' claim to be the resurrection and the life (11:25-26): "Everyone who is alive and believes in me shall never die at all."

If Jesus is the way because he is the truth and the life, "truth" and "life" are not simply coordinate: life comes through the truth. Those who believe in Jesus as the incarnate revelation of the Father--and that is what truth means--receive the gift of life, so that the words of Jesus are the source of life: "The words

that I have spoken to you are both Spirit and life" (6:63); "The man who hears my word and has faith in Him who sent me possesses eternal life" (vs 24). When a person comes to Jesus for the truth, it is not simply a matter of learning and going away. One must belong to the truth (18:37). Thus, not only at the moment of first belief but always Jesus remains the way.

The disciples did not fail completely to know Jesus (as "the Jews" had done: 8:19); yet their questions betray their inadequate grasp of knowing him perfectly. All of this will be changed; after "the hour" the author of 1 John (2:13) will be able to say with conviction to his Christian audience: "You have known the Father."

In Near Eastern covenantal language, the verb "to know" includes the sense of "acknowledge." In the Bible it is used for Israel's acknowledgement of Yahweh as its sole God (Hosea 13:14); and Jeremiah (24:7, 31:34). True knowledge or acknowledgement of Yahweh part of the new covenant. As author of the new covenant with his disciples, Jesus insists that they must know him even as Israel knew Yahweh, for "from now on" it is Jesus who will be acknowledged by Christians as "My Lord and my God" (20:28).

In the evangelist John's own time, there were heretical Christians who sought after or claimed a mystical vision of God. Jesus explains clearly (vs 9) that such theophanies or visions are futile now that the Word who is God has become flesh. In seeing Jesus one sees God. Much of the equivalence between Father and Son is phrased in language that stems from the Jewish concept that the one who is sent is completely the representative of the one who sends him.

In this episode there are two themes running concurrently: Jesus union with the Father and the ability of his

"works" to reveal that union. They are spelled out in vs 10: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you are not spoken on my own; it is the Father, abiding in me, who performs the works." Jesus had already stated in 8:28, "I DO nothing by myself." This attitude is best expressed in 17:4 where the whole ministry of Jesus, words and deeds, will be called the "work" given him by his Father to do.

Real belief and acceptance of the works involves the ability to understand their role as signs, that is, the ability to see through them to what they reveal, namely, that they are the work both of the Father and of the Son who are one, and thus that the Father is in Jesus and Jesus is in the Father. As with the disciples so with me, I must be able to see through external works to the reality of the transformation happening within.

We move now to the power of belief in Jesus. Verse 12 serves as a transition from belief (10:11) to receiving help from God (13:14): "Let me firmly assure you, the man who has faith in me will perform the same works that I perform. In fact, he will perform far greater than these, because I am going to the Father" (14:12). Belief in Jesus will bring to Christian power from God to perform the same works that Jesus performs, because, by uniting a man with Jesus and the Father, belief gives him a share in the power that they possess. The additional promise that the believer "will perform (works) far greater than these" is explainable in the changed situation of the post-resurrectional period. After Jesus has been glorified (17:1,5), the Father will perform in His Son's name works capable of manifesting the Son's glory (see the last line of verse 13: "so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.")

The idea that the disciples will be given the power to perform marvelous works is found in many New Testament

writings. There are conditions, however, for having the request granted. They are listed elsewhere in the New Testament, but I will confine the research to what John says: "If conscience (heart) knows nothing damaging, we can have confidence before God and receive from Him whatever we may ask, because we are keeping His commandments and doing what is pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3: 21-22). A similar theme is struck in 1 John 5:14-15: "Now we have confidence in God that He hears us whenever we ask for anything according to His will. And since we know that He hears us whenever we ask, we know that whatever we have asked Him for is ours."

In sum, the conditions are: keeping the commandments, asking in accordance with God's will, having the agreement of several Christians on what should be asked, and believing. This believing is not blind faith, for the Greek noun "PISTIS," which has been translated "FAITH," never appears in John's Gospel. Faith is not simply an internal disposition, but a union with Jesus and his Father involving total commitment and engagement on my part. It includes trust and loyalty. Only then might I have the presence and power to do what Jesus has done.

Prayer is a leading subject in much of the New Testament. Johannine theology, however, introduces into prayer in Jesus name an emphasis that goes beyond the use of a formula. A Christian prays in Jesus' name in the sense that he is in union with Jesus. Asking "in my name" in 14: 13-14 continues and develops the indwelling motif of 10-11: because the Christian is in union with Jesus and Jesus in union with the Father, there can be no doubt that the Christian's requests will be granted. This context of union with Jesus also suggests that the requests of the Christian are no longer thought of as requests concerning the petty things of life--they are requests of such a nature that when they are granted the Father is glorified in the Son (13). They are requests pertinent to the Christian life and to

the continuation of the work by which Jesus glorified the Father during his ministry (17: 4).

What I see in this whole episode is that there are no intermediaries involved among the three parties, the Father, the Son, and the Christian. It is direct communication, perhaps an anticipation of the indwelling passages that John will explain in subsequent chapters. Religion seems to be moving from principle to the personal. I can talk at great length of religion offering ways and truths to make life better. But here Jesus himself takes the place of all these aids and teachings. Jesus is the gate where our entrance starts (the way). He reveals things to us about God that never fail to astonish (the truth). Our goal is living with the Father, now and forever (the life).

In John's writings we are to love not only God but also Jesus himself. To me this is a clear invitation to treat Jesus as a person I know, to talk to him as a friend. Talking to Jesus as a person gets me to my heart. Since strong feelings and emotions are involved this can be exhilarating and frightening at the same time. But what else could be expected? In opening my heart to Jesus I am stripped naked in front of God!

In allowing myself to be open, I may feel the total otherness of God. Yet since all is One, any feeling of alienation is a passing sensation. I may even experience light and darkness. Here again, they are merely fleeting phenomena.

In loving Jesus it is not only possible to have a personal relationship with him, but also to become him. I think that is the ultimate meaning of the second half of verse six which began, "I am the way and the truth and the life." The "way," the "truth," and the "life" are not doctrines; they inhere in Jesus' soul as much as flesh inheres in his body. The same verse concludes, "No one comes to the Father except through me." If I keep

loving, a Jesus arises in me. I need to constantly remind myself that all is One. With God's divinization there is ultimately only God.

If God cannot be thought but He can be loved, the essence of love carries me beyond the intellect and wings me home. There is something beyond the world scene that is solid but invisible. Implicitly I am connected with it, but the intellect, try as it might, cannot fully understand it. Love overcomes all obstacles and puts me to rest so that all striving is over. But I have to be open to love to let this happen. It completely satisfies if I let it because it opens a path to the infinity of God that now includes me so that the two become infinite in the one Infinity. I become as God because ultimately there is only God. When Jesus tells me that he is the way and the truth and the life, I believe he is showing me the different qualities inhering in him that could attract me.

(Selections from Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 29.)

Love's Reward

There is a threefold plea of Jesus asking for love from his followers in John 14. A statement about loving Jesus and keeping his commandments/words occurs in verse 15, verse 21, and verse 23. And in each instance there is a promise that a divine presence will come to those who meet the demand. The first:

15 "If you love me and keep my commandments,

16 then at my request
the Father will give you another Paraclete
to be with you forever.

17 He is the Spirit of Truth
whom the world cannot accept
since it neither sees nor recognizes him;
but you do recognize him
since he remains with you and is within you.

18 I shall not leave you orphans:
I am coming back to you."

In John's arrangement, the second entreaty and promise
occurs shortly after the first:

21 "Whoever keeps the commandments that he has from
me
is the man who loves me;
and the man who loves me will be loved by my Father,
and I shall love him
and reveal myself to him."

The third and last petition/reward is:

23 "If anyone loves me,
he will keep my word,
Then my Father will love him,
and we shall come to him
and make our dwelling place with him."

In 15-17 it is the Paraclete/Spirit who will come to dwell
with the disciples. In 21 it is Jesus who will come to dwell with
the disciples. In 23 it is the Father who will come along with
Jesus to make a dwelling place within the disciples. There is a
triadic pattern here placing in rough parallelism the Spirit, Jesus,
and the Father (with Jesus). Three types of divine indwelling are
woven together into a unit that begins and ends on the theme of
loving Jesus and keeping his commandments.

As we now know, John's Gospel and Epistles were written in stages. Most likely, in the final stages of Johannine theology, all these indwellings were thought to be accomplished in and through the Paraclete. The Paraclete is the presence of Jesus while Jesus is absent, so that the "I am coming back to you" in 18 is no contradiction to the idea that the Paraclete is being sent. And since the Father and Jesus are one, the presence of the Father and Jesus (23) is not really different from the presence of Jesus in the Paraclete.

Jesus demand to be loved is perfectly at home in the covenant atmosphere of the Last Discourse and the Last Supper. There is a parallelism between the demand of the God of Sinai of the Old Covenant to be loved exclusively by His people (Deuteronomy 6:5) and the demand for exclusive love on the part of Jesus who is God's visible presence among men, establishing a new covenant with them.

It must be noted that none of these passages is concerned with the presence of Jesus encountered by mystics; the presence of Jesus is promised, not to an ascetical elite, but to Christians in general. Sharing Jesus' presence in any form is readily available, provided, John indicates, one loves Jesus and keeps the commandments. St. Augustine said centuries later, "Love separates the saints from the world."

A prophet like Zachariah (2:14) had promised on behalf of Yahweh: "For look, I come to dwell in the midst of you." Israel had expected this to take place in the Temple, the house of God (Exodus 25:8; 1 Kings 8:27 ff.); but in Johannine thought this was now the hour when men would worship the Father neither on Mount Gerizim nor in the Jerusalem Temple, but in Spirit and truth (4:21-24).

I have always been impressed by how each succeeding generation of Jesus' followers wanted to preserve any item from the Master that they thought would give an authentic glimpse of his mission and that would help believers in their spiritual awakening. The compilation of the Bible as we have it came in stages, layer after layer. And the discovery continues with modern scientific methods being applied to Biblical studies to bring out the hidden meanings and development of these precious documents.

Who knows what may help the spiritual sojourner? Every one of us has had a father. One may want to relate to God as a Loving Father who looks after his child and will not let harm come to him, who grooms him to eventually be on his own. Jesus was a Son, and every one of us is either a son or a daughter. To feel closer to God, one may like to look upon Jesus as a brother, a fellow traveling companion. Others of us may be entranced by the Spirit Mystery of the Paraclete, of his permeating and pervasive Presence. All are valid ways to God, and John's writings invite us to choose what is most fitting for the individual. At different stages in our life, we have different attractions.

John has given us so much to be aware of. I like to see Father, Son, and Spirit in stages one, two and three, all directed to mankind out of pure love. God's intercession is continuous, leaving it up to us to adapt to His phases in whatever way pleases us. God wants us to take what He gives and make it our own. We are here to live, and all life moves and grows. I like to see the Fatherhood of God somehow living in the Unmanifested Absoluteness of God. The Son, like each of us, is the absorbed manifestation of God. The Paraclete is the Divine Energy working to transform the world and each of us.

Since Paraclete is the least known and most mysterious of the three subjects we are exploring, Father, Jesus, Paraclete, I would like to spell out the various meanings and functions of a paraclete that have helped me to wonder at the presence of this divine figure in my life.

Paraclete can have many meanings, but they all seem related. At one level, a paraclete is "one called alongside to help," thus an advocate or defense attorney. In a more active sense, its meaning is "to intercede, entreat," thus an intercessor, a mediator, a spokesman. Still in the active sense, it means "to comfort," thus a comforter or consoler. Lastly, he exhorts and encourages the preaching of the apostolic witnesses, thus a friend.

No one translation of Paraclete captures the complexity of functions that this figure has. In an attempt to be comprehensive, the Paraclete plays the following roles: the Paraclete is a witness in defense of Jesus and a spokesman for him in the context of his trial by his enemies; the Paraclete is a comforter or consoler of the disciples for he takes Jesus' place among them; the Paraclete is a teacher and guide of the disciples and thus their helper or friend. Instead of choosing one of these meanings to translate Paraclete, we probably are wise in modern times to settle for "Paraclete," a transliteration that preserves the uniqueness of the title and does not emphasize one of the functions to the detriment of others.

The Spirit of Truth is a Paraclete precisely because he carries on the earthly work of Jesus. The Paraclete/Spirit will differ from Jesus the Paraclete in that the Spirit is not corporeally visible and his presence will only be by indwelling in the disciples. The Old Testament theme of "God with us" (the Immanuel of Isaiah 7:14) is now to be realized in the Paraclete/Spirit who remains with the disciples forever.

As suggested above that I may choose between Father, Jesus, or Paraclete in my spiritual endeavor, so too I may do the same regarding the various functions of the Paraclete that corresponds to my need at the time. For example, do I see the world as good or bad, and other people as pleasing or unpleasant? Each of us needs to answer to ourselves whether the world is a friendly place or not. In this quest it can be consoling to call upon the Helper Friend (Paraclete) to come to our aid regarding this questionable world. Father and son are known entities in our daily life; spirit is not. In looking at the different roles attached to Paraclete and the various functions He performs, they tell us he is unfolding the meaning of Jesus and God in our life, in a personal, intimate way. I like to see Him as the Transformer, active as the divine energy changing my life. It is a real possibility to glory in beholding the Spirit/Paraclete manifesting as me.

John has much to say about the Spirit/Paraclete which needs our attention. I think the multiple functions that He plays can be a boon in anyone's spiritual life because I think His role has been underplayed in the life of many a Christian. John presents the Paraclete as the Holy Spirit in a special role, namely, as the personal presence of Jesus in the Christian while Jesus is with the Father. In many New Testament passages, like the spirit of God in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit is described as a force; in John, however, the Paraclete is more clearly personal.

Thus, the one whom John calls "another Paraclete" is another Jesus. Since the Paraclete can come only when Jesus departs, the Paraclete is the presence of Jesus when Jesus is absent. Jesus' promises to dwell within his disciples are fulfilled in the Paraclete. John insists that Jesus will be in heaven with the Father while the Paraclete is on earth in the disciples; and so the two have different roles.

By way of bringing this discussion of the Paraclete to a close, it is profitable to see how John uses his extended treatment of the Indwelling Presence to answer problems that the early Church was facing, answers that also have relevance today. The first problem was the confusion caused by the death of the apostolic eyewitnesses who were the living chain between the Church and Jesus of Nazareth.

The concept of the Paraclete/Spirit is an answer to this problem. The eyewitnesses who had guided the Church and the Beloved Disciple who bore witness to Jesus did so not primarily because of their own recollection of Jesus. After all, they had seen Jesus but not understood (14:9). Only the post-resurrectional gift of the Spirit taught them the meaning of what they had seen (2:22, 12:16). Their witness was the witness of the Paraclete speaking through them.

The second problem was the anguish caused by the delay of the second coming. In the period after A.D. 70 the expectation of the return of Jesus began to pale. His return had been associated with God's wrathful judgment upon Jerusalem (Mark 13), but now Jerusalem had been destroyed by Roman armies and Jesus had not yet returned.

John does not lose faith in the second coming but emphasizes that many of the features associated with the second are already realities of the Christian life (judgment, divine sonship, eternal life). And in a very real way Jesus has come back during the lifetime of his companions, for he has come in and through the Paraclete. In fact, the Paraclete demythologizes several apocalyptic motifs, including world judgment (16:11). The Christian need not live with his eyes constantly straining toward the heavens from which the Son of Man is to come; for, as the Paraclete, Jesus is present within all believers.

At the beginning of this discussion it was said that a divine presence will come to those who meet the demand of loving Jesus and keeping his commandments/words. Love produces intimacy and certainty. A Christian in union with Jesus prays in his name and is always learning things from his Master.

(The above reading is taken in large part from Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John, XIII-XXI*, *The Anchor Yale Bible*, vol. 29.)

PART FOUR

MEDIEVAL CONTINUATION OF THE PARACLETE'S WORK

"Truly you are the hidden God," Meister Eckhart told his congregation. (MEISTER ECKHART, *ibid.*, p. XIV). This medieval mystic, enraptured by God's love, helps me to better understand the mystery of how God and I, His believer, are one. I have quoted from his works several times already, and will do more at length in the following pages.

The Dominican Order, of which he was a member, has tried to have his name and writings exonerated by Catholic Church authorities. In 2010 it was revealed that the Vatican responded in 1992 in a letter to Timothy Radcliffe, then Master of the Dominicans: "We have tried to have the censure lifted on Eckhart [...] and were told that there was really no need since he had never been condemned by name, just some propositions which he was supposed to have held, and so we are perfectly free to say that he is a good and orthodox theologian."

Not only was Eckhart a theologian, but also a philosopher and a mystic. Having read and studied some of his sharp and profound writings, his greatest contribution may have been as a spiritual director for his followers. I feel a particular bond with Eckhart because of the work I was engaged in as a member of the Society of St. Sulpice teaching theology at St. Mary's Seminary, Baltimore, MD. This society was founded in France in 1641 to direct and educate men for the priesthood. Fellow members established the first seminary in America, St. Mary's, Baltimore, MD, in 1791. Each member, while teaching from his faculty position, is also the confessor and spiritual director for a designated number of students given to his care. I sensed it as a divine charge to be groomed as a Sulpician, to teach theology in the seminary, to research and to write, and to be entrusted with the development of these young and impressionable men. And here is where I felt a particular connection with Eckhart's teaching, of which the "dominant central theme (is) the birth of the Word in the soul." This giving birth to God within the soul is exactly what we strove for in our seminary work.

Eckhart found his own identity in God, modeling for others to venture forth and find a place of their own. In the following prolonged and in depth review of his writings, the reader may think that he is hearing the rector in the seminary instructing his students on the ground-plan for their transformation, or that she is hearing a discourse from Mother Superior in a convent teaching those who want to be nuns. One has but to read the lives of some saints to understand how these saintly souls are enraptured with God in their life, akin to what we will see here. Eckhart constantly talks about how God acts, revealing surprises large and small, showing not only his confidence but also his own closeness to God.

Since the focus of my entire treatise is John's Gospel, I will start with Eckhart's commentary on it. I will then proceed to other salient features of his astute understanding of the divine/human enterprise in his sermons and treatises. A prevailing feature of the Johannine writings is love; a dominant feature in Eckhart's is the impetus to love, namely, the will. He shows again and again how much depends on the free choices of the individual.

It occurred to me that I intended John's Gospel to be the central theme of this treatise, and here I am writing at length about Meister Eckhart. I recall the intention he had for his teaching, which I quoted earlier: "the birth of the Word in the soul." The wording made me think of a similar statement of Angelus Silesius (German Catholic priest and physician, 1624-1677) who said Christ "could be born a thousand times in Bethlehem-but all in vain until He is born in me." Silesius gives a further example where likeness to God escalates into identity with God:

"I am like God and God like me.
I am as large as God, He as small as I.
He cannot above me, nor I beneath him be."

The convictions of these two mystics harken right back to the work of the Paraclete. John the Evangelist was adamant on how His indwelling in us continues the work of Jesus. It then made me feel that it is fitting to have the work of a great mystic like Eckhart follow a treatise on John's Gospel. In fact, I think it serves well to give as wide a display of his teachings as I can for three reasons. First, I already mentioned his qualification based on his sterling credentials as theologian, philosopher, and spiritual director. Secondly, he has written a detailed commentary on the Prologue of John's Gospel. And thirdly, I believe he is a prime example of the Paraclete continuing the

work of Jesus in him. He took the Gospels and used the words of Jesus to personally realize their meanings for himself and his followers. He is proof that Jesus is thus born again in Angelus and in himself, and wants to be born in you and in me. I wanted to take one person, he happened to be a distinguished mystic, and show how Jesus and the Christian message transformed him into another being, into a God-Being, who shows the way for the rest of us. It is for this reason that I ask for the reader's patience if my quoting Eckhart seems long and laborious. I found his work, so carefully translated and annotated by Edmund Colledge and Bernard McGinn, particularly amenable as a follow-up to John's Gospel because where John (and the Synoptics) stress the paramount importance of love, Eckhart elaborates on the impetus for love, the human will, in its many operations.

Eckhart's Commentary on John's Prologue

In his interpretation of the Prologue, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," Eckhart states his purpose: "In interpreting this Word and everything else that follows my intention is the same as in all my works--to explain what the holy Christian faith and the two Testaments maintain through the help of the natural arguments of the philosophers." He then quotes Scripture's similar philosophical approach to substantiate his claim: "God's invisible attributes are seen and understood from the creation of the world in the things that he has made as well as his everlasting power...and his divinity..." (Romans I:20). Eckhart further explains his method of operation at the end of his Commentary on John: "But there is good reason to say (always presupposing the historical truth of the text) that everything that is said here, the whole verse, is contained in and taught by the properties of things of nature, morality and art." Eckhart often offers multiple ways to explain the same scriptural passage, so that we can get several meanings from a particular

text. They are derived but essential meanings of the passage in question.

His "natural arguments of the philosophers" includes classical Greek philosophy and its categories, often as interpreted by Augustine and Arabic writers. To see what Aristotle, Plato, Avicenna and others said about the same or similar subjects was vogue for the times. For example, Eckhart has this in his commentary on John; "In the seventh book of the CONFESSIONS Augustine says that he read 'In the beginning was the Word' and a large part of the first chapter of John in the works of Plato." With the rediscovery of classical culture after the dark ages, it was seen as a worthy handmaiden for the exposition of Christian thought.

This format of resorting to secular sources, however, was not without opposition, for some saw it as a return to paganism. Such a view was taken by those who boycotted Thomas Aquinas' teaching at Paris and those who went so far as to condemn his writings.

Students of Scripture have said that each age gets out of Scripture what it brings to the writings. The early centuries of Christianity brought faith and so they got faith in return in its various aspects. They saw the trust of Abraham and Jesus, relished the engagement of Saul becoming Paul, celebrated the commitment of Job and the Beloved Disciple. At the time of the Reformation, the parties saw Church in Scripture, and so that is what they extracted from the Good Book, a distinct kind of community with common ties to Jesus. Our time is bringing science to Scripture, and so we get a scientific interpretation: literary forms or form criticism, the differences among Greek and Hebraic and Aramaic thought, the layered or sequential composition of the Bible, discerning what the different cultures behind the composition of the Bible contributed to its final form.

Since it is agreed that the Old and the New Testament have the divine imprint on them, we can infer that such texts are translatable for all people of all times.

In Eckhart's interpretation of the Prologue, he takes those words as well as Jesus' own and, as Jesus intended, applies them, with the proof coming, as Jesus intended, from within. I will give his explanations for the Prologue then move on to his sermons and treatises. In reference to the Word beginning in God and coming forth from God, he says that what is produced or proceeds from anything is pre-contained in its source: "A chest in its maker's mind is not a chest, but is the life and understanding of the maker, his living conception....the chest that is or has been brought forth into existence still exists and stays in the maker himself, just as it was in the beginning before it came to be. This is true even if it's external existence is destroyed....it is life, the vital concept of the maker."

Eckhart is saying "That the Son or Word is the same as what the Father or Principle is," and "the Word is in the Father himself." Applying it to Jesus, Eckhart quotes John 16:15, "All the things that the Father has are mine." He sees it as Jesus receiving "the Father's uncreated nature," for as John says in 10:29, "What the Father has given me is greater than all." Behind his thought, which serves as ground for what he teaches, the Meister's outlook "is that the One, Being, the True and the Good are interchangeable,"

Eckhart is saying that what is created in some way stays in the creator. His hope is that such a realization about our own being is a source of everlasting joy and solace. It means we can never lose God, nor can God ever lose us. Eckhart wants to show how God giving birth to his Son is prototype and model for each of us. He uses the example of a just man who preexists in justice itself: "the just man is always being born from justice itself in the

same way that he was born from it from the beginning of the time he became just....The just man in justice itself is not yet begotten nor Begotten Justice, but is Unbegotten Justice itself."

Then the Meister applies his comparison to me when he tells his congregation: "As truly as the Father in his simple nature gives his Son birth naturally, so truly does he give him birth in the most inward part of the spirit, and that is the inner world. Here God's ground is my ground, and my ground is God's ground. Here I live from what is my own, and God lives from what is his own....allow God to be God in you. Go completely out of yourself for God's love, and God comes completely out of himself for love of you. And when these two have gone out, what remains there is a simplified One." In the following sermon he quotes St. Augustine (St. Bernard of Clairvaux) on love, "When the soul loves, it is more properly itself than when it gives life." And for the happy conclusion of loving in this way he quotes 2 Corinthians 3:18: "We shall be completely transformed and changed into God."

Eckhart says "note that God, although he is everywhere and in all things as existence, and is also everywhere and in all things through his essence, is still said to 'come' when his presence is evident through some new effect." Eckhart alternates between talking about God's own nature and our nature. What we may regard as "out there" must be taken into ourselves. "With us no matter how close the object of sight approaches the faculty of sight, we never see unless the visible image itself (the same image as that of the visible thing) is imprinted on and transferred to or 'dwells in' the one who sees....so that not only may 'the Word be made flesh,' but 'what is made flesh may also dwell among us.' This is what the Son says further on-'I have come,' that is, by taking on flesh, 'that they may have life' " (John 10:10), that is, by my living among them. This is said right

below, 'And of his fullness we have all received, grace for grace.'"

Lest I feel unworthy of God's coming to me personally because of my sins or some transgression, Eckhart offers some consoling words. He looks deeply into effects of God's presence in us. "Sin and evil in general are not things that exist, so they are not made through him but without him. This is the meaning of what follows: 'Without him was made nothing,' that is, sin or evil, as Augustine says. Here it says that all things were made through him, but evil things do not exist and are not made because they are not produced, but as defects of some act of existence."

He further consoles his hearers by pointing out the immediacy of God's presence. People often have difficulty by thinking that God is in heaven or some other remote place. Things are "present equally and immediately to God at the same time," so do not look "for a medium in what is immediate, a space where there is no quantity." A second false image occurs when it is thought "that grace alone is an illumination, when every perfection, especially existence itself, is an illumination and a source of each enlightening perfection."

When Eckhart says that existence itself is an illumination and a source of perfection, he is giving credence to the fact that all life must be done in God, not just at certain times or places: "If you want to know if your work has been done in God, see if it is your life....see if it is living, for it says here, 'What was made in him was life.' " Augustine had said, "Our hearts are restless until they rest in God." Eckhart says it more blatantly: "Since man...receives his total existence entirely from God...existence for him is not 'existence-for-himself' but 'existence-for-God....It is existence-for-God, I say, insofar as

God is the principle that gives existence, and insofar as he is the end for which man exists and lives."

Eckhart especially likes to show how a creature's birth parallels the birth of God's Son. "The Father gives his Son birth without ceasing. Once the Son has been born he receives nothing from the Father because he has it all....In this we must understand that we must be an only son whom the Father has eternally begotten. When the Father begot all created things, then he begot me, and I flowed out with all created things, and yet I remained within, in the Father....That is,...the soul is the "little spark," it is both eternally being born from the Father and eternally unborn as one with the Father".

"Here we are given to understand that we are an only son whom the Father has eternally borne out of the concealed darkness of the eternal concealment, remaining within in the first beginning of the first purity, which is a plenitude of all purity....Out of the purity he everlastingly bore me, his only-born Son, into that same image of his eternal Fatherhood, that I may be Father and give birth to him of whom I am born."

Since I am "an only son" who "has it all," the consequence is that I have to Father the Son in me and keep begetting Him over and over again. This is how God and I become One. I remove acts of selfishness to become One with the "other." I will close Eckhart's commentary on John's Prologue with what might be considered the reward (my destiny) for taking these words to heart. Eckhart quotes Hugh of St. Victor, speaking in the person of the soul, who asks:

"What is that sweetness that is accustomed to touch me from time to time and offers to me so strongly and deliciously that I begin in a way to be completely taken out of myself, and to be carried away I know not where? All at once I am renewed and

entirely changed; I begin to feel well in a way that lies beyond description. Consciousness is lifted on high, and all the misery of past misfortunes is forgiven. The intellectual soul rejoices; the understanding is strengthened, the heart is enlightened, the desires satisfied. I already see myself in a different place that I do not know. I hold something within in love's embrace, but I do not know what it is."

Eckhart sees this ecstatic state of St. Victor as the result of taking the words of the Prologue to heart and letting them flourish there: "The third sentence (of the Prologue) gives the answer to the question of what it is--'And God was the Word.' The just man, the word of justice, is justice itself. 'The Father and I are one' (John 10:30). The just man signifies justice alone, as we read above. The following sentence, 'This was in the beginning with God,' teaches us why the Word exists. The end is universally the same as the beginning, or principle. It does not have a why, but is itself the why of all things and for all things."

As the only writing we have that tells us of Jesus' previous life with God, the Prologue represents the supreme revelation of God; the Supreme Being became man so that not only every aspect of human existence may be divinized, but also to show man how that can be done. It needs stressed that revelation is always going on, for through the Paraclete Jesus dwells in those who believe in him. The Paraclete is the link of future generations to Jesus, so that in an essential way, all Christians are as close to Jesus as those who saw and heard him. It is up to us to see this as Eckhart did, for knowing this is one of the greatest gifts we could have.

Eckhart takes examples from many sources to help his congregation grasp how God identifies with the believer and the believer with Him. The will, of course, plays a dominant role in all we do. So much is asked of the will, but nothing beyond its

capability. The glory of the will is that it is free and made that way so that man can freely reach his highest aspirations. If I am full of God, than I can know no lack. All can be one because spirit is unlimited. We are dealing with eternal spiritual realities that do not have the limits of time and space, of mind and matter.

Eckhart's Sermons and Treatises

In my slow and meditative readings of Eckhart's writings, I was impressed by the deep stirrings he caused in me. As a result, I want to talk about those subjects that so moved me and give examples of how one's uniqueness finds identity in God. I want to make it as personal as I can for my friends and me, so I will take the thoughts of Eckhart and without changing the meaning create a personal synopsis. I think this is in accordance with what Meister intended.

Eckhart, like so many mystics, identified emphatically with God in himself. I covered his commentary on the Prologue; here I will go on to his sermons and treatises. I think a good beginning is to be clear on what God has done for us. Such a format also follows that of John's Gospel that started with the pre-existent Word taking flesh.

God Gives Us His Life

(Sermons 2, 5b, 6, 15, 22, 48)

"What God gives is his being, and his being is his goodness. and his goodness is his love. All sorrow and all joy come from love....In this we must understand that we must be an only son whom the Father has eternally begotten. When the Father begot all created things, then he begot me, and I flowed out with all created things, and yet I remained within, in the Father."

If often we don't recognize God's presence, it is because as Eckhart says, "Truly you are the hidden God...in the ground of the soul, where God's ground and the soul's ground are one ground....Here God's ground is my ground, and my ground is God's ground. Here I live from what is my own, as God lives from what is his own. Subtle as that may be, "The earth can flee nowhere so deep that the heavens will not flow into it and impress their powers on it and make it fruitful, whether it likes it or not."

Because of what God has done, "People ought to give joy to the angels and the saints." Eckhart then takes a light turn and asks, "What, does that amaze you? Can a man in this life give joy to those who are in everlasting life? Yes, indeed he can....And not only the saints or the angels, for God himself takes such delight in this, just as if it were his blessedness; and his being depends upon it, and his contentment and his well-being."

Eckhart wants to expand the horizon of his listeners by quoting an ancient Greek master: "Now notice carefully what Aristotle says about separated spirits in the book called METAPHYSICS. He is the greatest of authorities who ever spoke about the natural sciences, and he deals with these separated spirits and says that they are not the form of anything, and that they accept their being as it flows without medium from God; and so they flow back in again, and receive the outflowing from God without medium, above the angels, and they contemplate God's naked being without distinction."

The Meister emphasizes again the grand gift of God to us: "I say in the truth, which is good and eternal and enduring, that God must pour out the whole of himself with all his might so totally into every man who has utterly abandoned himself that God withholds nothing of his being or his nature or his entire

divinity...." Eckhart goes on to explain what this grand gesture means for the recipient: "And I have often said that there is a power in the soul that touches neither time nor flesh. It flows from the spirit and remains in the spirit and is wholly spiritual. In this power God is always verdant and blossoming in all the joy and the honor that he is in himself."

God's Life in Us Is a Door to the Beyond

(Sermons 2, 5b, 6, 15, 22, 48, 52, 53, 83)

Because so much can be said about God's gifts, Eckhart cautions that what we know about God is only a dim shadow of what we don't know. He opens that door for us, and wants us to keep it open because it leads to other rooms within us. He says, "God is spoken and unspoken. The Father is a speaking work, and the Son is speech working. There are things beyond our understanding that can awe and enrapture us, a treasury untapped deep within." He gives us an inkling of this when he quotes a source without naming it: "One authority says, 'If I had a God whom I could understand, I should never consider him God.' A truthful man says, 'I know that I don't know God, and that is a great source of joy and consolation; it transports me out of myself propelled by God's presence in me.'" Eckhart hopes that such statements as these would lead his hearers to say to themselves, "Isn't the source of this God dwelling in my soul? Isn't this the Paraclete continuing the work of Jesus as instructed by the Father?"

Eckhart says that blessedness does not consist in either knowing or loving, "but that there is that in the soul from which knowing and loving flow; that something does not know or love as do the powers of the soul. Whoever knows this knows in what blessedness consists. That something has neither before nor after, and it is not waiting for anything that is to come, for it can

neither gain nor lose. So it is deprived of the knowledge that God is acting in it; but it is itself the very thing that rejoices in itself as God does in himself....A man should be formed again into that simple good which is God; he should reflect on the great nobility with which God has endowed his soul, so that in this way he may come to wonder at God, about the purity of the divine nature, for the brightness of the divine nature is beyond words. God is a word, a word unspoken." Eckhart wants us to "dream" big, and in this inspiring paragraph he shows how the reality is greater than the dream. That "something" residing in the soul is the source of our knowing and loving. It "rejoices in itself as God does in himself." It is where God and I are indistinguishable from each other. It is where the greatest dream possible comes true!

Considering the phenomenon of light the way Eckhart experiences it can help us understand that "something" in the soul from which knowing and loving flow. Light is also a common feature in the experiences of many mystics. He speaks "of a light that is uncreated and not capable of creation and that is in the soul. I always mention this light in my sermons; and this same light comprehends God without a medium, uncovered, naked, as he is in himself; and this comprehension is to be understood as happening when the birth takes place. Here I may truly say that this light may have more unity with God than it has with any power of the soul, with which, however, it is one in being." Eckhart, in speaking of uncreated light in the soul, is most likely speaking of the existence of the ground of the soul in God.

Eckhart continues by explaining what this experience of light is: "I speak in all truth, truth that is eternal and enduring, that this same light is not content with the simple divine essence in its repose, as it neither gives nor receives; but it wants to know the source of this essence, it wants to go into the simple ground,

into the quiet desert, into which distinction never gazed, not the Father, nor the Son, nor the Holy Spirit. In the innermost part, where no one dwells, there is contentment for that light, and there it is more inward than it can be to itself, for this ground is a simple silence, in itself immovable, and by this immovability all things are moved, all life is received...."

Eckhart often spoke of "breaking-through," such as in Sermon 52 when he says that only in breaking-through can "I receive that God and I are one." The light leading the soul into the silence and solitude of the desert would be the breakthrough where end and principle are the same.

The breakthrough can be better explained when one sees the importance of what Paul said, "Be renewed in your spirit" (Ephesians 4: 23). Paul explains that this means a spiritual revolution by giving up illusory desires. Eckhart confirms this when he emphasizes the need to drop images. In early stages of contemplation, images can serve a useful purpose. But Eckhart says, "Even if the soul contemplates God, either as God or as an image or as three, the soul lacks something. But if all images are detached from the soul, and it contemplates only the Simple One, then the soul's naked being finds the naked, formless being of the divine unity, which is there a being above being, accepting and reposing in itself. Ah, marvel of marvels, how noble is that acceptance, when the soul's being can accept nothing else than the naked unity of God."

Renewal happens to all created things, but no renewal comes to God, only eternity evermore. "What is eternity? Pay heed! It is the property of eternity that in it being and youth are one because eternity would not be eternal if it could be renewed, if it did not always exist....To the soul, too, renewal happens, so far as 'spirit' is its name. It is called spirit because it is detached from here and now and from the whole natural order. But when

it is an image of God and as nameless as God, then no renewal happens to it, but only eternity, as in God.”

“Now pay attention: God is nameless, because no one can say anything or understand anything about him. Therefore a pagan teacher says, 'Whatever we understand or say about the First Cause, that is far more ourselves than it is the First Cause, for it is beyond all saying and understanding.’”

His way was to keep silent out of regard for our inner power and potential: “The best that one can say about God is for one to keep silent out of the wisdom of one's inward riches. So be silent, and do not chatter about God....And do not try to understand God, for God is beyond all understanding. One authority says, ‘If I had a God whom I could understand, I should never consider him God.’ ” Eckhart's approach is to keep silent, for, he warns, "He who seeks God under settled form lays hold of the form, while missing the God concealed in it." The key word is 'settled.' It is permissible to seek God provisionally under a form which is understood as merely a symbol of Reality, and a symbol which must sooner or later be discarded in favor of what it stands for.

I see a parallel here with the Hesychia of Mount Athos. In their teaching, choosing the Spirit sent by God forms in our mind a "CLEAR SPACE-initially small. We will sense this as a stillness, and it was this stillness, known as HESYCHIA, that was taught by the earthly Fathers, including Saint Augustine, as a sign or test by which we will know when we are touched by the Spirit of God....It is, sometimes at least, regarded as synonymous with 'dwelling in God' " (Robin Amis, *A DIFFERENT CHRISTIANITY*, Praxis Institute Press, Chicago, USA, pp 280, 312).

It appears from these offerings that we are urged less to make an effort and more to trust our own interior processing. Is this the acute awareness Jesus counseled: "You should be like men who are always watching and waiting for their master" (Luke 12: 36), and, "Watch and Pray" (Matthew 26: 41),

Jesus' words carry us beyond a relationship with God to identifying with Jesus and the Father. Elsewhere, the same is said of oneness with the Holy Spirit. Such as I am, I can be one with the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit. They are closer to me than I am to myself! "On that day you will recognize that I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I in you" (John 14: 20) "Father may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17: 21). This is the promise of Jesus, but do I listen and take it seriously? The result spelled out is that power comes from Jesus to me. "Whatever you ask in my name I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it" (John 14: 13-14).

Belief in Jesus brings power from God to perform the same works that Jesus performs, because, by uniting a man with Jesus and the Father, the union gives him a share in the power that they possess. Many New Testament writings show that the disciples will be given power to perform marvelous works. The destination of the way is life with the Father; this life the Father has given to the Son: "But the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you myself" (John 14; 260). From Eckhart's writings it seems that every thought he had, every word he spoke was in connection with what Jesus said and did. He is a great example of the internal revolution that can take place in us. All this may well be a new way of thinking and of living. We are to love the unseen; God is everywhere all the time. A deep conviction of this leads me to fear nothing.

"You should perceive him without images, without a medium, and without comparisons. But if I am to perceive God so, without a medium, then I must just become him, and he must become me. I say more: God must just become me, and I must just become God, so completely one that this 'he' and this 'I' become and are one 'is,' and, in this is-ness, eternally perform one work, for this 'he' who is God, and this 'I' which is the soul, are greatly fruitful."

The human mind constantly resorts to "pictures," to "images," to facilitate what it thinks is understanding. It may work on the purely earthly level, but such "understanding" cannot apply to God. We give spirit a "form" or "image." Eckhart prefers us to be image-less of God. This is where Eckhart gives warning: "You should love God un-spiritually, that is, your soul should be unspiritual and stripped of all spirituality, for as long as it has images, it has a medium, and so long as it has a medium, it has not unity or simplicity. Therefore your soul must be unspiritual, free of all spirit, and must remain spiritless; for if you love God as he is God, as he is spirit, as he is person and as he is image--all this must go! 'Then how must I love him?' You should love him as he is a non-God, a non-spirit, a nonperson, a non-image, but as he is a pure, unmixed, bright 'One,' separated from all duality; and in that One we should eternally sink down, out of 'something' into 'nothing.' May God help us to that. Amen."

Eckhart sets the bar so high that it may seem unreachable. Yet he had called attention to the "wisdom of one's inward riches," showing the great trust and confidence he has in the awareness and love in each of us to find our way. And as he had already reminded us, love and awareness are faculties of a still greater power. He had also said the following: "For in the same being of God where God is above being and above distinction, there I myself was, there I willed myself and

committed myself to create this man. Therefore I am the cause of myself in the order of my being, which is eternal, and not in the order of becoming, which is temporal. And therefore I am unborn, and in the manner in which I am unborn I can never die. In my unborn manner I have been eternally, and am now, and shall eternally remain. What I am in the order of having been born, that will die and perish, for it is mortal, and so it must in time suffer corruption. In my birth all things were born and I was the cause of myself and of all things; and if I would have wished it, I would not be nor would all other things be. And if I did not exist, 'God' would also not exist. That God is 'God,' of that I am a cause; if I did not exist, God too would not be 'God.' There is no need to understand this."

Eckhart recognizes how hard it may be to comprehend what he is saying. He finishes this Sermon 52 with the following: "Whoever does not understand what I have said, let him not burden his heart with it; for as long as a man is not equal to the truth, he will not understand these words, for this is a truth beyond speculation that has come immediately from God. May God help us to live that we may find it eternally. Amen."

One of the chief sources for Eckhart's writings is Pseudo-Dionysius. He is called "Pseudo" because he represented himself as Dionysius the Areopagite, a notable Athenian who was converted by St. Paul. Assuming such an identity was a common ploy in his day, and is not to be taken as "forgery," a much later conception. This late fifth and early sixth century author did not consider himself an innovator but rather as a communicator of a tradition. His brilliance is attested by the fact that he has been called the "fountain-head" of Christian mysticism. He describes God or absolute truth only in negative terms.

A sample of Pseudo's" work may illustrate his influence upon Meister Eckhart, as shown by William James in THE VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE, The Modern Library, New York, 1936, pp 407-408: "The cause of all things is neither soul nor intellect; nor has it imagination, opinion, or reason, or intelligence; nor is it reason or intelligence; nor is it spoken or thought....It is neither essence, nor eternity, nor time....It is not even royalty or wisdom; not one, not many, not divinity or goodness; not even spirit as we know it," etc. James continues, "But these qualifications are denied by Dionysius, not because the truth falls short of them, but because it so infinitely excels them. It is above them. It is SUPER-lucent, SUPER-splendent, SUPER-essential, SUPER-sublime, SUPER-EVERYTHING that can be named." It might be said that Eckhart, like Pseudo-Dionysius, collapses time and space and all human extensions and dimensions into something we call the "ONE," in which we live and is the beginning and end of everything.

In this personal synopsis of some of Eckhart's writings, I have said so far that 1) God gives us His life, 2) With a door to the Beyond. That Beyond has many rooms as we have seen; mystics and others have entered rooms that others may have thought impossible. But that Beyond consists of rooms in my own house, in my own depths, of which one is: 3) A willingness to be one with God. Will, of course, plays a dominant role in all the Eckhart says, in all that I am. In this section I move on from Eckhart's Sermons to his Treatises, and want to specify the different ways in which we become one with God.

Willing Oneness

The reason it is important to will oneness is that things are already one but most of us don't know it. And those who do know it, can lose the realization any time. Eckhart offers a true

picture of reality: "And if we will see things truly, they are strangers to goodness, truth and everything that tolerates any distinction, be it in a thought or in a name, in a notion or just a shadow of a distinction. They are intimates of the One that is bare of every kind of multiplicity and distinction. In the One, "God-Father-Son-and-Holy Spirit" are stripped of every distinction and property, and are one. And the One makes us blessed, and the further we are away from the One, the less we are sons and the Son, and the less perfectly does the Holy Spirit spring up in us and flow out from us. And the closer we are to the One, the more fully are we God's sons and his Son, and also the more truly does God the Holy Spirit flow from us. This is what our Lord, God's Son in the divinity, means when he says, 'Whoever drinks from the water which I shall give, in him will spring a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting' (John 4:14). And Saint John states that Jesus said that referring to the Holy Spirit (John 7:39)."

Eckhart quotes Jesus in saying "That what is impossible to man is possible to God (Mathew 19:26). That is also true in common things and in the natural order: What is impossible to our lower nature is commonplace and natural to our higher nature....I have also often said, that a good man, born of goodness and in God, enters into all the attributes of the divine nature."

"A good man, in so far as he is good, has God's attributes not only in that he loves and works everything that he loves and works for the sake of God, whom he loves in everything and for love of whom he works, but he also loves and works for the sake of himself, who is the one loving. For what he loves, that is God, Father, Unbegotten; and he who loves is God, Son, Begotten. Now the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father (John 17: 21). Father and Son are one." Then Eckhart completes the identification of man with God: "the innermost

and highest part of the soul creates and receives God's Son and becoming-God's-Son in the bosom and heart of the heavenly Father." We will explore the meaning of this astounding statement at the conclusion of our work, in Part Five.

God's One with Us In Suffering

What can we respond upon hearing such magnanimous words? It seems obvious that God wants to join Himself with us in all of life's situations. All is not joy and happiness, however, as he warns us: "God chastises all those whom he receives and accepts as sons (Hebrews 12:6). It is part of being a son for us to suffer. Because God's Son could not suffer in his divinity and in eternity, the heavenly Father therefore sent him into time, to become man and to be able to suffer. So if you want to be son of God and you do not wish to suffer, you are all wrong."

"God's son by nature wanted to become man as a favor, so that he could suffer for your sake; and you want to become God's son and not man, so that you cannot and need not suffer, either for love of God or of yourself....God is with us in suffering means that that he himself suffers with us. Indeed, anyone who sees the truth knows that what I say is true. God suffers with man, he truly does; he suffers in his own fashion, sooner and far more than the man suffers who suffers for love of him. Now I say, if God himself is willing to suffer, then I ought fittingly to suffer, for if I think rightly, I want what God wants. I pray every day as God commands me to pray: 'Lord, may your will be done'....therefore I say, everything the good man suffers for God's sake, he suffers in God, and God is suffering with him in his suffering. But if my suffering is in God and God is suffering with me, how then can suffering be sorrow to me?....Of this it is written that the holy apostles rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer torment for the name of God" (Acts 5: 41).

In closing the current discussion, Eckhart warns not to misjudge someone who is suffering: "Now one can see and know how stupid the people are who are always surprised when they see good men suffering pain and harm; and often in their folly they wrongly imagine that this must be for such men's secret sins, and then sometimes they say: 'Oh, I thought he was a very good man! How can it be that he is suffering such great sorrow and harm, when I thought that he was perfect?' "

We becoming divine is a process that continues, as Eckhart avers in this same context: "God so created the world that he still without ceasing creates it....That is why the saints say that as the Son was eternally begotten, so is he still being begotten without ceasing."

Eckhart identifies the good man and goodness with the truthful man and truth, with the just man and justice, with the wise man and wisdom, with the Son of God and God the Father, with everything that is born of God and has no earthly father here, with everything in which nothing created and nothing that is not God is born, in which there is no image except God, bare, pure, alone. "For as Saint John says in his Gospel: 'To all those the power and might is given to become the sons of God, who are born not of the blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God' (John 1:12), and from God alone.' "

The Will Engaging Changing Images

"By 'the will of man' Saint John means the highest powers of the soul....And yet, because these powers are not themselves God, and are created in the soul and with the soul, they must lose their own image, and be transformed above themselves into the image of God alone, and be born of God and from God, so that God alone may be their Father; for in this way they too are the sons of God and God's Only-Begotten Son. For I

am the son of everything that forms and bears me to be like it and in its likeness."

It strikes me that while saying these powers must lose their own image and take on God's, Eckhart comments on how powerful and sublime the human will is before it assumes a divine dimension. To summarize Eckhart: The nature and works of these highest powers of the soul are unmixed with the flesh, residing in the soul's purity, separated from time and place and all that, which neither take delight in time and place, which have nothing in common with anything, and in which man is formed after God's image, in which man is one of God's family and of his kin.

On the subject of man's natural power of the will, Eckhart takes quotes from outside Christianity. "Seneca, a pagan philosopher, asks, 'What is the best consolation in sorrow and misfortune?' And he says, 'It is for man to accept everything as if he had wished for it and had asked for it; for you would have wished for it, if you had known that everything happens by God's will, with his will and in his will.' A pagan philosopher says, 'Leader and commander, Father and Lord of high heaven, I am ready for everything which is your will; give me the will to will according to your will.' "

Eckhart builds his own edifice on the same theme: "a good man's will ought to be so wholly one and united with God's will that he and God have only one will. For a truly perfect man should be accustomed to regard himself as dead, and his self as transformed in God, and so supernaturally changed in God's will that all his blessedness consists in knowing God alone, in willing and wanting to know nothing but God's will, and in wanting to know God as God knows him." Saint Paul says, "The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know as fully as I am known." (1 Corinthians 13:12). Eckhart quotes St. Paul here

because of the outstanding declaration from Paul that he will know himself as God knows him! What a grand awareness it must be to see myself as God sees me! After quoting Paul, Eckhart immediately quotes John because he wants to show why this inestimable state happens, this state not only of attaining God but also of discerning my true self as God knows me: "Eternal life consists in this: that they know you, the one true God, and Jesus Christ, the one whom you sent."

Eckhart expands: "This is why the teachers say that the blessed in heaven perceive creatures free from every creaturely image, and that they perceive them in that one image which is God, and in which God knows and loves and wills himself in all things."

God joins his will to man's, even in the seeming contradiction of man's sinning. Eckhart does not shy away from facing this difficulty: "The Gospel says about this: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit' (Matthew 5:3), that is, in the will; and we pray to God that 'his will be done on earth,' that is, in us, 'as it is in heaven,' that is, in God himself. Such a man is so much of one will with God that he wills everything that God wills, and in the fashion in which God wills it. And therefore, because in some way or other it is God's will that I should have sinned, I should not want not to have done so, for in this way God's will is done 'on earth,' that is, in misdeeds, 'as it is in heaven,' that is, in good deeds. Thus a man's wishes to be deprived of God for God's own sake and for God's own sake to be separated from God, and that alone is true repentance for my sins."

Now see what a wonderful and joyful life man has, 'on earth as it is in heaven,' in God himself....Misfortune serves him as if it were good fortune, and sorrow as much as joy....man obtains God more truly in lacking than in obtaining; for when a man receives something, the gift possesses in itself that by which

he is glad and comforted. But if he does not receive it, he does not have, he does not find, he does not know any cause for joy except God and God's will alone." Right here is where we see how revolutionary is such a mode of conduct--to rejoice in not getting, not having, not possessing anything but God alone! This is certainly not an earthly way of acting.

To answer the problem, Eckhart turns to the words of Jesus who, knowing our human dilemma, says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He then explains Jesus' Beatitude, and in a simple example from nature illustrates how emptiness leads to fullness "A man is poor who has nothing. To be poor in spirit means that as the eye is poor and deprived of color, and is able to apprehend every color, so he is poor in spirit who is able to apprehend every spirit, and the Spirit of all spirits is God....To be naked, to be poor, to have nothing, to be empty transforms nature; emptiness makes water flow uphill, and many other marvels of which we need not now speak."

Poor in spirit or emptiness really means the absence of self- or ego-existence. Poorness or emptiness has meaning only in reference to something that is not poor or empty, something that is full and rich. "Therefore, if you want to have and to find complete joy and consolation in God, make sure that you are naked of all created things, of all comfort from created things; for truly, so long as created things console you and can console you, never will you find true consolation. But when nothing but God can console you, then truly God does console you, and with him and in him everything that is joy consoles you."

The Nobleman

Building from Scripture and the theme of the good man, Eckhart tells the story of a nobleman to illustrate how what he

has said is absorbed into a person. He begins with the words of Jesus: "A nobleman went out into a far country to obtain for himself a kingdom and returned" (Luke 19: 12). Our Lord teaches us in these words how noble man has been created in his nature, and how divine that is which he can attain by grace, and also how man should attain it. And in these words much of holy scripture is touched upon."

"The seed of a pear tree grows into a pear tree, the seed of a nut tree grows to be a nut tree, the seed of God grows to be God." He then quotes Origen on the possible consequences of this planting: "Because God himself has sowed and planted and given life to this seed, even though it may be overgrown and hidden (by an evil laborer), it will never be destroyed and extinguished completely; it will glow and shine, gleam and burn, and it will never cease to turn toward God."

Eckhart further explains "what our Lord means by these words when he says, that 'A nobleman went out,' because man must go out of every image and out of himself and out of everything, he must go far off indeed, and become quite unlike all this, truly, if he wishes to and shall receive the Son, and become son in the bosom and heart of the Father....Every kind of medium is alien to God. 'I am,' God says, 'the first and the last' (Revelations 27: 13). There is no distinction in God's nature or in the Persons, according to the unity of the nature....Therefore man finds God in the One, and he who will find God must be one. 'One man,' our Lord says, 'went out.' In distinction we do not find either one, or being, or God, or rest, or blessedness or satisfaction. Be one, so that you may find God!...A heathen philosopher says that the One is born from the highest God."

Eckhart recognizes two distinct powers of knowing in man: "And so there is one distinct power...by which man sees, and another power by which he knows and recognizes that he

sees. It is true that the power here in us now by which we know and recognize that we see is nobler and higher than the power by which we see; for nature begins its work in what is feeblest, but God begins his work in what is most perfect. Nature forms the man from the child,...but God makes the man before the child....Therefore our Lord says very truly that 'A nobleman went out into a far country to obtain for himself a kingdom and returned.' For man must be one in himself, and must seek that in himself and in One, and he must receive it in One, that is to contemplate God alone; and to return is to know and perceive that we perceive and know God."

In closing his story of the Nobleman, Eckhart brings together as one the natural and the divine: "Who is then nobler than he who on one side is born of the highest and the best among created things, and on the other side from the inmost ground of the divine nature and its desert? 'I,' says our Lord through the prophet Osee, 'will lead the noble soul out into the desert, and there I will speak to her' (Osee 2: 14), one with One, one from One, one in One, and in One, one everlastingly. Amen."

We might better understand Eckhart's distinct powers of knowing if we look at the different levels of consciousness deployed at different times. On one level, I "know" the chair in my living room that I'm looking at right now. Employing reflection on a different level of my consciousness, I "know" that I "know" the chair, having it in my mind and can think about it at length. Behind both levels is the observer or the witness who can take in or "know" the whole transaction.

I cannot watch and think at the same time. If I stay with the witness, constantly watching, I can rise to a different level of consciousness or awareness. I give other and higher powers a chance to operate devoid of mental gymnastics. Beyond knowing

and willing, we have a higher power that operates through those faculties. Steadily observing what's happening thrusts me into the present. In doing so, things change dramatically. I move to witnessing the witness, becoming aware of awareness itself. Pure awareness supersedes all other activity. The ordinary mind disappears and witnessing expands exponentially. Watching holds me in a state of awe. Only I am, but I am in a condition of oneness with everything. Couched in such a state, thoughts and time don't exist. Consciousness becomes non-dual. Since the duality of mind and object disappears, comprehension is unreachable. Some call being established in ultimate consciousness Nirvana or God. In such a state of utter awareness bliss prevails.

Once I return to ordinary consciousness, I can look back, perhaps longingly, upon the direct experience I had. Even its remembrance is joyous and uplifting. Every time I go back to the experience, its power is re-activated and surges through me. Going into such a state and returning seem to me to correspond to Eckhart's teaching when he quotes Jesus: "A nobleman went out into a far country to obtain for himself a kingdom and returned."

The Necessity of Prayer

It should be obvious that prayer must play a dominant role in the life of a Christian religious person. It may be called the yearning of the spirit for God. Eckhart characterizes prayer in the following way: "The most powerful prayer, and almost the strongest of all to obtain everything, and the most honorable of all works, is that which proceeds from an empty spirit. The emptier the spirit, the more is the prayer and the work mighty, worthy, profitable, praiseworthy and perfect. The empty spirit can do everything." For "empty spirit" one might also substitute

"free heart, disposition or intention," meaning all man's capacities of thinking and feeling.

Continues Eckhart: "What is an empty spirit? An empty spirit is one that is confused by nothing, attached to nothing, has not attached its best to any fixed way of acting, and has no concern whatever in anything for its own gain, for it is all sunk deep down into God's dearest will and has forsaken its own. A man can never perform any work, however humble, without it gaining strength and power from this.

We ought to pray so powerfully that we should like to put our every member and strength, our two eyes and ears, mouth, heart, and all our senses to work; and we should not give up until we find that we wish to be one with him who is present to us and whom we entreat, namely God.

In the emptying process, Eckhart gives some practical advice. "You should know that there was never any man in this life who forsook himself so much that he could not still find more in himself to forsake. There are few people who see this to be true and stick by it." Such an ascetical practice aims not at doing so much as at being: "People ought never to think too much about what they could do, but they ought to think about what they could be."

"This true possession of God depends on the disposition, and on an inward directing of the reason and intention toward God, not on a constant contemplation in an unchanging manner, for it would be impossible to nature to preserve such an intention, and very laborious, and not the best thing either. A man ought not to have a God who is just a product of his thought, nor should he be satisfied with that, because if the thought vanished, God too would vanish. But one ought to have a God who is present, a God who is far above the notions of men

and of all created things. That God does not vanish, if a man does not willfully turn away from him."

"The man who has God essentially present to him grasps God divinely, and to him God shines in all things; for everything tastes to him of God, and God forms himself for the man out of all things. It is like a man consumed with a real and burning thirst....But whatever he may do, in whatever company he may be, whatever he may be intending or thinking of or working at, still the idea of drinking does not leave him, so long as he is thirsty. The more his thirst grows, the more the idea of drinking grows and intrudes and possesses him and will not leave him....Such a man finds far greater merit with God because he grasps everything as divine and as greater than things in themselves are....So a man must be penetrated with the divine presence, and be shaped through and through with the shape of the God he loves, and be present in him, so that God's presence may shine out to him without any effort."

From what Eckhart has just said, I see its application to our own times. Seeing the dangers of global warming and other catastrophic changes, there is a growing concern for our planet and its preservation. With his Platonic/Augustinian leanings, Eckhart focuses much attention directly on God, yet he also shows how to bridge the heavenly/earthly gap. The ideal that Eckhart holds out to us is that "God shines in all things, for everything tastes...of God," even earthly things. Saving the planet can be a divine mission for the devotee when "he grasps everything as divine and as greater than things in themselves are."

It is not easy to see God in all things and "to have a God who is present," but God may be present in our thoughts and actions without our advertent to that fact. We make hundreds, perhaps thousands, of decisions every day. Most do not result in

external actions, but they are nonetheless mental conclusions or leanings FROM WITHIN US in one direction or another. And we must remember, "The Kingdom of God is within you." Here is where I have a chance to take the higher road and let my finer self come out, and that is by every thought I have, by every internal decision I make.

I don't have to feel love in order to be loving. Loving is a matter of choice, of will. Do I choose the more loving, the more compassionate, approach? Do I judge in a negative manner? I always have a choice: Judge or Love? There is no path to follow except my own. My path is created by each step I take, because the path extends only to where I am now. Where do I go from here? Upward or downward? Toward the Kingdom or away from it? Most of us get closer to God and realize his presence only step by step. Each moment I am a follower of Christ, a Christian, or not, depending on where my mind and heart are in that moment.

Power of the Will

The need to save the earth points up the necessity for all of us in our human condition to work at something. Winston Churchill said, "You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give." Eckhart, as usual, takes the high road in his constant zeal for the greatest growth: "And in all his activities and under all circumstances a man should take care to use his reason, and in everything he should have a reasonable consciousness of himself and of his inwardness, and find God in all things, in the highest degree that is possible. For a man ought to be as our Lord said, 'You should be like men who are always watching and waiting for their master' (Luke 12: 36)...for whom God shines forth as directly in worldly things as he does in divine things....He ought always to lift himself up by the two

powers of reason and will, and in this to grasp at what is best of all for him in the highest degree."

Even the inclination to sin can help a person as St. Paul says, "Virtue is made perfect in infirmity" (2 Colossians 12: 9). And for this reason, "he should not want to choose that his inclination to sin should die in him, because without it he would lack decision in everything and...he would lose the honor of the battle and of the victory and of the reward."

Once again the will surfaces as a key and most important subject in the journey that Eckhart maps out for us. For him, all virtues are a question of the will. "A man should not be too afraid of anything, so long as he sees that he has good will, nor should he be depressed if he cannot accomplish his will in his deeds, but he should not consider himself deprived of virtue if he finds in himself a will that is just and good, because the virtues and everything that is good are a question of good will....What is good has not less power to draw toward good than what is evil has to draw toward evil."

Eckhart goes into the pervasiveness of God's power when my will is joined to his. "Indeed, with my will I can do everything. I can take on myself every man's toil, I can feed every poor man, I can do every man's work and anything else that you can think of. If you are not lacking in will but only in power, in truth in God's sight you have done it all, and no one can take it away from you, or stop you for a moment from doing it; for wanting to do something as soon as I can and having done it are the same in the sight of God. What is more, if I wanted to have as great a will as the whole world has, and if my longing for that is great and complete, then indeed I have it; for what I want to have, I have. And, too, if I truly wanted to have as much love as all men have ever gained, or to praise God as much, or

anything else you can think of, then, indeed, you have it all, if only your will is complete."

Eckhart is showing how space, time, and all human limitations are transcended through the will under God's omnipotence. The mystery in which we live becomes less mysterious. Eckhart points up how God grooms man, if the subject is willing, for his eventual identity with Himself. The question then arises, "When is the will a just will? The will is complete and just when it is without any self-seeking, and when it has forsaken itself, and has been formed and shaped into God's will. And the more this is so with a man, the more is his will just and true. And in that will you can accomplish everything, be it love or whatever you want."

Willing to love

"Here you ought to observe two properties that love possesses; one is the being of love, the other is the deeds or the manifestation of love. The place where love has its being is only in the will; the man who has more will, he has also more love. But no one knows about anyone else, whether he has more of it; that lies hidden in the soul, so long as God lies hidden in the soul's ground. This love lies wholly in the will; whoever has more will, he also has more love."

I have been showing and will continue to show the various functions in which the will engages, and the reason is because Eckhart clearly states, "This love lies wholly in the will." A dominant theme of John's writings is that "God is love," and since love resides in the will it is necessary to see the will's various operations in accepting and fostering God's life in us. There is no reason to be shy about the great power that man has as a result of God's gift of free will. Heaven is God's gift and also the reward for man's work.

"Yet there is something else, which is a manifestation and a deed of love. Often this appears plainly as inwardness and devotion and jubilation; and yet this is not always the best that could be....our Lord often gives it to such people to entice and draw them on. Yet these same people, when later they have obtained more love, may then well not experience so much emotion and feeling, and from that it is well seen that they have love, if they cleave faithfully and steadily to God without such a prop."

"And even if this really be love, it is not the very best love. That can be seen when sometimes a man must abandon this kind of jubilation because of a better kind of love, and sometimes to perform a work of love, whether spiritual or bodily, when someone has need of him...Christ said: 'Whoever has given up something for love of me, he will receive in return a hundred times as much.' (Matthew 19: 29)"

"Yes,...even if it be that a man has a great desire to experience such consolations and inwardness and does everything he can to obtain this and God does not give it to him, and he willingly relinquishes and foregoes this for God's love, then such a man will find in God what he seeks, just as if he had possessed as his own all the riches that ever were and had willingly relinquished, abandoned and denied them for God's sake. He will receive a hundred times as much....But you must know that God's friends are never without consolation, for whatever God wills is for them the greatest consolation of all, whether it be consolation or desolation."

Giving up one's will

"You ought to know that a man with good will can never lose God....Many people say: 'We have good will,' but they do not have God's will. They want to have their will and they want

to teach our Lord that he should be doing this and that. That is not a good will....This is what God looks for in all things, that we surrender our will.....So too, when the angel appeared to our Lady, nothing either she or he had to say would ever have made her the Mother of God, but as soon as she gave up her own will, at that moment she became a true mother of the everlasting Word and she conceived God immediately; he became her Son by nature." As Luke describes the scene: " 'I am the handmaid of the Lord,' said Mary, 'let what you have said be done to me.' And the angel left her."

Continues Eckhart: "Nor can anything make a true man except giving up his will....But if it were to progress so far that we gave up the whole of our will and had the courage to renounce everything, external and internal, for the love of God, then we would have accomplished all things, and not until then....There are thousands of people, dead and in heaven, who never truly and perfectly forsook their own wills. Only a perfect and true will could make one enter perfectly into God's will and be without will of one's own; and whoever has more of this, he is more fully and more truly established in God. Yes, one Hail Mary said when a man has abandoned himself is more profitable than to read the Psalms a thousand times over without that. With that, one pace forward would be better than to walk across the sea without it."

There are two things to be noticed from what Eckhart has just said. The first is that there are degrees of holiness, of being "more fully and more truly established in God," even in the heavenly realm, depending on how closely I can merge my will with God's. The second is that grueling ascetical practices or miraculous episodes are insignificant compared to aligning one's will with God's.

Eckhart next treats the subject of sin. "One can never in this life be wholly free from such mishaps. But because some weeds happen among the corn, one should not for that reason throw away the good corn. Indeed, if it were well with a man that he knew himself well with God, all such sorrows and mishaps would turn into his great profit. For to good men all things come to good, as Saint Paul says (Romans 8: 28), and as Saint Augustine says, 'Yes, even sins.' "

For a person to change his/her behavior and realign one's will, it is necessary to see some good in making the change. I am reminded of the time I worked in a clinic with psychologists. In one staff meeting we discussed why we had so many clients yet saw so little change in their behavior. On the surface they said they wanted to accomplish this or that and sought our help in reaching their goals. After much discussion all the counsellors agreed that the clients had sufficient motivation to seek our help, but underneath they wanted to stay how they were. They wanted a benefit, but they did not want to change.

Eckhart takes time to show the advantages of changing. "Yes, that man would not wish that the sin into which he had fallen had never been committed;...but since, through that, you are obliged to greater love, and through that, brought low and humbled. He should only wish that he had not acted against God. But you should indeed trust God, that he would not have inflicted this on you, had he not wished to produce from it what is best for you. But when a man with all his resolution rises up from his sins and turns wholly away from them, our faithful God then acts as if he had never fallen into sin. For all his sins, God will not allow him for one moment to suffer. With this man God can use all the simple tenderness that he has ever shown toward created beings. If he now finds the man ready to be different, he will have no regard for what he used to be."

First, Eckhart asks me to look less upon my discomfort and see the hurt executed upon the All-Good God. I play a necessary role, but the disparity between the two actors, God and myself, is unimaginable. Secondly, when I am "ready to be different," the all-important change is taking place.

"God is a God of the present. He takes and receives you as he finds you--not what you have been, but what you are now. All the harms and the insults that could come upon God for all sins he is gladly willing to suffer and to have suffered for many years so that a man thereafter may come to a greater knowledge of his love and so that man's love and gratitude may be so much greater and his zeal may be so much more ardent, which properly and frequently follows after our sins....Our Lord's intention in this is that we recognize his great mercifulness; and through it he wishes to exhort us to a greater and truer humility and devotion. For when repentance is renewed, so too love should be greatly increased and renewed."

In much of Eckhart's explanations, he talks about God in human terms with familiar qualities. I think that is exactly how God wants us to see Him; to approach Him as friendly and warm and loving. That fits our human needs and is true of God, with a truth driven to unknown limits found only in the divine.

I recently read a story told by a Buddhist monk that reminded me of the way God may look upon sinful acts. The monk is Ajahn Brahm, who captions his experience, "There Are No Criminals." He received a phone call from an officer at a local prison who wanted to speak to Ajahn personally to invite him to come back to his prison to teach. I will let Ajahn tell the story from here.

"I promised that I would send another monk."

"No!" he replied. "We want you."

"Why me?"

"I have worked in prisons most of my life," explained the guard, and I have noticed something very unique with you. All the prisoners who attended your classes never returned to jail once they were released. Please come back."

"That is one of the compliments I treasure most. I thought about it afterward. What had I done that others hadn't that had genuinely reformed those in jail? I figured out that it was because, in all my years teaching in prisons, I had never once seen a criminal."

"I have seen many people who had committed murder, but I have never seen a murderer. I have seen many people who have stolen from others, but I have never seen a thief. I have even seen people who had committed terrible sex crimes, but I have never seen a sex offender. I saw that the person was more than the crime."

"It is irrational to define people by one or two, or even several, horrific acts that they have done. It denies the existence of all the other deeds that they have performed, the many noble acts. I recognized those other deeds. I saw people who had done a crime, not criminals."

"When I saw the people not the crimes, they also saw the good part of themselves. They began to have self-respect, without denying the crime. Their self-respect grew. When they left jail, they left for good."

In his book, Ajahn follows this story with another chapter entitled, "The Stigma of Mental Illness." Again, I'll let him tell the account.

"I told the above story at a conference on mental health a few years ago. One of the department heads at a prestigious mental health facility was very impressed. He invited me to 'bless' his building."

" 'What form of mental illness are you involved in?' I asked."

" 'Schizophrenia,' he replied. ' "

" 'And how do you treat the schizophrenia?' I enquired."

" 'Just like you explained in your presentation,' he responded. 'I don't treat the schizophrenia. I treat the other parts of the patients.' "

"I raised my hands up in the Buddhist gesture of respect to him. He had understood."

" 'What are the results?' I asked, even though I knew what the answer would be."

" 'Brilliant! Much better than any other treatment,' he answered."

"When you call people schizophrenic, they are likely to live up to your label. You have stigmatized them. When you regard them as people who suffer episodes of schizophrenia, that they are more than their illness, then you give the healthy part a chance to grow" (Ajahn Brahm, DON'T WORRY; BE GRUMPY, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2014, pp 24-26).

The stories Ajahn tells tie in well with the lessons Eckhart teaches. People are more than their illness, more than any sins they commit. Ajahn and the department head gave their subjects a chance to be different, to grow. I think the examples of these two men shed light on how God sees the act as very

distinct from the person, whom He will forgive and never stop loving.

Love Resides in the Will

"One ought to test whether love be true and perfect by asking if one has great hope and confidence in God, for there is nothing by which one can better see whether one's love is total than by trust. For if one man loves another greatly and completely, that causes him to have trust; for everything that we dare trust to be in God we find in him truly and a thousand times more. And so, since no man could ever love God too much, so also no man could ever trust him too much. Nothing that a man can do is so fitting as to have great trust in God. God never ceased to achieve great things through those who ever gained great trust in him. He has truly shown to all men that this trusting comes from love, for love not only has trust, it also has true knowledge and unshakeable certainty."

"In this life we have a twofold knowledge of everlasting life. One knowledge is when God himself imparts it to a man or sends it to him through an angel or shows it through a special illumination; this happens seldom and to few people."

"The second knowledge, which is incomparably better and more profitable and happens often to all who are perfect in their love, is when a man, through the love and the intimacy that exist between his God and him, trusts in him so fully and is so certain of him that he cannot doubt....This certainty is by far greater, more complete and true than is the first, and it cannot deceive. To be told it in words could deceive, and could easily be a false light. But this certainty one receives in all the powers of the soul, and it cannot deceive those who truly love God; they doubt as little as a man doubts in God, because love drives out

all fear....It is not as if a man had not sinned, but that love wholly destroys and drives out sin, as if it had never been."

It is obvious that man has to work at something in this life. Eckhart touches on this subject as his dialogue continues. "God has no regard for what your works are, but for what your love and devotion and intention in the works are. Our works do not greatly matter to him, but only our intention in all our works, and that we love him alone in all things....Christ performed with the intention that we should imitate him spiritually, not physically....For inwardly a man ought to entrust himself so completely to God with his whole will that he is not greatly concerned about his way of life or the works he performs....to practiced men the outwardness of images is not outward because to inward men all things possess a divine inwardness."

Without rejecting anything Eckhart says about work, the passage of time, the plight of the world, the development of science and technology, and other relevant conditions, force us to look deeply into man's responsibility to Mother Earth so that She can continue to nourish us and offer us a place where man can continue to work. There need to be leaders who hold for the spiritual development of the individual, such as Jesus, Buddha, and their spokespersons. But there also must be the conviction that not only is it good but also necessary for man to give himself in any way he can to work for his earthly well-being, the good of his family, and the benefit of the universe. The responsibility falls on all of us, but primarily on the individual and his own will, which we are discussing right now.

Spiritual growth is not incompatible with material progress. We don't give up one for the other. God is Universal (one universe). Wilber's words, previously cited, apply here: "There is nothing but God, nothing but Goddess, nothing but Spirit in all directions, and not a grain of sand, nor a speck of

dust, is more or less Spirit than any other." I am also reminded of what many consider the fundamental teaching of the Upanishads: "That is I, That is you, That is all this." Such Oneness was prefigured by Jesus' words: "May they all be one. Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17: 21). In this light, I need to ask myself, "How wide is my vision? How open is my heart? Can I embrace the whole, heaven and earth?" The answers may give us an estimation of where I am on the spiritual/material path.

Eckhart takes time and effort describing the role that will and works play in our life in order to show what God has in mind for those who use them properly: "God does not give, he has never given any gift so that we might have it and then rest upon it; but all the gifts he ever gave in heaven and on earth he gave so that he might give us the one gift that is himself. With all these other gifts he wants to prepare us for the gift that he himself is."

"God never gave himself or gives himself according to anyone else's will. He gives himself only by his own will. When God finds someone who is one will with him, he gives himself to him and lets himself be in him, with everything that he is. And the more that we cease to belong to ourselves, the more truly do we belong to this."

"Then no time can be too short for a just man who is in perfect good will. For when the will is so disposed that it wants to accomplish just every single thing of which it is capable--not just now, but if the man were to live for another thousand years, he would want to do all he was capable of—then the will gains as much as a thousand years of works could do; in God's eyes, he has all this."

Eckhart does not go half-way; he wants man to be the best he can be. In this he follows God who knows what man can do and can be. Echoing God, Eckhart wants for man "to have a great and perfect and complete conversion to his dear God in a love so unshakeable that his devotion to God and his longing for him be great."

A key idea in Eckhart is that all the gifts that God gives is to prepare us for the one gift that is God himself. The two lesser gifts that prepare us are love and trust, and Eckhart shows the dynamic interplay these two exercise in man's ascent to God. On the one hand, the Meister says that the test of love is trust: "there is nothing by which one can better see whether one's love is total than by trust." And on the other hand, he says that love is the cause of trust: "if one man loves another greatly and completely, that causes him to have trust....this trusting comes from love, for love not only has trust, it also has true knowledge and unshakeable certainty."

It appears that at different times in our life either one, love or trust, can play the dominant role without the other being excluded. Without dismissing trust, love is more of the essence of what I am. It fulfills more of my needs, which God has planted in me, such as attraction and fulfillment. Love is also more dynamic in my outreach to take care of others.

It seems that trust is most needed when things do not go well for us. Can I remain loving and accepting at such times? Love doesn't mean I have to like something or someone. I can remain loving while not liking what transpires. My trust is measured by the degree to which I understand and accept the purpose of things.

Love resides in the will; what can erode the will and undermine love is distrust. While considering my own childhood

attending a public school in the Pittsburgh area, I came to realize that an incident as an eleven year old in sixth grade set the course that had a powerful sway in my approach to people. I had thrown a paper wad that hit a girl on the side of the head. It perhaps frightened her, but I knew a paper wad could not do serious damage for I had been hit several times. In any event, she complained to our teacher. The next morning Miss Tragicity, our home room teacher, gathered us around her, tenderly touching and embracing many of us. She promised that what was said there would go no further, but she had to know who threw the paper wad. Under what I thought was her loving care for us, I fessed up and told her that I was the one. That afternoon I was summoned to the principal's office where I was told to lean over the desk and was painfully struck over and over with a wooden paddle.

I remember how hurt I was, and not just my backside. This was my home room teacher with whom I felt very close. I trusted her words and was deceived--I was crushed. I now see how it led me to be suspicious of others. It does not stop me cold, but my first instinct is not to trust but rather to be wary. It is an incident that makes up part of the warp and woof of my conditioned life.

Without knowing it, many of us are running away from hurt all our lives. When aware, I want to be free of it; but it has to be "fixed" at its core. It is too much and so deep that grace or God is needed, which is part of the aversion/conversion that Eckhart talks about. Knowingly or unknowingly, I have an aversion towards anything that prevents me from operating at my full potential, which, at the same time, is not wholly God and godly. God wants me operating at my best. The conversion is not only to God but to my own wholeness (holiness). What's done in me stays in me until corrected. The correction involves not only me, the sufferer, but also the perpetrator, insofar as the latter

exists in me. Can I forgive without exacting revenge? Or wishing punishment? Can I and will I ask God to enter? I can't make it right by myself.

In extreme cases I can get lost in my own will. And sometimes suicide results as an act of my own will wanting to control things. In helplessness, I can pull the trigger, or I can turn to God. Fear can be God-given, if it moves me in the right direction. In this episode of aversion/conversion, admission of weakness plays a huge role. I can be so driven because I do not believe in my own goodness. God is goodness; all that comes from Him must be good. Each one of us is uniquely precious, not just a manifestation but a particular replica of God. God delights in us and so should we.

The dominating and unanswered question of psychology is, What and where is the "I"? If I limit myself to a body enclosure, I could become discouraged and despair. Stimuli come from me and at the same time from outside me, demonstrating that I am larger than the lone-self I thought I was. The deepest levels of the psyche connect with others and the world. The limits of the subject cannot be set. Consciousness and interiority can be anywhere. They are not limited to a physical presence. Interior experiences can begin within and move without, or begin with an external happening that we interiorize. There is a world out there as well as a world soul to which we are connected.

One of the greatest insights and consolations I got from Eckhart's treatises is that God suffers with me. I repeat what I quoted earlier on this subject because it is so applicable in the present situation:

"God's son by nature wanted to become man as a favor, so that he could suffer for your sake; and you want to become

God's son and not man, so that you cannot and need not suffer, either for love of God or of yourself....God is with us in suffering means that that he himself suffers with us. Indeed, anyone who sees the truth knows that what I say is true. God suffers with man, he truly does; he suffers in his own fashion, sooner and far more than the man suffers who suffers for love of him." In God suffering with us, Eckhart points out the "humanness" of God, which "Godliness" would certainly embrace.

"Now I say, if God himself is willing to suffer, then I ought fittingly to suffer, for if I think rightly, I want what God wants. I pray every day as God commands me to pray: 'Lord, may your will be done'....therefore I say, everything the good man suffers for God's sake, he suffers in God, and God is suffering with him in his suffering. But if my suffering is in God and God is suffering with me, how then can suffering be sorrow to me?....Of this it is written that the holy apostles rejoiced that they were worthy to suffer torment for the name of God" (Acts 5: 41).

Eckhart closes his treatise, "On Detachment" with these words: "Now, all you reasonable people, take heed! The fastest beast that will carry you to your perfection is suffering, for no one will enjoy more eternal sweetness than those who endure with Christ in the greatest bitterness....The firmest foundation on which this perfection can stand is humility, for whichever mortal crawls here in the deepest abasement, his spirit will fly up into the highest realms of the divinity, for love brings sorrow, and sorrow brings love....That we may all be brought to this, May that supreme detachment help us which is God himself. Amen."

It changes my whole life if I trust that God suffers with me "in his own fashion, sooner and far more than the man who suffers." God is with me all the time, everywhere, whether

rejoicing or suffering, because He does the same. He is actually doing it in me as me.

In coming to the end of reviewing Eckhart's treatises, the Meister gives some final instructions. He describes a man's commitment to God: "he must want and intend...only God's dearest will and nothing else. Whatever God may then send him, let him accept it directly from God himself and let him regard it as the best of all that could come to him, and let him be wholly and utterly at peace in it...Our faithful God disposes the best of all for everyman, of that there is no doubt."

Ultimately, I cannot go wrong; finally, I will not fail. This throws a totally different light on things happening now. I need to see the possible good that can result, from any loss, even personal deprivation. One of the greatest tests of the will is the willingness to suffer.

"He ought to become a man who seeks for God and finds God in all things, always, everywhere, with everyone, in every way. Doing this, we can always go on growing and increasing, and never come to the end of our increasing....he should not allow himself to become self-complacent in anything, however good it may seem or may be....man says the finest things who has learned out of the fullness of his inward riches to keep silent about him."

"Therefore, the more a man can humble himself, the higher he will be, and that is why our Lord said: 'Whoever wants to be the greatest, let him become the least among you' (Mark 9: 14) Whoever wants to be the one must become the other. Being this is learned only by becoming that."

"But we ought to have everything as if it were loaned to us and not given, without any possessiveness, whether it be our

bodies or our souls, our minds, powers, worldly goods or honors, friends, kinsmen, houses, lands, all things. What is God's intention in this which he considers so important? Because he wants himself to be, solely and wholly, what we possess. This is what he wants, this is what he intends, this alone is important to him, that he may be and he must be this."

"In return for my going out of myself for love of him, God will wholly become my own, with all that he is and all that he can bestow, as much my own as his own, neither less nor more."

With the groundwork laid out, some may be apprehensive before the task. Eckhart counsels: "Now you say: 'I am afraid that I am not working as hard as I ought at this and I am not keeping it up as I could.' Accept it as suffering, suffer it patiently, take it as an exercise and be at peace."

"Leave God to work in you, let him do it, and do not be upset over whether he is working with nature or above nature, for nature and grace are both his. What has that to do with you, what it suits him to work with, or what he may work in you or in someone else? He must work how or where or in what way it is fitting to him....Just let him work, and just be at peace....lack of peace comes from created things and not from God."

What separates Eckhart from so many like us is that he was constantly aware of a Higher Power operating. This conviction did not have to first go through his head; it was an abiding presence. Higher Power means out of my hands yet benefitting me. Cosmic Beloved is universal encompassing. God loves all, and to be united with Him all is to be accepted. The perfect love that casts out fear is a love for all that consciousness contacts. Absolute consciousness has no needs. When consciousness is not restricted by the concerns of the individual

self, it glories in not being modified this way or that. Then consciousness and love are one; pure consciousness is pure love.

For me and my friends, visible and otherwise, Higher Power is more tangible when we think of God as the Cosmic Beloved; that is, God is to be loved in everything that happens, as it is happening, for "GOD IS LOVE."

Although such a statement may seem absurd when one considers all the atrocities in the world, we know that God doesn't make mistakes. Everyone has a contribution to make; the healing begins with me. The example of Christ is to not run away from anything that befalls me, and I cannot think of anything worse than what happened to him. I am to love (accept) the whole of earthly life. I think good advice is to allow the pain, the discomfort, which includes allowing for the shortcomings of others. I cannot let my behavior be determined by what others do. His life is about him; my life is about me. The life we are given is perfect for each of us.

If I can implement the Cosmic Beloved in my life, I am identified with the Father. The Father and I become One. I am Father. The twenty-third psalm, from someone who implemented the Cosmic Beloved in his life, is a heroic response to all the bleakness we sometimes see in the world

"The Lord is my Shepherd,
I shall not want....
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of
death,
I will fear no evil,
Because Thou art with me,
Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

Eckhart returns us to the free will in all of us. "Man has a free will, with which he may choose good and evil....Man must be free, and the master of his actions, unimpeded and unconstrained. Grace does not destroy nature, it perfects it. Glory does not destroy grace, it perfects it, for glory is perfected grace."

I see Eckhart's words here as a bridge to his treatise, "Detachment," and as a kind of conclusion. The Meister gives detachment a preeminent position: "I find no other virtue better than a pure detachment from all things; because all other virtues have some regard for created things, but detachment is free from all created things." In this same treatise, however, he teaches, "Yet know that God requires every spiritual man to love him with all the powers of his soul...But God cannot work according to his whole will in every man's heart, for though it may be that God is omnipotent, still he cannot work except where he finds or creates a willing cooperation."

Love knows no bounds, as to the intensity of the one loving or to the number of subjects that one can love. Here at the end, Eckhart joins the importance of loving with the necessity of the will to cooperate.

We come back to love which resides in the will. So when Eckhart declares, "Man must be free," the question arises, "Free from what?" The answer from a Biblical perspective would seem to be, "Free from fear." The other question that arises is, "Free for what?" Again, from a Biblical outlook, the answer seems to be, "Free to love." Love is the greatest commandment from the Old and New Testaments. Love does have a regard for created things as well as God, for we are to love God in all things. I would like to end Part Four with a quote here from a modern scientist and mystic, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: "Love

is the affinity which links and draws together the elements of the world...Love, in fact, is the agent of universal synthesis."

(Most of the material on Meister Eckhart has been taken from, MEISTER ECKHART, THE ESSENTIAL SERMONS, COMMENTARIES, TREATISES, AND DEFENSE, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ 07430, 1981.)

PART FIVE

**CURRENT COMMENTS
AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS**

Reading and knowing the elevated experiences of John and Eckhart, though beyond the personal experience of many, can affect us deeply and move us forward. John has spelled out for us how God gives us his very own life to live, his light to guide us, and his love to draw us. Then we saw how a renowned Medieval master, Eckhart, took these three gifts and applied them in his rendering of the Prologue and in his sermons and treatises. It's as though he got the gift of a new pair of shoes made by God, and the shoes knew where and how to go, how to proceed. The analogy continues below as I see the gift applied to others and myself. God's Spirit becomes and is my knowing and loving. An all-important part of divine revelation is what happens within the Christian.

John's Gospel centers on encountering the Divine so that we may believe and God can deify us. Consequently, what

follows falls under three main headings: 1) Faith as John the Evangelist describes it, which we have seen above at the end of Part Two. 2) Encountering; 3) Deification. Jesus often indicated that wanting something new in life requires getting rid of the old that's blocking the way, so the following paragraphs may seem disjointed, but in one way or another they deal with internal turning away from the ego's abiding self-interest. I'll be saying the same thing in different ways with varied emphases in my attempt to accommodate the reader. My intention is to offer various choices so that the individual may pick what is most appealing.

After seeing the irreplaceable role of love taught by Jesus for my role in life, I need to see how I can make it possible because of the obstacles in its way. Almost everyone has been taught to hate someone or something. The dislike may be directed at spiders, the school bully, the neighbor, the neighboring football team, another's race or religion, foreigners, a native or foreign head of state, etc. The net result of such discrimination is that it puts a condition on my own capacity for loving. Love, then, is no longer unconditional. Love concerns not so much what is outside of me but primarily the begetter of love inside me. There is a shutter drawn on the vast openness that in my essence I am. Thwarted is my outward reach, but it is frustrated from within. Even the possibility of acceptance of life's offerings is denied. Can I really love if I reject the possibility of the right for others to exist, let alone the goodness of their very existence? Can I really love if I put judgment ahead of compassion? My restricted awareness prevents love's functioning. We don't know what may enable me to see the error of my ways. A long-term prisoner of Alcatraz reformed in a startling and sudden manner. He said that when he realized that all he had done was by his own choice, all the hatred went out of him.

Unconditional Love

I want to look at what can happen when I come from unconditional love. It leads to a power I didn't know I had. In discussing earlier the nature of God's love in John, I came to know and believed the extent and depth of God's love--a love to the very end in self-giving for others. That love is offered to me, but do I recognize that the love that God has is "in us " (I John 4:16)? This love makes me God's child, and the way I live is a manifestation of God's love. The Father expresses concern for His children by having each child love the other. The Johannine author does not speak of two commandments, nor does he give priority to love for God. The one commandment involves both love for brother and love for God; and if there is a practical priority, it is with love for brother.

Experience of that love makes the Christian grow in knowledge and belief. Herein is fulfilled Jesus' prayer for future believers (John 17: 26): "And to them I made known your name; and I will continue to make it known, so that the love you had for me may be IN THEM, and I may be in them." Love reaches its perfection in the abiding in each other that binds God and the Christians (1 John 4:17). Love that is truly expressive of the God who sent His only Son must be effective in me in terms of loving others; then "we are the same as Christ is" (1 John 4:17), Divine revelation includes what happens WITHIN Christians.

The love that the Father had for His Son is in me and Christ is in me. God makes Himself myself. St. Catherine of Genoa says pointedly, "My Me is God, nor do I recognize any other Me except my God Himself," (Aldous Huxley, *THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY*, Triad Grafton Books, London, 1985, p. 28).

What we have been talking about is the giving and receiving of God's indwelling. This identification of God with myself is possible, but it requires my cooperation. I must remove from myself everything that is not God, that is, everything that is irreverent or unworthy in my life. This would include the hatred or dislike mentioned earlier. For most of us, such a disengagement cuts deep, but it is possible. Jesus says in John 1:12, "But all those who did accept him he empowered to become God's children. That is, to those who believe in his name--those who were begotten, not by blood, not by carnal desire, nor by man's desire, but by God."

My will and intention are powers of the soul whose nature and works are mixed with the flesh. These powers are not themselves God, and are created in the soul with the soul. Their earthly bearing must be transformed above itself into the image of God, and be born in God and from God, so that God may be their Father. God is the bearer, incarnating in me as me. In this way I am the son of God and God's Only-Begotten Son. I am the son of everything that forms and makes me to be like it and in its likeness.

Everything encountered in my life must be professed as God's will, or truly as God Himself. "The realization of the Nondual traditions is uncompromising: there is only Spirit, there is only God, there is only Emptiness in all its radiant wonder"--Ken Wilber. Something doesn't have to be pleasing for me to accept it, but the acceptance represents a softening of what was hard inside, and that is the pathway to love. Then my conviction grows of the Father's Presence, of the Paraclete's manifesting Jesus as me and my life. I exist so that God can experience my unique life. As I grow in awareness and love, I supply or "nourish" God with the creation of His new son, that is, me. I know that all is well. God has made Himself my own. The joy and bliss come from within where He lives.

The Fourth Gospel reveals the different possible approaches to God, with love the living water springing from God Himself. Realizing the truth of the Gospels, yet looking at today's world, God as a loving Father permits many religions and cultures in the world. I am reminded here of a quote entitled "Close to God" from St. Thomas Aquinas, "One may never have heard the sacred word 'Christ,' but be closer to God than a priest or nun" (Daniel Ladinsky, LOVE POEMS FROM GOD, Penguin Compass, New York, NY 10014, p. 125).

What seems essential is approaching life with love seeking the truth. The blueprint displayed in John's Gospel awaits my internal disposition not only of wanting the good but also of wanting to be good. All my intellectual efforts are but thrusts toward and into the divine, but only love can have me abide there. The love that God has shown me in Jesus reflects the simple great goodness of God. That goodness makes me want to be good. I need to capitalize on that feeling of goodness inside me.

There is a blending of the human and the divine. Spiritual realities are invisible and internal. God is acting which I cannot see; I know only of my attempt to be better or not. With my earthly makeup I can and do perceive the divine. The two must collaborate, working together. With the danger of being over-simplified, it might be said that God provides the fiber, Jesus the pattern, the Gospels tailor us a suit, and I buy it to wear.

So God has provided the blueprint, and the human ideal is Jesus. But the fitting of the suit is entirely up to me. I pick the color, the fashion, the style, even the buttons, and how I want the suit to fit me; here God is silent. "Stillness is the language God speaks, everything else is a bad translation"--Eckhart Tolle. God's stillness moves, however, and speaks in me as me! I have

the resources and must make the choices. God is me, wanting me transformed into Him. God deals with us singly and individually. There is no limit to how many individuals can be identified with God, or to how many ways I may choose to be identified with God. All paths lead home.

In one way or another, the listener may hear from the stillness: "Find your God; make your statement." And the hearer may in honesty reply, "I don't know God; today I choose to live my not knowing. But I do choose to love and to give." From the beginning, men have tried to find the answer to life, to God. We must be honest with ourselves. We can repeat what was just said above, "All paths lead home."

Pathfinders

Dionysius the Areopagite

Dionysius (Late fifth, early sixth century) has been called the fountain-head of Christian mysticism. His way, a source for and akin to Eckhart's, is to describe the absolute truth by negatives exclusively (Via Negativa), yet he finds it extremely satisfying: "The simple, absolute and immutable mysteries of divine Truth are hidden in the super-luminous darkness of that silence which revealeth in secret. For this darkness, though of deepest obscurity, is yet radiantly clear; and, though beyond touch and sight, it more than fills our unseeing minds with splendours of transcendent beauty.... We long exceedingly to dwell in this translucent darkness and, through not seeing and not knowing, to see Him who is beyond both vision and knowledge--by the very fact of neither seeing Him nor knowing Him. For this is truly to see and to know..." Dionysius sees this negative approach as a truer way to "knowing" God. (Aldous Huxley, *THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY*, Triad Grafton Books. London, p. 55)

Ramakrishna

Another example is Ramakrishna (died 1886) who found God in many religions, as he himself professes: "So many religions, so many paths to reach the same goal. I have practiced Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, and in Hinduism again, the ways of the different sects. I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths." He was asked why he had followed so many paths; was not one path enough by which to reach the supreme goal? Ramakrishna responded, "The Mother is infinite—infinite are her moods and aspects. I longed to realize her in all of them. And she revealed to me the truth of many religions" (Swami Prabhavananda, *THE SPIRITUAL HERITAGE OF INDIA*, Vedanta Press, Hollywood, CA, 1979, p. 341).

Yogananda

An example closer to the American scene is that of Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1952), a delegate to the International Congress of Religious Liberals in Boston. This native of India arrived in America in 1920 to undertake the mission given him by a line of enlightened masters "to reveal the complete harmony and basic oneness of original Christianity as taught by Jesus Christ and original Yoga as taught by Bhagavan Krishna and to show that these principles of truth are the common scientific foundation of all true religions" (p. xiv, referenced below).

For the next ten years he travelled the length and breadth of the United States, teaching in nearly all the major cities overflow audiences that were spellbound by his great wisdom and love for God. His unique exposition of the teachings of Jesus Christ dissolved theological boundaries between the liberating path to God's kingdom revealed by Lord Jesus and the Yoga

science of God-union taught by Bhagavan Krishna in the sacred scripture of India, the Bhagavad Gita.

The title and subtitle of his landmark two volume opus encapsulates his purpose and much of my intention in these writings: **THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST--THE RESURRECTION OF THE CHRIST WITHIN YOU**, Self-Realization Fellowship, Los Angeles, CA 90065-3298, 2004. His purpose was to have the Christ resurrect today in each of us. His work may be called a "scriptural treatise that represents the inclusive culmination of Paramahansa Yogananda's divine commission to make manifest to the world the essence of 'original Christianity as taught by Jesus Christ' " (p. xix).

Zen Master

My next example is from a personal experience I had on retreat with some Zen Buddhist monks. As expected, they do not usually talk about God, but when I explained that God to me is the ultimate reality or the supporting force that grounds all being and activity, they could then use the word God and talk about "It." The Zen Master gave the opinion that as the ocean contains the perfection of the wave, so emptiness or the void must contain traits of consciousness and personhood. He told me that he thought Buddha was the most religious person who ever lived, and that he, Buddha, never used the word "god" because people associated it with the idea of a person and therefore limited its meaning.

Whatever approach I take to God, the ideal is to use the model presented to us in the life of Jesus. "It is the Father, abiding in me, who performs the works" (John 14:10). "All that is mine (Jesus') is yours (the Father's) (17:10) "Just as the Father possesses life in Himself, so has He granted that the Son also possess life in himself" (5:26).

Another reason why it was good for Jesus to go away was the need for me to go within and experience Jesus, the Paraclete, and the Father. The signs have been worked; I am in the Hour of Jesus' glory with power coming to me from his Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension.

I want to stress the importance of connecting our whole life with the life of Jesus and patterning it after the most perfect man who ever lived. Living in the "Hour of Glory" means I no longer need signs of the presence of God or Christ. Jesus chastised the crowds for asking for a sign, replying that he himself will become the sign to this generation (Luke 11:29). I have "seen" his signs and I have His Spirit. The theology of the cross must take place within me, accepting what life brings and seeing it as a means for my own growth. In a sense I must save myself, and that is possible as God becomes more and more me and I become more and more God. The Kingdom of God or of Heaven in Aramaic means "God's Saving Presence." The indwelling of Father, Son, and Spirit cannot end in failure, no matter what I have done or will do. I am here to experience life to the fullest and to grow. I must be true to what attracts me. I am free and may do as I please. It is of prime importance to follow love and not to fear anything my conscience tells me to do. At the same time it is to be remembered that what I do to others I do to myself, to Christ, and to God (Matthew 25:40).

Jim Marion, PUTTING ON THE MIND OF CHRIST

I want to cite the example of a man who followed his instinct of love and followed it in freedom to overcome his fear. Jim Marion has written a remarkable book about the spiritual path. Ken Wilber called it an "astonishing document...probably the first book to describe the overall path of consciousness development from a Christian perspective." A former monk, his book is the result of many years of spiritual practice, experience,

and study. In this work Marion describes what was necessary for him to break through to higher spiritual levels:

"I discovered no pathology or 'unnaturalness' about my same-sexual orientation or of that orientation in general. Nor did I find the slightest negative spiritual consequences of my same-sexual activity. In fact, (my) psychic said Jesus wanted me to know that those same-sexual experiences had been 'necessary' for my breakthrough into the spiritual level." Marion felt he was on what Joseph Campbell called the "hero's journey" to the depths of the psyche. He also thinks that perhaps his actions were what Jesus was alluding to when he said, "The Kingdom of heaven is taken by violence and violent men take it by storm." It appears as a principle in all spiritual traditions that one must follow one's conscience. I think this is exactly what Marion did as a conscientious and deeply religious person. (Jim Marion, *PUTTING ON THE MIND OF CHRIST*, Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Inc., Charlottesville, VA 22902, pp 154-155).

When we discussed John's understanding of the sacraments, it was shown that he felt their enactment was not tied sufficiently to the work of Jesus and his on-going presence. Christ's "Hour of Glory" is His perpetual sacrament for the community of His followers for all time. To partake in it, there must be what I referred to earlier in the context of the spiritual practices of Mount Athos: the personal experience of an inner realization bringing with it a dying and rebirth. Any hardships I encounter can bring out my true human/divine nature. Is my mind big enough and my heart loving enough to grasp all difficulties and differences and still live in peace?

Jesus is always looking out for me to help me on the way home. His injunction, "Watch and pray" (Matthew 26:41), is to connect my heart to my highest aspirations, or to merge the

human into the divine. This said, praying takes on huge proportions. There has to be an earnest desire to reach my greatest longings, and that itself is prayer! If I want something badly enough, it will take on formulation becoming prayers. I pray not that God remove my difficulties or shortcomings or inabilities, but that I may have the wherewithal to conquer them or live with them. I pray not to change God's will but to change my own.

Waiting can play a huge role in watching. Deification can take a long, long time and I must not get discouraged. It is necessary to keep an eye (watching) on my own process to make sure I am progressing.

Wanting something badly enough includes the willingness to make any sacrifice to reach the goal. Receptivity is the gate through which anything spiritual must pass to enter my being. Surrender is not submission; surrender is letting my finer self-rule. It means the abandonment of all lower drives, including the ego, which may seem like self-abandonment.

It is sometimes said that the way to know God is not direct, but is through knowing my own True Self. This is certainly the way for many. The "Real I" patterns itself after Christ as the image or icon of the Father. My birth as a human being means I am already created in the image and likeness of God. God's will is already in me in seminal form. My consciousness is already spirit; my job is to make it into The Spirit, to realize my oneness with God. There can be no change without a change from within.

It helps immensely if I can feel, at least sometimes, a changeover in my being. This brings me right back to love. Sometimes, when I have great pain or suffering, it feels like it's in my deepest core. But upon reflection, if I truly love someone

or something, my wife, my cat, or a great tenor singing a beautiful song, I notice that the joyous love and warmth I feel is also in my deepest center. That felt sense is what I need to let dominate, to move toward that emotional knowing in all my connections. However long it takes, I am being transformed into God.

Encountering Life

There are stages in this transformation. The first is coming into faith, understood in the way we have seen from John's Gospel: engaging, trusting, committing; this was explained in Part Two under **The Meaning of Faith in John's Gospel**. The next stage is encountering which already begins in believing (faith). Faith and encountering lead to the next stage, which is also the purpose of the first two: deification. So we have faith, encountering, deification.

When men began to commit their lives to Jesus, his first question was, "What are you looking for?" (John 1: 38). Jesus knows that true seekers cannot be satisfied with worldly goods or human glory. They have to get out of ignorance (darkness); they have to set their sights higher. They cannot satisfy their longing the way they satisfied earthly needs, although many will try to be happy in just that way. If they want something new in their life, they have to get rid of barriers that block the way. Expounding this self-entrapment and the need to reach for heaven are the subject of the "Gospel Message." I might paraphrase Jesus' question, "What do you really want, and how will you get it?" This is the first question he asks me. He is still looking to me, but do I understand what my true needs are? Am I anguishing, and in what way? I can better grasp what my true needs are by taking to heart what Jesus says regarding my true nature, which I already am.

To better understand my own needs, I was struck by a story I read about a young boy and a cat. I will let his mother, Andrea, tell the story about Henry, her five year old son. I will quote her and fill in where needed....

"Like many boys, Henry was always in motion and forever touching the world around him. It wasn't enough to see it--he wanted to hold it, manipulate it, see what the world could do."

"Henry, at five, easily taxed the capacity of our house and yard to fill his needs. And though we went to the park and beach as much as we could, there never seemed to be enough room to roam. So one summer I decided it was time to see real-life versions of those animals we read about, so I booked a vacation at a working dairy farm in upstate New York away from city life. The stay will be great, I thought. A large farm with cows to milk, horses to feed, a pond to fish in, a huge yard, and acres and acres to explore. He can't cover all of it, and he'll completely wear himself out."

"The hosts warned us that dinner was a communal event at the farmhouse. We would have to come when the bell rings, because life is too busy to stop and make meals for people at all hours. So when the dinner bell rang, I went in search of Henry who seemed to have disappeared. He was not on the swing, not in the barn, not by the horses or chicken coop. I entered the back door of the farmhouse with a guilty and puzzled look on my face. Before I could apologize or get a question out, the farmer's wife nodded her head toward the front porch. 'We have a new litter of kittens. If you're ever looking for Henry, just go to the front porch.' Sure enough, there he was on a porch swing with eight kittens in his arms, on his shoulders and legs, moving around, and snuggling against him. And Henry was so quiet! He was studying their eyes and their color and their personalities. It

was a reluctant boy I moved into the dining room that day. Only the promise that he could come right back after dinner made the idea of leaving at all possible."

"We spent four days at the farm, and Henry never left the front yard. It was a sight to see him get up in the morning, put on his blue rain boots everyday regardless of the weather, grab a Pop-Tart (after all, we were on vacation), and head across the field toward the generous front porch, his bright blond head glowing in the sunlight. And so this child whom I thought ached for lots of land and activity, contented himself with a small patch of grass, a porch swing, and, of course, a cardboard box with eight farm kittens."

"All my photos of Henry from that trip show him and a kitten or two or three, sitting or lying on the swing, lazing on the grass, staring at each other or the blue sky. Watching Henry on the farm made me think about how we use motion and speech to get noticed in a world that is far too busy, far too loud. Today I'm picking up the now six-foot teenage Henry from lacrosse practice. He still loves to move fast and touch the world around him. But animals continue to flock to Henry, who, in their presence, becomes still and quiet. He is noticed and known among them--and is at peace." (See "On a Farm," Andrea Doering, excerpted from *THE CAT IN THE WINDOW*, edited by Callie Smith Grant; Revel, Grand Rapids, MI, 2013, pp. 133-136).

I wonder how many of us are a child-like Henry or an adult like his mother, not knowing what our true needs are. Jesus asks the question of me, "What are you looking for?" His whole life was spent telling me of my true needs, whose satisfaction alone can make me happy. It begins with his communication of divine life to me.

As for living, no one can tell what another person needs to advance his or her life, and it is often difficult to see what it takes for one's own human/divine development. All one can undertake is to be the best he can be while engaging what comes, committing to the task, and trusting life. Some things can be explained, but much cannot. Life always includes embracing the Mystery. My deeper self tells me, "Live where you are; there is no need to choose because the whole is worth choosing." Devotion to this divine/human enterprise can take away doubt and worry. The resolution of obstacles and difficulties come from knowing it can take place, but on a transcendent level. On this point, it may be helpful to refer to what was said above about faith in John's writings. Faith is not an internal disposition but trusting, committing, and engaging in a living encounter.

God trusts me to share His life with me, but do I live in trust to share my life with Him? Do I talk to Him and confide in Him? Reciprocal sharing is what leads to intimacy. He as much as says "I will live in you if you'll live in me."

I need to expand on the meaning of encountering: first with God, then with other people. The first words on John's Gospel are, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God." "Word" is used instead of Wisdom or any other attribute because word implies a speaker and an audience to be addressed. The stress is primarily on God's relation to men, rather than on God in Himself. The title "Word" implies a revelation--not so much a divine idea, but a divine communication. It means that God is seeking an encounter. This divine being has taken on human form and has thus found the most effective way in which to express himself to men. Having entered the world, Jesus as the Word incarnate SPEAKS to people. That is why interaction or encounter is an essential part of the life of Jesus, and it is my entry to receiving God's life. He exercises his function as Word to the full. It is a

revelation that the Creator is here present to his creatures. And the Creator does not come with empty hands, for he gives light and life and love and resurrection.

Further in the Prologue to John's Gospel, we are told

"And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us.
And we have seen his glory,
the glory of an only Son coming from the Father,
filled with enduring love....
And of his fullness
we have all had a share--
love in place of love."

The love replacing love refers to the love of God in Jesus succeeding the Law that was a gift through Moses. God has spoken, seeking a conversation! Do I respond? How do I answer?

Deification

Encountering leads to our ultimate purpose: deification. There is a paradoxical statement in Robin Amis' *A DIFFERENT CHRISTIANITY*: "A God who does not deify man has no interest for man." This is a grand truth taking us closer to understanding how God deals with man. Man wants to be God, but he hardly knows what he is asking for. It takes only a moment to know that to deify anyone of us is no easy task. God may have to take man on a long journey for this to happen. Since God "believes" in free will, He can only proceed at the pace that man allows Him. Man has to believe and then become convinced that this deification is for his own good, that it always was and always will be his final destiny.

This can cause problems because man's ego is so strong. When the divine enters the human, the divinization eliminates that which is not lasting and true. There is a dissolution of ego simultaneous with the divine taking on this man's true nature and personality. His identity with God and his own individuality can be one in a way the mind does not grasp.

Implicit in the "Word" communicated to man is the divine "idea" which God the Father implants in him through His Son. The Greek LOGOS means either idea or word. Thus encapsulated is a divine reality, a knowing/loving reality handed over to him. This divine expression planted in each person is like a mustard seed meant to grow and prosper (Matthew 5: 31-32). God is in the growing, not just the beginning and the end. As the Son is always being born and always has been born, so the divine personal generation continues in man without end.

Man's integration into God doesn't mean he loses his identity. He is himself, yet one with the Infinite. When it seems the divine is passing out of him, man is merely returning to his limited human nature. We could say the divine is returning to its universal nature, where our openness will eventually take us. God doesn't return anywhere, but we feel deprived of His presence.

Openness requires that man accept and love all in his life. Only a saint, a true seer, can do this, which we are meant to become. This is how God deifies us--making us love the way he loves. For love to rule, self-abandonment is necessary. Thinking comes to understand itself and its inadequacies, and gives up the attempt to dominate. Thought cannot possibly cultivate love, for love has nothing above itself.

All I have is from God. I have nothing of my own. I must feel this to be true. If this idea feels unreal to me, it's

because the idea of God is not sufficiently real for me. If I can accept that my grasp of God is lacking, this realization is a great step forward! To a considerable extent, what I remember determines what I am now perceiving. I may have to deepen and expand my notion of God to realize (make real) that He/She is my beginning, my end, and all of my life between. This enlarging will probably last as long as I live. To repeat, God is in the growing.

John has Jesus quoting the Psalm to point out our true nature: "Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said, "You are gods' "? (John 10:34). The original passage in the Psalter is more elaborate: "I once said, 'You too are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.' "

In addition, the psalmist of 139 can be an aid in expanding for me the actuality of God:

"It was you who created my inmost self,
and put me together in my mother's womb;
for all these mysteries I thank you:
for the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your
works.

If I flew to the point of sunrise,
or westward across the sea,
your hand would still be guiding me,
your right hand holding me."

By embracing the psalmist's words and making them my own, I have an implicit divine acknowledgment of what I am capable of, not by my own power, but by His granting. Right here is the source of life and love, heavenly and divine at the same time. I am an inexhaustible emptiness to be filled measure

by measure as long as life lasts, which is forever. This is my deification.

The kind of life and love that exists between the Father and Son is the same life and love that are mine. The real enemy of eternal life is not death but sin, which means that sin is temporary and therefore passing. There are not two eternals. The nondual world of the Oneness of God awaits me. If I fear anything, including my own sinfulness, there is a cure:

"Love has no room for fear;
rather, perfect love drives out fear,
for fear carries with it punishment.
Love has not reached perfection in one who is still
afraid.
As for us, we love because He loved us first" (I John
4:18-19).

Fears cannot interfere with my dreams. I am to pass through Christ's Hour of Glory, for He is the Exemplar. From whatever suffering and death I may endure, including sin, I will rise and ascend like the mythical Phoenix bird that arises out of the ashes of destroyed darkness. God and Jesus and the world are present to help me, but in a sense I have to save myself. God values me too highly to let me come to Him without my own free will and full cooperation. If at times I don't "feel" like loving or caring, I may just have to exert my will by accepting what is. The command to love is not hinged to my passing feelings. I can have the direct guidance of the Good Spirit Paraclete, as Jesus taught, if I truly open myself to Him. It is an interior journey that requires my own work and responsibility. I am in my own way all that God is, because behind all that my life is, is the Life, Light, and Love of God now made mine. With Jesus I can truly say, "I Am."

Certain prayers or meditations are apt here because of what Jesus has ushered me into. This final prayer of Jesus lifts my soul from the cross and my earthly life into the vast openness of God's waiting arms: "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." In another plea, I surrender into the Oneness I cannot escape: "All is One, I am your son, Thy will be done." I paraphrase Joel S. Goldsmith: "I enjoy watching the glory of the Father unfold as my personal experience." Inspired by Goldsmith's statement, I added a personal invocation: "I glory in beholding the Good Spirit Paraclete manifesting as me and my life." The most challenging I have come up with is: "I love Jesus becoming me! Come Lord Jesus." In this last affirmation, I am more and more aware of the transforming of what I deal with into a Jesus dealing with it, or of falling short of that ideal. For example, behind my driving, as I take the best parking spot, and behind my conversations, as I push my opinion, it often looms large that "me-first" is the operating principle. I stop being Jesus and return to my old ego self. My identity reverts in a way I don't like, and I want to correct the reversal. I might put it this way: if I want my ego to die in God, become the unique individual that I am, transiting identities with One greater than me in whom I am absorbed.

In the meantime, the deification journey proceeds: I am One playing the game of many. Forces (influences and energies) are moving to unify my disparate parts. It is the One, God/Myself, moving toward total acceptance of everything in my life. Life is the real test. Ultimately, as the Upanishads said long ago, "I Am That, You Are That, All This Is That." Thought gives way to love. Relationship gives way to Being.

From what has been examined, certain conclusions are warranted. First, as many people as there are, there are that many images of God. Secondly, I am God, not as He is but as I am. God is making a god of each of us. Or as some prefer to say it, "I

become God, not in his essence, but by participation." As suggested earlier, I need to come up with the most comprehensive picture of life that I can, which may be a very subjective way of emptying my ego-self. A close friend uses the following to begin his morning meditation: "All is a movement from Un-manifested Absolute to Absorbed Manifestation. Saints and seers, seekers and sinners, men and women of all religions and all persuasions, I bow to you all. Please lead me from ignorance to wisdom, from restlessness to peace, from desires to contentment, from delusion and illusion to reality, from indifference and fear to love, from ego to the One Self, from doubt to certainty."

Another example would be: a loving God who creates and acts only out of love for all his creatures. Then I can say, "It's all OK; it's all God." If I hold that as an abiding sense, as my habitual outlook, similar to what the mystics demonstrate, then life can be bearable and acceptable. Such a portrait of life was the life that Jesus lived and what he expected from his followers. It is difficult to understand the finer workings of God, yet I prefer to believe in and live as well as I can the dictum: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."

Since I am That (God), I have infinite capacity. The SOURCE has made me a source. In my deepest nature that God has given me, I am not vengefulness, impatience, meanness, hatred, spitefulness, selfishness, jealousy, anger, etc. Rather, I am Son/Daughter. I am Light. I am Love. I am Life.

"I am God" is not a falsehood, nor a fantasy, nor is it presumptuous. Jesus shows the high esteem in which he holds men and women in the Beatitudes: "You are the salt of the earth....You are the light of the world." Jesus declares that I am light. If the light has penetrated me, darkness disappears. It

dissolves differences and duality. It makes my body light so that I am light all over. At the end of this Sermon on the Mount, he says "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you; in this way you will be sons of your Father in heaven....Be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect." While Jesus shows my godliness in these pronouncements, at the same time it is demonstrated that a deification process must take place for me to be able to love my enemies.

Love more than anything else will aid the deification process. Look to love; let love be the direction-finder. I can train myself to look out with love in my eye. If new or different, I must familiarize myself with the new or strange. Awareness and love are ultimately one. Know and love everything that is happening to me. I cannot love what I don't know. Know that I don't know.

In trying to make love the abiding principle of my life, I thought I would go where mindfulness has failed me up to now. I am keenly aware in meditation, but not outside of it. My mind just rambles on, thought after thought after thought. I decided to try attaching love to whatever awareness I have, to any thought that surfaces. My negative side asked, "If you can't be aware of thoughts, how can you be aware of love?" I determined to give it a try regardless. Surprisingly, it's working! I decided to love whatever comes up, even if it's just the thought itself. I may not be able to attach love to everything that surfaces, but I can offer acceptance, which for me is the beginning of loving. Maybe it's working because I have always believed love to be God's and my own deepest nature!

I think it also works because of something deeper going on in my psyche. One of my favorite quotes from Jesus' sayings is, "Watch and pray!" When I decided to, 'Watch and love,' my conscience pricked me that maybe I SHOULD be saying, 'Watch

and pray,' as Jesus instructed. I had a wrestling match. It struck me that I was looking outside of myself for an answer, away from what had spontaneously occurred to me from within.

I detected a certain lack, an inability to find the source of power and strength within myself. And I knew that surrendering one's power results in fear and can lead to hatred. I kept looking outside where I could not find it, hence the pain. It occurred to me that I needed to develop my assertiveness and carry out my intentions with action. While working out the problem, a question from another of Jesus' sayings occurred to me in my daily meditation:

"Let me firmly assure you, the man who has faith in me will perform the same works that I perform. In fact, he will perform far greater than these, because I am going to the Father, and whatever you ask in my name I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:12-14).

The question I had was, "Isn't love greater than prayer?" If love is superior, than "Watch and love" is preferred to "Watch and pray." It goes without saying that the 'greater work' does not occur in an automatic, mechanical fashion. Jesus' words clearly state it is belief in Jesus that will bring to the Christian power from God to perform great and greater works, because, by uniting a man with Jesus and the Father, belief gives him a share in the power that they possess. After Jesus has been glorified, the Father will perform in His Son's name works capable of manifesting the Son's glory. The idea that the disciples will be given the power to perform great and marvelous works is found in many New Testament writings. Not only is belief required, but also keeping the commandments, and asking in accordance with God's will. It must also be stated that Jesus' decree was dependent upon asking "in my name," which means that the

Christian is in union with Jesus. Because the Christian is in union with Jesus and Jesus is in union with the Father, there can be no doubt that the Christian's requests will be granted. They cannot be requests concerning the petty things of life; they are requests pertinent to the Christian life and the continuation of the work by which Jesus glorified the Father during his ministry.

It is not a matter of rearranging words and thoughts; it's a personal challenge! Since watching (awareness) often fails me, can I be a loving being? Can I love all that I see? Is not all of it God in some way? Can I love everything that happens to me? Ken Wilber's words, already cited, apply here. "There is nothing but God, nothing but Goddess, nothing but Spirit in all directions, and not a grain of sand, nor a speck of dust, is more or less Spirit than any other."

It further occurred to me that I don't have to feel "love" in order to be loving. Loving is in the will. What was said earlier in treating Eckhart is worth repeating here: I make hundreds if not thousands of decisions every day. Most of these choices stay within (but do not lose their power), and most of the time, judging is not necessary. My path is created by every step I take, within or without. Do I choose the higher path to let my finer self-prevail? I say to myself, "Choose to love and not to judge!" In choosing the better I know that I am acting out of love. This is putting on the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2: 16). No matter what I profess to be externally, moment to moment I am close to God or far from Him, depending on where my mind and heart are in that moment.

In working it out to "Watch and pray" or "Watch and love," I saw that both highlight the importance of watchfulness or awareness. Prayer is the inward reaching out for something great and good. It is an interior yearning that doesn't need formulation in words. Love is beyond the intellect and is

ultimately total acceptance. One asks us to know; the other asks us to love. It seems to me that love is to be synonymous with awareness. Pure consciousness, not restrained by personal need and self-interest, is pure love. Mystics have found the way to this realization. But this is also my destiny as shown by the words from the Upanishad: "I am That, You are That, all this is That." God is total love and total awareness simultaneously. I, Tom, am That, and since That is I, in my depths I am knower and lover as well. It hardly needs to be said that consciousness and love, residing in God and us, are timeless.

I feel I am choosing the greater good, so I say to myself, "Watch and love." I needed the extra force of will and love coming together, surfacing to practice long held convictions.

I think the Johannine Gospel Message shouts for a repeat of the Divine Presence in me as it was in Christ. Part of divine revelation is what happens within the Christian. I need to remember that I am made in the image and likeness of God. I also need to remember that although there is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, God is still One. I would like to suggest a practical exercise/meditation for growing in love, which I believe is patterned after the way John described God's own nature.

Love is blind in the sense that it is an out-going thrust from my deepest self, a source where God Himself resides. I want to capitalize on being inner-directed, which comes from looking within and trusting. To begin, I call up an image of myself and love it. To help the process, I see myself in four stages of my life: child, adolescent, mature man and as I am today. I simply watch; there are no judgments, wishes, or regrets. Attitudes other than witnessing can bring in fear. I just see and love. If any thought or object comes to mind, I don't fight it or pursue it. I simply watch and love it. It will pass as I remain

witnessing and loving. I know I am introducing a kind of duality here, the witness and the image of myself, but it is only temporary and will pass, so that simply witnessing love will ultimately prevail.

Just watching and loving begets a kind of spirit, a new presence within myself, which excludes the non-essentials from my life. As a Buddhist monk once told me, you cannot watch and think at the same time. In simply watching I allow a power to become operative which quiets down ordinary mental activity. That spirit becomes operative for what is going on within me. I stay aware of witnessing love itself. There is nothing else but only me. By watching and loving, the spirit/witness unfolds and enlarges to become all inclusive. I am getting rooted in fundamental consciousness, and am moving toward the boundless, the Infinite. It is very similar to the state described in Part Four under "The Nobleman."

I need to have awareness and love come closer together, so that acceptance and compassion become my habitual outlook. This creates a greater conviction of a divine concurrence or presence in everything I do. I become more in touch with ultimate truth, a knowing that comes from direct experience. Loving awareness is what I do and what I am.

In loving awareness I am most like God. And perhaps unbeknown to me, I may be performing the same or greater works than Jesus performed. As outrageous as that may sound, I have Jesus' own words that it is possible. I used Jesus' teaching to overcome a personal problem I had, as narrated above. It is appropriate here to reprise Jesus' words as they apply to any true follower: "Let me firmly assure you, the man who has faith in me will perform the same works that I perform. In fact, he will perform far greater than these" (John 14:12). As explained above in Part Two, by a man uniting himself with Jesus and the Father,

belief gives him a share in the power that they possess. Such power is explained by the changed situation of the post-resurrectional period. After Jesus has been glorified, the Father will perform in His Son's name works capable of manifesting the Son's glory. The idea that the disciples will be given the power to perform marvelous works is found in many New Testament writings, but in John less attention is given to their marvelous character and more to their future orientation, implicitly, to our times.

I first have to discover my own natural leaning or propensity to love. I have a natural tendency to love, but so often it is misdirected. It takes work to become a fully human human being, that is, a knower and lover without fear. My nature is made up primarily of love and awareness. Nothing will contribute more to my felt sense of the Divine Presence than my own growth in love. God's essence is love, which means Love is infinite. It is from this Storehouse that I want to draw a love that will consume my own.

It is well to remember the example Jesus holds out to his followers for all time. The coming of Jesus among us that we might have life was an unparalleled act of love on the part of both the Father and the Son, indeed a revelation of God's love (John 3:16; I John 4:9). It was this heavenly act of love--a love that is of and from God (I John 4:7)--that Jesus held up to us as a model for our love for one another (John 15:9, 12). If we loved one another with the love with which he (and the Father) loved us, our sense of loneliness would have been overcome. We would be bound to one another as the Father and Son are bound to each other (John 17:22). We would have found a kinship that believers of all time could share. The very existence of the followers of Jesus who love one another with the love by which he loved us constitutes a revelation of the Father and the Son, a

revelation that gives life. Loving one another reveals God's presence.

I would like to add here a paragraph from the unpublished notes of Ray Brown that he prepared for the theology faculty of St. Mary's University and Seminary, Baltimore, MD, explained in the Epilogue to this book. These are the concluding words of the magnanimous work that he passed on to us:

"The implications for the Christian life of understanding the role of the Paraclete in Johannine thought are dramatic. The presence of the Paraclete among Christians differs from the presence of Jesus during his ministry in an essential feature: the Paraclete is invisible to the world (14:17), because the Paraclete is within the disciple. The only way the Paraclete can exercise his ministry is through Christians and their way of life. If the Paraclete is to bear witness to Jesus, this is through the witness of Christians to Jesus. The only way that the world can know that Jesus' death was not the end is because the Spirit which animated Jesus is alive in his followers....two thousand years after his death his presence is still with his disciples; his Spirit is still alive; the Paraclete through the Christian is still glorifying Jesus and bearing witness to him. And in the very first verse of the Paraclete passages (14:16) John explains the specific way in which the presence of the Paraclete finds realization, i.e., when the Christian disciple loves Jesus and keeps his commandments. 'If you love me and keep my commandments, then at my request the Father will give you another Paraclete to be with you forever.' "

And so, the work of the Paraclete continues. We have seen it in a great mystic like Meister Eckhart, and it continues in every follower of Jesus, even if one is living only in the Spirit of Jesus. The Spirit is the Spirit of God, not the spirit of man that

worships in our inner resources. It is a Glorious Spirit that brings to us the Spirit of the Father, the Spirit of Jesus. These are living realities. They make us into a Father, a Son, so that we perform the works they do. He is Glorious because now is the Hour of Glory of the Father's work accomplishing in us the Passion, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus. I am a Father unto myself, begetting in me a loyal Son following my Father's wishes. I am all that they are, and the intimacy enraptures me. We have to allow the widest berth for what the SPIRIT IS.

Conclusion: The Beauty and Wonder of God and Us

I would like to bring our journey to an end with an extended treatment of what may be the most astounding statement in Christian spirituality outside the Bible: "the innermost and highest part of the soul creates and receives God's Son and becoming-God's-Son in the bosom and heart of the heavenly Father." Such a statement is in itself first, a cause for awe and wonder in just accepting the fact; and secondly, it points out the power and beauty with which God has endowed us. Eckhart's statement reminded me of Silesius, also previously quoted, who said, Jesus "could be born a thousand times in Bethlehem but all in vain until he is born in me." We could have the highest ideals and be shown the greatest examples, such as John and Eckhart held out for us, but all is worthless unless I make them my own.

In writing this story I have only to look at what brought the reader and me this far. In digesting Eckhart's writings, we see how he prods us in all the ways he can to nurture our interior life with God. He also has high regard for personal inner power and potential as we have seen: "The best that one can say about God is for one to keep silent out of the wisdom of one's inward riches. So be silent, and do not chatter about God....And do not try to understand God, for God is beyond all understanding." This

reminds us of the essence of faith as seen in John's Gospel: engaging and committing to God and Jesus in absolute interior trust. Life is a path that God and the sojourner walk together. It's a joint enterprise in which we cannot underestimate the role of God or myself.

I believe marvelous works capitalizing on the soul's ability were foretold in Scripture along with the divine/human concurrence that makes them possible. I ask the reader's patience in quoting them once again: "Let me firmly assure you, the man who has faith in me will perform the same works that I perform. In fact, he will perform far greater than these, because I am going to the Father, and whatever you ask in my name I will do....On that day you will recognize that I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I in you....and we shall come to him and make our dwelling place with him" (John 14: 12-13, 20, 23). Jesus does not underestimate man. He knows the power we have, the power of Spirit, which we hardly know. As the Father's son, when we grow up we have the same power the Father has. Our Godliness depends on how we see things and on how we handle daily affairs. The earth is God's as well as heaven. The vision of someone mature in Spirit is that nothing can harm him, nothing can kill him. He is invincible!

We can be lifted up to breathless heights by what is great in us. But such an elevation can be achieved only when something dies in us. The personal experience of an inner realization brings with it a dying and rebirth. We need not here go into the cause of suffering, for the individual knows when he or she is caught in its clutches, whether it be physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. It seems to be a part of the human condition. For John the Evangelist, one needs to overcome darkness (ignorance), die to the world, and rise above human glory. Eckhart's rendition begins with quoting Scripture, as previously noted: "God chastises all those whom he receives and

accepts as sons (Hebrews 12:6). It is part of being a son for us to suffer. Because God's Son could not suffer in his divinity and in eternity, the heavenly Father therefore sent him into time, to become man and to be able to suffer. So if you want to be son of God and you do not wish to suffer, you are all wrong."

The words of Christ urge us not to be fearful but to venture forth. With his passion upon him, Jesus told his disciples, "In the world you find suffering, but have courage: I have conquered the world" (John 16: 33). In the context of fear that we may all experience from time to time, John's words remind and console once again: "Love has no room for fear; rather, perfect love drives out fear,...Love has not reached perfection in one who is still afraid" (I John 4: 18).

Jesus appeals to us anyway he can. A part of the child remains in all of us. And so, when the disciples asked Jesus who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, he called a little child to him and set the child in front of them. Then he said, "I tell you solemnly, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18: 1-4). Jesus is talking about the simplicity of a child who doesn't have the obstacles that so many adults let get in the way. For an unspoiled child, all things are possible. He is unafraid and adventurous, a model for the wary soul.

For as long as I can remember, I have had a recurring dream in which I am looking for my classroom. I'm usually in a building and checking the numbers from door to door. I don't know what number is my room, but I know I don't find it. I wake up frustrated and always ask myself, "What am I looking for?" The answer has always eluded me and the dream comes back again and again.

But last night, after researching this material all day, I had another dream. I was walking alone on a single-file all-rope bridge over a raging river gorge far below. I am high above earth and water and all creation. The very height in which I can see all below is awesome. The bridge sways wildly back and forth in the wind, and I have no idea what supports it, where it comes from, or where it goes. It is very scary, yet supremely exhilarating, and I only know that I must walk it. Although deeply frightened, I have absolute confidence that nothing bad can happen to me. I have only to proceed and keep walking.

When I awoke, I was ecstatic. I was supercharged with energy and joy! Pure bliss is the way to describe the afterglow. I found what I had been looking for. The classroom is IN ME. I no longer have to search outside. God puts the magic in my hands with the love that Jesus holds out and the willfulness that Eckhart teaches. The only path to follow is my own. I must follow the path I have chosen, yet God is doing it with me. I have become a Father unto myself, and the words of Joel S. Goldsmith quoted earlier come back to me: "I enjoy watching the glory of the Father unfold as my personal experience." I move from relationship to identity!

And so, Eckhart's statement about our soul creating and receiving and becoming God's Son unites heaven and earth, God and man working together. It answers the question of how God and man are ultimately One. The seed that God planted has fully blossomed: from God's heart to mine.

God becomes me and I become God without losing my identity. Therefore, God as me does everything I do. I am God, not as He is but as I am. This is the Indwelling. There's the thought, maybe even the desire, neither of which is anything like the realization, which no one can do for me. Fear grips me! I am all alone, with not even God to turn to because He is me. But

then I remember that perfect love casts out fear. And I rest in that love. Father, Son, Holy Spirit are One and rest in me as me as One with me. East and West are joined and I am One with the universe: "I am That, you are That, all this is That." I have a leading role in God's plan for the universe. Am I being presumptuous? Fear of pride enters. It is quickly banished because every one of us has the same role to be carried out individually.

I would like to employ Eastern thought in one further way to demonstrate oneness. Nagarjuna (circa second century C.E.) has been called the Second Buddha, largely because of his doctrine of Emptiness. The Buddhist doctrine of Emptiness is perhaps the intellect's strongest argument that all is one for it holds for the absence of self-existence (no separate self). Emptiness is a conventional truth used to help us realize the ultimate which cannot be expressed in words. It has meaning only in reference to something that is not empty. The conventional is not ultimately true, but it's needed in order to point to the ultimate. It points to something that is not-empty, and since ultimately there are no self-existing things, there is no Emptiness, either. We have to let go of the boat once we get to the other side of the river. (David Loy, "The Second Buddha," *TRICYCLE*, winter, 2006, pp. 42-45).

It seems to me that Emptiness is a conventional truth similar to the one that says the earth is stable and solid, meaning it has sufficient stability that we can stand on it and build homes on it. But actually we know that the earth is not solid, having more empty space than matter, and that it is in constant movement and flux instead of being steadfast.

The great "Truth" of Emptiness pointing to no separate existence and ultimate Oneness is not enough to satisfy us. The heart, the whole self, wants more. Blaise Pascal (1623-1662),

French mathematician and famous scientist, has often been quoted for what he said on this matter: "The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing. It is the heart which perceives God and not the reason." If some semblance of trust is still required, we could look again at what the Evangelist said earlier in this book regarding faith as engaging and committing in a trustful manner. The ultimate truth of Whom we are loving and trusting is God Himself, the Ultimate which cannot be expressed in words.

In God becoming man, He had to express Himself in human language so that we could understand. A great test for us his followers is whether we can put God above all the human trappings in which men have enclosed and encased Him. Is my version of God big enough to include in the Divine all the suffering in the world as well as my own? Is my intellect sturdy enough to survive living in the heart?

All is One, from beginning to end, from the first to the last. All the past is for my edification, that Christ may be born and grow in me. God, Son, Holy Spirit are One with me, living, rejoicing, suffering. God wants to experience all that I experience, AND, He wants me to pass over into the divine. This is the purpose of the Indwelling. God has shown His will; the rest resides in my will.

Am I willing to take Eckhart's words seriously and apply them to myself? Can I say, "The highest and innermost part of my soul creates and receives God's Son and becoming God's Son in the bosom and heart of the heavenly Father?" If it seems like a preposterous statement, one must remember he/she does not make it alone; all is done from, in, and with God. God is entirely transcendent and entirely immanent in all activity. He is totally beyond all and completely within all. Everything is in God, and God is in everything.

As background for such a declaration, it is good to remember the nondual nature of all reality as stated earlier by Ken Wilber: "The realization of the Nondual traditions is uncompromising: there is only Spirit, there is only God, there is only Emptiness in all its radiant wonder." God is the One who alone IS! I need to attempt saying it, even though it may seem absurd at first. I need to make a pronouncement for myself, as John and Eckhart had done, which helps bring to an end seeking and searching.

Eckhart's words about the highest and innermost part of my soul tells me that there is a sacred home in my soul, and I am in that holy house. The deep meaning of John and Eckhart is that the soul is not in the body, but that the body is in the soul! Here is the chance for me to wake up to my own mysticism. Do I see a grand soul, God and myself, encompassing all reality? Trusting one's own experience is the basis of all mysticism. I must take responsibility for my own spiritual/mystical life. Behind all that is said in this book is the zeal and rapture of the figures quoted and explored; I need to make those qualities my own, and only I can do that by my own deep desire.

A close friend and fellow traveler is convinced that mysticism is within his grasp. He says it is deep contemplation when the subject is totally amenable to God's Spirit acting in him. This is the prayer he uses:

"Be still and know that I am God.
Be still, my will, and know, no doubt, that God is
becoming myself.
Myself is becoming all things.
All things are mine as they merge in me.
My me is God, nor do I recognize any other me
except my God Himself."

My friend is aware that he closes with the line from St. Catherine of Genoa, and he says he can use anything he wants to get closer to God. He experiences "something" greater than himself "taking over" when he is in his higher states.

Another famous figure made a personal declaration that stemmed from his deepest convictions. Mahatma Gandhi remained steadfast in his belief that non-violence was the way to overcome the persecution and injustice he experienced in the world. He was questioned why he believed in Christ's Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth, etc.," when some say it was put on the lips of Jesus by a later writer, and others were questioning the very existence of Jesus. Gandhi's statement cut through all historical and literary difficulties to express what was of paramount importance to him:

"It does not matter to me if someone demonstrated that the man Jesus never lived and that what we read in the Gospels is nothing more than a production of the author's imagination. The Sermon on the Mount will always remain true in my eyes" (Gandhi, "Buddhisimo, Cristianesimo, Islam- isimo," Rome, Tascabili Newton Compton, 1993, p. 53.)

When Eckhart says the soul creates, receives, and becomes, he is offering a microcosm, an individualized version, of a much larger reality. All of life is a giving and a receiving and in that is our becoming. His statement is, in reality, an example of one of his own principles: Grace perfects nature and glory is perfected grace. The "going out" and "coming in" are more striking when beauty is involved. Beauty draws us to itself and gives us something in return. Sometimes a Grand Canyon, a glorious sunset, a favorite piece of music, takes us out of ourselves. We can be so enraptured that we are not aware of the outpouring, of the "to" and "fro" of the happening.

Thomas Aquinas sees the marked harmony between beauty and love. In his poem "On Behalf of Love," quoted entirely in Part Two, he has God saying, "All acts of beauty are mine, all happens on behalf of love." Elsewhere he gives beauty the magnitude it deserves: "All things have been made in order that they may imitate the divine beauty in whatever possible way. Divine beauty is the cause of all states of rest and motion, whether of minds or spirits or bodies." Beauty leads to delight, and here again Aquinas teaches us when he said that people change by delight.

Poets in particular are adept at portraying the giving of oneself to beauty and the rich reward received. The first line of John Keats' (1795-1821) poem, ENDYMION, is not the only memorable part, but also the lines immediately following:

"A thing of beauty is a joy forever;
It's loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing."

Keats sees beauty as a sheltering dwelling because of what it gives and we receive. Beauty ever increases and never passes away. In this light, the "becoming" that springs from giving and receiving never ends. Being is forever becoming.

Great spiritual teachings are not the possession solely of the mystics. Another poet, this time an American, Walt Whitman, gives us a striking illustration of endless possibility in his poem, PASSAGE TO MORE THAN INDIA:

"Have we not stood here like trees in the ground
long enough?
Have we not grovel'd here long enough,

eating and drinking like mere brutes?
Have we not darken'd and dazed ourselves
with books long enough?
Sail forth--steer for deep waters only,
Reckless O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou
with me,
For we are bound where mariner has not yet
dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.
O my brave soul!
O farther farther sail!
O daring joy, but safe! are they not all the seas
of God?
O farther, farther, farther sail!"

(Walt Whitman, *LEAVES OF GRASS*, edited by
Emory Holloway, Doubleday and Company, Garden City, NY,
1926, pp. 349-350.)

Our identity is to be in God. If we can see God as beautiful, it will enhance the giving, receiving, and becoming. When we can see all things in God, then we, too, shall be in God. Existence is Absolute; there is no second, which means it's all God. All is done in God, but we have to put ourselves there. We have to see ourselves as taking place in God. We need to put our mind and will to work to be a part of it. Then we are there: the soul creates, receives, becomes. It's easier to do if all moves in one direction. Two quotes from Scripture help assemble our disparate thoughts:

"All things work together for good to those that love
God" (Romans 8: 28).

"The Lord is my Shepherd,
I shall not want..."

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days
of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever"
(Psalm 23).

Whatever one sees as beautiful can open his heart: the infinity of space, the untold number of galaxies with billions of stars, the ceaseless orbiting of the planets, the wonder of nature and all its creatures, the genius of man and his creations throughout history. Being alone with nature often is peaceful and makes us feel good. Once the heart is open, the divine has easy access to enter. If the person can trust and rejoice in his own experience, he is laying the foundation for his own mysticism. Each one of us can be a mystic.

Something very simple can turn a person into a mystic, or at least start him on his mystical journey. For example, he may have a deep love of the concurrence of God in all that he does, aware that God makes it all possible. He has been given a mind not of his own doing that can know all things. It is capable of comprehending the entire universe, for its learning can go on forever. His heart is susceptible of loving everything, and the heart's depth of love can never be fathomed. His hands can do something that no one else can perform the way he does. There has never been another DNA like his in the history of the universe, and every single person is a unique expression of the all-encompassing One God. He can bring all this about, and God as well, as his soul creates and receives and becomes. It is God Who creates all this beauty for his delight, for his pleasure. He accepts existence with awe. Awe is the beginning of wisdom, and beauty draws him into itself. Neither beauty nor wisdom nor love can ever be replaced by ideas. The rivers of knowledge, navigated with intelligence and effort, all empty into the ocean of love, where those skills are no longer needed. (For further pursuit of the mystic, see Matthew Fox, "Creation Spirituality,"

ONLY CONNECT SOIL, SOUL, SOCIETY, Chelsea Green Publishing Co., White River Junction, Vermont, 2000, pp. 108-117).

If the Scripture quotations above are true, and if all that we have been saying in this entire book rings genuine, than God cannot help but be the Most Awesome and the Most Beautiful Thing that ever existed, more wonderful and more lovely than one could ever imagine.

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EPILOGUE

After I successfully defended my doctoral dissertation on "The Suffering Servant in John's Gospel" at the University of Louvain, Belgium, I was assigned to teach theology at St. Mary's University and Seminary, Baltimore, Maryland. Fortunately, I got to know Ray Brown who was already on the faculty teaching Scripture. He asked me to address the local chapter of the Catholic Biblical Association on what I found and wrote about in my dissertation on the Suffering Servant. Later, Brown used the dissertation, a small part in his much grander work, **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN**.

Older members of the theology department knew they had a genius in their midst, so they asked the renowned Biblical scholar to give his rendition of the "One God" and the "Triune God" as found in the Old and New Testaments. Ray graciously agreed, and we younger members profited by theology's "return" to Scripture. I still have this collection of his unpublished notes which I have used in this and other writings.

Although we shared much as teachers and directors of students, it was not all work and no play. We mingled as freely as we could with the seminarians between classes and in recreation; Ray had a warm and engaging side in addition to his great intellect. He asked me to be his handball partner to show these young "Trojans" that we faculty members were not old and decrepit and ready to be turned out to pasture. In the end, youth ruled the day. We didn't win many games, but we scored "points" with the students.

Ray went on to become the only Catholic priest ever to receive tenure at Union Theological Seminary, New York. He received over forty honorary doctoral degrees from around the world, and was probably the premier Biblical scholar of his day, at least in America. He died in 1998 at 70 years of age.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom grew up in the Pittsburgh area attending strict public schools that had a mix of colors, religions and cultures. After high school, at the prodding of an older brother and a widowed mother, he entered the University of Pittsburgh to major in writing. Feeling lost and wondering what his own "purpose" was, he left after his junior year to enter the Catholic seminary. There he majored in philosophy, finding peace and order and wallowing in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and the mystics. He was ordained a priest and joined the Sulpician Society (S.S.) whose sole purpose is the training of young men for the priesthood. After three lesser degrees he was sent to the renowned University of Louvain, Belgium, to get his doctorate in theology.

Having successfully completed his degree work, he taught theology and counseled seminarians for thirteen

years in Kenmore, WA, Baltimore, MD, Plymouth, MI, Burlington, VT, and Washington, D.C.

Inspired by Pope John XXIII on a visit to Rome, and by the radical decrees on non-Christian religions the Pope fostered at Vatican II, Tom left the priesthood to mine the riches he felt lying in other pastures which he studied. He married, became a general manager in a business venture, and counseled in a private clinic. Happily married to Helen over forty years, he lives in Dearborn, MI with their cat, Charmer. As co-worker and true friend, his wife recently set up a website for Tom to continue his work:

www.findingoneness.com.

Tom's purpose is giving to others the riches he found in the world's mystical traditions in the pursuit of the Oneness of everything. His other books are SUPERSEED, OCEAN IN A DROP, HONORING GOD WITHIN, and FINDING ONENES, The Power of Loving Awareness.

