



**THEOLOGY,  
SPIRITUALITY AND  
RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE**

**by Fr Pat Collins C.M.**

**Summer School 2020**

## Course Outline

### Theology, Spirituality and Religious Experience

It could be argued that, in traditionally Christian countries, the centre of gravity has shifted from the experience of religious authority to the authority of religious experience, whether theistic or non-theistic. Writing about the tension that exists between subjective religious experience and objective Christian truth, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote, “What is the relation between personal experience and the common faith of the Church? Both factors are important: a dogmatic faith unsupported by personal experience remains empty; mere personal experience unrelated to the faith of the Church remains blind.”<sup>1</sup>

This course will not only look at the tension that necessarily exists between religious experience and Christian dogma, ritual, & spirituality, but also the danger it poses when one element prevails at the expense of the other. It will do so in an interdisciplinary way by having recourse to such topics as theology, Church history, anthropology, psychology, neuroscience and empirical research. The course will aim to demonstrate that when religious experience and Christian truth are kept in balance, the Christian life is animated by meaning, energy and relevance. While each talk will be a standalone topic, the series will be interconnected.

- 1) Introduction to the course. Religion, religious experience, prayer and mysticism. Definition of terms, tension between subjective and objective and the contemporary shift to the authority of experience.
- 2) The Protestant and Catholic emphasis on religious experience from an historical point of view.
- 3) Religious Experience and Empirical Research. The brain is hardwired for religious experience. Empirical research findings on the incidence of religious experience.
- 4) Religious Experience and Spiritual direction. How spiritual direction is the art of identifying, facilitating and discerning genuine religious experience of a Christian kind. The need for discernment.
- 5) A typology of religious experience. It has four constituent elements namely, desire, attention, revelation and effects.
- 6) Examples of theistic and non-theistic religious experiences examined in the light of the fourfold typology. Are non-theistic religious experiences examples of apophatic spirituality?
- 7) Evangelisation and Gifts of revelation, proclamation & demonstration. St Thomas Aquinas on the connection between gifts of *revelation*, proclamation and

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<sup>1</sup> Foreword to Cardinal Suenens, *Renewal & the Powers of Darkness* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1983), x.

demonstration in 1 Cor 12:8-10, with a special focus on prophecy as an experiential form of private revelation.

- 8) Religious experience and three models of evangelisation. The importance of religious experience in two of those models. Evangelisation as, primarily, witness to an experience of God.
- 9) Religious Experience: influence on Mental and Physical Health. How research indicates that those who have intrinsic as opposed to extrinsic religion and pray accordingly, enjoy better health and longer lives on average.
- 10) Dangers implicit in the experiential approach to religion, e.g., relativism, syncretism, and neo-Gnosticism as epitomized by New Age spirituality, which, like a Trojan horse is threatening the Church from within. The role of dogma, as a form of ecclesial discernment.

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## Talk One

### Introduction to the Course

#### Introduction

I want to begin this course with a passage from 1 Sam 3:1-14. I'll say why having read it.

“Now the young man Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called Samuel, and he said, "Here I am!" and ran to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. And the Lord called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the young man. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant hears." Then the Lord said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which the two ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. And I declare to him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.”

This passage introduces us to issues that will be relevant during our Summer School.

- **Firstly**, there is the issue of the religion, in this case the Jewish religion, with its institutional aspects such as the priesthood, the role of the temple, the word of God and prayer.
- **Secondly**, although the institutional elements were in place, there was a lack of genuine religious experience. We are informed that, “the word of the Lord was rare in those days.” Eli, the high priest was a very flawed man. We are told symbolically that he was a man with very little vision. His two priestly sons were corrupt and “knew not the Lord.” So the Jewish religion was in need of renewal at the time as a result of a famine of religious experience.
- **Thirdly**, things began to change when the Lord called to Samuel. We are told that on the third occasion he said, “Speak Lord, your servant is listening.” Then he had a profound religious experience during which he heard God’s prophetic word. It took the form of a rebuke for Eli

and his two wayward sons. They died soon afterwards. As for Samuel we are told, in contrast, that he was “a seer” (1 Sam 9:9) and that the Lord, “let none of his words fall to the ground.”

Renewal came with the appointment of David as king, whose dynasty would last forever.

At this point I would like to talk about a number of concepts that will arise during the course such as religion; religious experience, prayer, and mysticism.

## Religion

We begin with the word "religion." It is derived from the Latin, *religiare*, meaning "to bind fast" So it could be said that religion binds people to God, to others and to their deepest selves. Understood in that way it could be referred to as a sense of ultimate belonging.

1] David Hay has coined the phrase, “relational consciousness” to describe this kind of awareness. It is an alternative to the "possessive individualism" which has become the norm in the Western world. It refers to an awareness of our interdependence with other beings, including God, animals, and other humans. It suggests a nuanced sensitivity to the complexity and connection of all creatures.<sup>2</sup>

2] In this connection I am also reminded of Karl Jasper’s notion of “the Comprehensive,” which is a mystical awareness of a oneness that transcends the normal, subject-object dichotomy which characterises every day, mundane experience.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, the phrase refers to an intuitive, experiential awareness, a felt sense, rather than a mere intellectual awareness.

3] There may also be echoes of Nicolas of Cusa’s (1401-1464) notion of the “Coincidence of Opposites,” the idea that all kinds of multiplicity in the finite world become one in the infinite realm of God.

This kind of thinking is being backed up by scientists who are familiar with quantum physics. Dr. Rollin McCraty and Annette Deyhle, Ph.D. authors of *Science of Interconnectivity* have written, “We can no longer think of reality as little building blocks separated by an empty space. We now know there is no such thing as empty space and that physical objects, including us, do not exist in isolation, but are part of this holistic web of interconnectedness in which fields and relationships are primary.”<sup>4</sup> An example would be the so called “butterfly Effect” a notion which can be traced back to chaos theory and the writings of scientist Edward Lorenz (1917-2008). It maintains that a butterfly's wings might create tiny changes in the atmosphere that may ultimately alter the path of a tornado or delay, accelerate or even prevent the occurrence of a tornado in another location. The butterfly does not power or directly create the tornado, but the term is intended to imply that the flap of the butterfly's wings can *cause* the tornado: in the sense that the flap of the wings is a part of the initial conditions of an inter-connected complex web; one set of conditions leads to a tornado while the other set of conditions doesn't.

In his Terry Lectures, which were delivered in Yale in 1937, Carl Jung quoted the following words from Cicero:

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. “Relational Consciousness” in *Encyclopedia of Religious and Spiritual Development* (Thousand Oakes: Sage Publications, 2006), 375-377.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Jaspers, “The Comprehensive,” in *Way to Wisdom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), 28-38. He wrote, “Suffice it to say that the Comprehensive, conceived as being itself, is called transcendence (God) and the world, while as that which we ourselves are, it is called being-there, consciousness, mind, and existence” p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.heartmath.org/resources/downloads/science-of-interconnectivity-ebook/>

"Religion is that which gives reverence and worship to some higher nature which is called divine."<sup>5</sup>

Then Jung went on to add in a more psychological way to say, "The term "religion" designates the attitude peculiar to a consciousness which has been changed by experience of the *numinosum* [divine power]. Creeds are codified and dogmatised forms of original religious experience."<sup>6</sup>

### **Religious experience**

As Jung has already indicated, at the heart of religion is 'religious experience.' It is worth noting, that instead of talking about religious experience, we could refer, rather, to the religious dimension of human experience.<sup>7</sup> Implicit in this understanding is the belief that religious experience, like spirituality, is not a separate form of human awareness, but rather the characteristic of subjective depth and ultimate concern, of a transcendental kind, whether theistic or non-theistic, in all the other aspects of human experience. In this talk, I will use the term "religious experience" with this understanding in mind. The phrase refers not so much to talk or thought *about* transcendental reality, as conscious, awareness *of* that reality.

When we are with our human friends we can see, hear, and touch them. But our relationship with God is different. The Lord is pure Spirit and cannot be directly perceived by the human senses. So how can the Lord, reveal the God-self to us? Clearly, a principle of mediation is needed. We can only encounter God indirectly through created things. In Rom 1:20 St Paul articulated this point of view when he stated: "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-- his eternal power and divine nature-- have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made."

St Thomas Aquinas, the greatest theologian of the medieval era, stated in his *Summa Theologica*:

"Our natural knowledge begins from sense. Hence our natural knowledge can go as far as it can be led by sensible things.<sup>8</sup> . . . The nature of man requires that he be led to the invisible by visible things. Therefore, the invisible things of God must be made manifest to man by the things that are visible."<sup>9</sup>

Karl Rahner, one of the greatest Catholic theologians of the twentieth century, wrote in similar vein,

"The human person's first personal partner...cannot be God, because a mediation is always needed.....the human person and the world must be the mediator."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *De Inventione Rhetorica*, II, 53, 161.

<sup>6</sup> "Psychology and Religion" *The Basic Writings of C G Jung* (New York: The Modern Library, 1959), 473.

<sup>7</sup> Dermot Lane, *The Experience of God: An Invitation to do Theology*, (Dublin: Veritas, 1981), 13; William Barry, *Spiritual Direction & The Encounter with God*, (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1992), 29-39.

<sup>8</sup> ST I-I, Q 12, Art. 12

<sup>9</sup> ST. I-I, Q. 43, Art 7.

<sup>10</sup> "Reflections on the Unity of love the Love of God and love of the neighbour," *Theological Investigations* Vol 6. (London: DLT, 1969), 241.

Writing mainly about human mediation especially in his *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, St John Paul said something similar,

“The body in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it.”<sup>11</sup>

That is why Christians believe that God became human in Jesus Christ. During his lifetime, the words and actions of Jesus were like so many panes in the stained glass window of his humanity. Through them believers are enabled see what God the Father, who lives in “unapproachable light” (1 Tim 6:16), is truly like. As Jesus testified, “anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). Where do we meet with Christ nowadays? The poet Gerald Manley Hopkins responded in the following words,

“For Christ plays in ten thousand places, lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his to the Father through the features of men's faces.”<sup>12</sup>

As the two disciples on the road to Emmaus discovered, we meet the risen Lord in and through the Eucharistic community. The new sense of transcendental relatedness involved in religious experiences leads to a new sense of self. That in turn is expressed in the form of religious affiliation, e.g., to a Church, and by means of such things as a code of morality, rituals, sacraments, customs etc.

### **Prayer at the heart of religion and religious experience**

The history of spirituality indicates that there is an inseparable link between formal religion, religious experience and prayer. Speaking about the relationship of religion and prayer St Thomas Aquinas stated:

“It belongs properly to religion to show honour to God, wherefore all those things through which reverence is shown to God, belong to religion. Now man shows reverence to God by means of prayer, in so far as he subjects himself to Him, and by praying confesses that he needs Him as the Author of his blessings. Hence it is evident that prayer is properly an act of religion.”<sup>13</sup>

In the twentieth century different writers echoed that point of view. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James, defined prayer as

“A conscious and voluntary relation, entered into by a soul in distress with the mysterious power upon which it feels itself to depend, and upon which its fate is contingent.”<sup>14</sup>

He said that as such:

“Prayer...is the very soul and essence of religion...Whenever interior prayer is lacking, there is no religion; wherever on the other hand, this prayer rises and stirs the soul, even in the absence of forms or of doctrines, we have living religion.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 19:4, (Boston: Pauline Books, 2006), 203.

<sup>12</sup> As Kingfishers Catch Fire.

<sup>13</sup> *Summa Theologica* II-II, Q. 83, A. 3.

<sup>14</sup> (London: Fontana, 1971), 444.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

In his classic book entitled *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* Friedrich Heiler defined prayer as:

“A living communion of the religious man with God, conceived as personal and present in experience, a communion which reflects the forms of the social relations of humanity.”<sup>16</sup>

Then he went on to say:

“Religious persons and students of religion agree in testifying that prayer is the centre of religion, the soul of all piety.”<sup>17</sup>

Just as the lungs enable the human body to live by breathing in life giving oxygen, so prayer enables the human soul to live by breathing in the life giving Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> In other words, prayer is soul-breathing. As soon as prayer stops, religious experience begins to expire, and one is left with a religious corpse of lifeless beliefs, duties, worship, rituals customs etc. As Heiler wrote:

“Without prayer faith remains a theoretical conviction; worship is only an external and formal act; moral action is without spiritual depth; people remain at a distance from God; an abyss yawns between the finite and the Infinite.”<sup>19</sup>

One is reminded in this regard of Jesus’ observation that, “These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men” (Mt 15:8-9). As a result they are like “whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones” (Mt 23:27)

### **Mild and extreme mysticism**

Religious experiences can be mystical in nature. Because the word mysticism can mean so many different things, it is difficult to define. Etymologically, it refers to a person who has been initiated into a "mystery." A mystic, therefore, is a person who has a certain experiential sense of what eye has not seen or ear heard (cf. 1 Cor 2:9). Here are a few definitions. Dean Inge said that mysticism “is the immediate feeling of the unity of the self with God; it is nothing, therefore, but the fundamental feeling of religion, the religious life at its very heart and centre.”<sup>20</sup> Evelyn Underhill one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s greatest students of spirituality stated that mysticism

“Is the direct intuition or experience of God; and a mystic is a person who has, to a greater or less degree, such a direct experience. His or her religion and life are centered, not merely on an accepted belief or practice, but on that which he or she regards as first-hand personal knowledge.”<sup>21</sup>

A noted psychologist of religion James Pratt maintained, in a book entitled *Religious Consciousness*, that there were two interrelated forms of mysticism, one mild and the other extreme. He said,

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<sup>16</sup> *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), 358.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 362.

<sup>18</sup> Pope Francis said in the course of an address to Catholic Fraternity of the Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowship, Oct. 31, 2014, “Breathing is made up of two stages: inhaling, the intake of air, and exhaling, the letting out of air. The spiritual life is fed, nourished, by prayer and is expressed outwardly through mission: inhaling and exhaling. When we inhale, by prayer, we receive the fresh air of the Holy Spirit. When exhaling this air, we announce Jesus Christ risen by the same Spirit.”

<sup>19</sup> *Op. Cit.*, 362.

<sup>20</sup> W. R. Inge, *Mysticism in Religion*, (London: Rider & Co., 1969), 31.

<sup>21</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Mystics of the Church*, (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1975), 9-10.



“No just idea can be formed upon the subject and no sound conclusion as to the nature and place and value of mysticism can be reached unless one consistently keeps this distinction in mind.”<sup>22</sup>

He maintained that in both kinds, people sense the presence of a being or reality through means other than the ordinary perceptive processes or human reason.<sup>23</sup> This intuitive feeling of presence has a compelling sense of objectivity and evokes characteristic feelings of joy and happiness. From what he says, it would seem that ordinary religious experiences, the kind mentioned in surveys, are often forms of mild mysticism. In other words, it would seem that all genuine religious experiences are mystical, either in a mild or an extreme way.

### **Conclusion**

In this short course I will maintain that in contemporary Christianity the centre of gravity has shifted from the experience of religious authority to the authority of religious experience whether theistic or non-theistic. The late Karl Rahner endorsed this point of view when he wrote,

“The Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all.”<sup>24</sup>

By mysticism, Rahner meant,

“a genuine experience of God emerging from the very heart of one’s existence.”<sup>25</sup>

St John Paul II seemed to acknowledge this fact when he stated,

“People today put more trust in witnesses than in teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories.”<sup>26</sup>

The course will not only look at the tension that necessarily exists between subjective religious experience, and objective Christian revelation, it will also point out the dangers involved when one element prevails at the expense of the other.

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<sup>22</sup> *The Religious Consciousness: A Psychological Study* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 339.

<sup>23</sup> *The Religious Consciousness*, op. cit., 337.

<sup>24</sup> *Theological Investigations*, Vol. XX, 149.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>26</sup> *Redemptoris Missio*, par. 42.

## **Talk Two**

### **The Protestant & Catholic Emphasis on Religious Experience**

During the Age of Scholasticism, Christians saw faith largely as assent to the truths revealed by God, i.e., a mainly objective focus. The classical text of Saint Thomas Aquinas from *De Veritate* q. 14, a. 1. follows in the footsteps of Saint Augustine of Hippo by defining faith as “thinking with assent.” Luther and Calvin shifted the emphasis on to faith as heartfelt trust in the person of Christ, i.e., a more subjective, affective approach.

Ever afterwards Protestants not only put more stress on religious experience, they were the first to study the nature of such experiences. John Wesley was an outstanding example. He was born in 1703. He was a conscientious Christian. When he was at university he joined what was known as the Holy Club. The members followed a strict routine of prayer, bible study and devotion. He was ordained as a priest of the Church of England in 1727. Sometime later he went to the American colonies. During his time there he became romantically

involved with Sophia Hopkey. Although he never asked her to marry him he may have got an undertaking from her that she would never marry anyone else. He broke off the relationship as a result of the advice of another cleric. Sometime later he refused communion to Hopkey who was newly married. She and her husband filed suit against Wesley on the basis that he had defamed her reputation in a public way. Although the case ended in a mistrial Wesley's reputation was badly tarnished.

This was a very disillusioning experience for him because it illustrated the gap that existed between his high ideals and the reality of his life. During his time in the colonies he met a Moravian pastor from Germany named Spangenberg. Wesley says in his diary that one conversation they engaged in left a lasting impression upon him. The Moravian said to him, "My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions. Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?, Do you know Jesus Christ?" "I know that He is the Saviour of the world," I replied. "Do you know that He has saved you?" he asked. I answered, "I hope He has died to save me" he responded, "Do you know yourself?" "I said I do, but I fear they were vain words." Clearly, Wesley was admitting that although he was familiar with Christian teaching and received the sacraments, he wasn't fully evangelised.

When Wesley returned to England he happened to attend a Christian prayer meeting. Writing about it in his diary he said. "I reluctantly attended a meeting in Aldersgate Street. Someone read from Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to Romans*. About 8:45 p.m.,

"While he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

In other words the message of the kerygma fell the vital eighteen inches from his head to his heart. Wesley was truly evangelised and spent the rest of his life evangelising.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), possibly America's greatest religious thinker, was a minister in the Congregational Church in Northampton, Massachusetts. He described how the Great Awakening took place in his locality. It began among members of the Dutch Reformed Church in New Jersey, and spread into New England. It was sparked off by the preaching of Edwards himself and developed by George Whitfield, a former colleague of John Wesley's. There were dramatic signs associated with the many conversions that occurred. For example Edwards wrote:

"It was a very frequent thing to see a house full of outcries, faintings, convulsions, and such like, both with distress, and also with admiration and joy. It was not the manner here to hold meetings all night, as in some places, nor was it common to continue them till very late in the night; but it was pretty often so, that there were some that were so affected, and their bodies so overcome, that they would not go home, but were obliged to stay all night where they were."<sup>27</sup>

Edwards was cautious about what he saw, as some of it seemed unhealthy in nature. So he wrote two classic books entitled, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the True Spirit with a Particular Consideration of the Extraordinary Circumstances with Which this Work*

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<sup>27</sup> "An account of the Revival of Religion in Northampton in 1740-1742, as Communicated in a Letter to a Minister in Boston," *Jonathan Edwards on Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 151.

is *Attended*. He also wrote a classic work entitled *The Religious Affections* in which the true, Spirit in which he tried to identify inspired experiences, from those which were not genuine. This was one of the first theological studies of religious experience. Edwards wrote:

"The devil sees to it ....to endeavour to his up-most to propagate and establish a persuasion that all affections (feelings) and sensible emotions of the mind, in things of religion, are nothing at all to be regarded, but are rather to be avoided and carefully guarded against, as things of a pernicious tendency. This he knows is the way to bring all religion to a mere lifeless formality, and effectively shutting out the powers of godliness, and everything that is spiritual, and to have all true Christianity turned out of doors....The Holy Scriptures do everywhere place religion very much in the affections; such as fear, hope, love, hatred, desire, joy, sorrow, gratitude, compassion, zeal.....He that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion....I am bold to assert that there was never any considerable change wrought in the mind or conversation of any person, by anything of a religious nature that he ever read, heard or saw, that had not his affections moved."<sup>28</sup>

Sometime later Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), one of the greatest Protestant thinkers since the Reformation, made a profound study of the religious impulse and its associated religious experiences. He did so mainly as a philosopher examining natural religion. Instead of looking at the subject solely from an objective, dogmatic point of view, his book, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers*,<sup>29</sup> also looked at religion from the point of view of subjective experience. He said that religion was based on the feeling of 'absolute dependence' and a concomitant 'thirst for the infinite.'

"Religion's essence, is neither thinking or acting, but intuition and feeling. It wishes to intuit the universe, wishes devoutly to overhear the universe's own manifestations and actions, longs to be grasped and filled by the universe's immediate influences in childlike passivity."<sup>30</sup>

He stressed the fact that such felt-intuitions were not entirely subjective states, they were intentional, i.e. they were about something beyond the self, what could be referred to as intimations of infinity, or divinity-consciousness. In some of his later works Schleiermacher went so far as to say that "Dogmas are a knowledge about feeling," i.e., notional articulations of religious experiences of a Christian kind. His attitude was, "anyone who does not believe will not experience, and anyone who does not experience will not know."<sup>31</sup>

Shortly before his death a Canadian doctor, Richard Maurice Bucke (1837-1902) published a very interesting book entitled *Cosmic Consciousness: A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind*.<sup>32</sup> Having explored the mental and spiritual activity of the human race, he noted that, typically, people like Moses, Gautama, Socrates, Jesus, Paul, and Plotinus experienced this kind of inner illumination in their mid to late thirties. Some of them were founders of religions, while the others exercised a great influence on their followers.

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<sup>28</sup> *The Religious Affections* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986), 49.

<sup>29</sup> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)

<sup>30</sup> *Op. cit.*, 102.

<sup>31</sup> "The Christian Faith" quoted by Hans Kung, "Friedrich Schleiermacher, Theology at the Dawn of Modernity," in *Great Christian Thinkers* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 174.

<sup>32</sup> (New York: Dutton, 1969)

In his classic book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, there are indications that William James (1842-1910), was probably influenced by Schleiermacher's approach when he wrote, religion is, "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."<sup>33</sup> He added, "I myself invincibly do believe, that, although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd, yet the life of it as a whole is mankind's most important function."<sup>34</sup>

Rudolph Otto (1869-1937) a German scholar of religion in the early 1900's was also an admirer of Schleiermacher. In his influential book, *The Idea of the Holy*,<sup>35</sup> he maintained that the "non-rational factor in the idea of the divine" was an essential and constitutive element in every religion. People have religious experiences when they become consciously aware of the *numinous* i.e. the holy or the "wholly Other." Otto says the numinous is mysterious, i.e. beyond the grasp of the rational mind. He writes:

"The *mysterium* is experienced in its essential, positive, and specific character, as something that bestows upon man a beatitude beyond compare, but one whose real nature he can neither proclaim in speech nor conceive in thought, but may know only by a direct and living experience."<sup>36</sup>

When people are aware of the mystery, it evokes two typical responses; firstly the *mysterium tremendum* i.e. the mystery is awesome and daunting and secondly, the *mysterium fascinans* i.e. the mystery is attractive and fascinating.

### **Catholics and Religious Experience**

As a generalisation it could be said that in the Counter Reformation period, apart from the phenomenon of popular piety, e.g. devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Catholic theology tended to stress the objective side of religion. For example, at the first Vatican Council, faith was looked at in mainly propositional terms as,

"A supernatural virtue, whereby, inspired and assisted by the grace of God, we believe that the things which He has revealed are true; not because of the intrinsic truth of the things, viewed by the natural light of reason, but because of the authority of God Himself who reveals them, and Who can neither be deceived nor deceive."<sup>37</sup>

Despite that characteristic emphasis on the experience of religious authority, what was known as Modernism began to emerge in the Catholic Church in the late nineteenth century. It began to stress the authority of religious experience. However, the writings of its modernist exponents, such as Irishman, George Tyrrell, S.J., and Frenchman Fr. Alfred Loisy, were condemned by the Church. In spite of that fact, during the twentieth century, orthodox Catholic theology and spirituality put increasing emphasis on the role of religious experience, especially in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. Let me point to a few random examples.

- 1) In par 51 of his Encyclical, *Lord and Giver of Life*, St John Paul II wrote,

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<sup>33</sup> (London: Longmans & Green, 1902), 31.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted by Wulf in *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views*, (New York: Wiley, 1991), 475.

<sup>35</sup> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970)

<sup>36</sup> *The Idea of the Holy*, 33.

<sup>37</sup> *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith*, chapt., III.

“Faith, in its deepest essence, is the openness of the human heart to the gift: to God's self-communication in the Holy Spirit.”

Note of how this description of faith differs from that of the First Vatican Council. Whereas the former was objective and propositional in emphasis, that latter is more subjective, interpersonal and experiential. This point was reflected in a document entitled, *The Contemplative Dimension of Religious Life*, par. 30, which was published by the Sacred Congregation for Religious and for Secular Institutes we read,

“The contemplative dimension is the real secret of renewal for every religious life. It vitally renews the following of Christ because it leads to an *experiential knowledge* of him. This knowledge is needed for the authentic witness to him by those who have heard him, have seen him with their own eyes, have contemplated him and have touched him with their own hands (cf. 1 Jn 1:1; Phil 3:8).”<sup>38</sup>

2) Par. 67 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has stated,

“Throughout the ages, there have been so-called "private" revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive revelation, *but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history.*" (The revelations given to St Faustina Kowalska would be an example of what the Church has in mind).

Perhaps it would be true to say that in many instances Pentecostals, Charismatics and followers of popular devotion have recovered something of the primal experience that gave birth to Christianity but are not always good at expressing it in a sophisticated theological way. On the other hand, for many contemporary Christians, especially well educated ones, the order has been reversed, “they have the meaning, but miss the experience”<sup>39</sup> to quote a phrase of T. S. Eliot. Although they are theologically erudite they can lose touch with the primal religious experience that ought to animate the Christian life.

In par. 36 of the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, which was written by Benedict XVI and promulgated by Francis, we read,

"...theology is more than simply an effort of human reason to analyze and understand, along the lines of the experimental sciences. God cannot be reduced to an object. He is a subject who makes himself known and perceived in an interpersonal relationship. "[Theology]is not just our discourse about God, but first and foremost the acceptance and the pursuit of a deeper understanding of the word which God speaks to us, the word which God speaks about himself, for he is an eternal dialogue of communion, and he allows us to enter into this dialogue."

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<sup>38</sup> Vatican Collection Vol II: *More Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982), 258.

<sup>39</sup> *The Four Quartets*, Dry Salvages.

## Talk Three

### Religious Experience and Empirical Research

In recent years a number of books by d'Aquili, Newberg, and Alper have engaged in what is known as neurotheology or less commonly, biotheology.<sup>40</sup> It is a search for the place(s) in the brain where religious experience registers. Investigations of this kind have led some scientists, who study the brain, to discover the part of the cortex which makes it possible to have spiritual experiences. A number of studies are particularly significant in this regard. Here are two examples.

In the first, Michael Persinger, a Canadian neuro-psychologist, carried out original research in the 1990's. He fitted a hat-like magnetic stimulator on his own head. It beamed a rapidly fluctuating magnetic field at selected areas of his brain, specifically the temporal lobes, i.e. the areas of the brain just under our foreheads. As a result of the magnetic stimulation Persinger says that he "saw God." Subsequently, he found that he could induce all kinds of religious experiences, such as out-of-the-body and mystical experiences by stimulating appropriate parts of the brain.

The second scientist whose work is worth noting is Vilayanur Ramachandran, of San Diego University. In 1998 he published a book entitled, *Phantoms in the Brain*<sup>41</sup>. In it he maintained that, following seizures, about 25% of epileptics reported deeply moving spiritual experiences. They included a feeling of a divine presence and a sense of direct communication with God. Everything around them was imbued with cosmic significance. They said such things as,

"I finally understand what it is all about....Suddenly it all makes sense....I have insight into the true nature of the universe."

In *The Idiot*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky has Prince Myshkin, an epileptic, say:

"I have really touched God. He came into me, myself; yes, God exists, I cried. You all, healthy people can't imagine the happiness which we epileptics feel during the second before our attack."

As a result of examining the epileptics who reported such significant religious experiences, Ramachandran and other researchers have suggested that there appears to be a part of the brain in the front left temporal lobes which is capable of religious experience. Briefly put, they suspect that epileptic seizures cause damage to some of the pathways which connect the area of the brain that deals with sensory information to the amygdala which gives such information emotional significance. As a result, these patients can perceive an unusual depth of spiritual meaning in every object and event. Jeffrey Saver and John Rabin of the University of California, in Los Angeles Neurological Research Centre, have suggested that the available documentary evidence indicates that a number of the world's spiritual leaders suffered from temporal lobe epilepsy. The tentative list would include people such as the prophet Ezekiel, the apostle Paul, Mohammed and Joan of Arc. Not surprisingly, scientists like Persinger and Ramachandran have referred to the part of the brain which is hardwired for religious experience as the "God Spot" or the "God Module."

What are we to make of all this? The role of the temporal lobes, in the religious experience of epileptics, probably throws light on the way in which all of us can have such experiences. However, non-believers such as Professor Susan Greenfield – who, some time ago, presented a fascinating series about the brain on TV - maintain that awareness of God is merely the outcome of the complex activities of the temporal lobes of the brain. In other words, rather than being God's creation, the

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<sup>40</sup> d' Aquili and Newberg *The Mystical Mind: Probing The Biology of Mysticism*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999); Newberg *God Won't Go Away: How Faith is Hardwired into our Genes* (New York: Ballantine, 2001); Alper, *The God Part of the Brain: A Scientific Interpretation of Human Spirituality and God* (New York: Rogue Press, 2001)

<sup>41</sup> (New York: Harper/Collins, 1998)

brain is the creator of God experiences.<sup>42</sup> This is typical of the reductionist approach of some scientists. It is worth noting, however, that when eminent neuroscientist, Andrew Newberg, was asked whether the brain created the idea of God, or God created the brain, he responded: "Neuroscience can't answer that question." He is right of course. Science can merely describe empirical phenomena; it cannot make metaphysical judgements about them. To do so would involve category error where one jumps from empirical description to metaphysical assertion. That said, those who espouse the validity of spiritual experience can quite justifiably point to the fact that the brain is hard-wired for such awareness.

### **Empirical quantitative and qualitative research**

In the twentieth century a number of researchers looked at religious experiences from an empirical point of view. For example, Alister Hardy was born in 1896. He became a zoologist. In 1925 he went to the Antarctic to do research. Before doing so he paid an agency in England to gather quotes about religion from the papers. He would collect them when he returned. He was disappointed with the results. In 1948, when he was a professor at Oxford, Hardy gave a lecture which once again raised the religious issue. He said,

"When some of the leading biologists proclaim a mechanistic - a materialistic - interpretation of life, they find their faith in science in conflict with an intuition which speaks to them of spiritual reality. One or other of them must be an illusion. Which is it? I am sure that the answer to that question is far more important to mankind than the discovery of atomic power."<sup>43</sup>

In 1951 in the course of a lecture entitled, "Science and the quest for God," Hardy suggested that there was need for a special institute to study religious experience. Sometime later he was invited to give two series of the Gifford Lectures. Sometime later, he retired from his professorship and decided to set up the Religious Research Unit in Manchester College, Oxford. Currently it is situated in Lampeter University in Wales. Incidentally, they have an interesting website which contains many articles that might interest you.

Hardy began to collect material by putting an advertisement in the paper asking for accounts of religious experience. He provided examples of what he had in mind. There was a quotation from Beatrice Webb the co-founder of the Fabian Society. '

'For my part I find it best to live as if the soul of man were in communion with a superhuman force which makes for righteousness"<sup>44</sup>

He included a second quotation from a Hibbert Lecture delivered by L. P. Jacks in 1922. He had said:

'All religious testimony, so far as I can interpret its meaning, converges toward a single point, namely this. There is that in the world, call it what you will, which responds to the confidence of those who trust it, declaring itself to them as a fellow worker in the pursuit of the Eternal Values, meeting their loyalty to it with reciprocal loyalty to them, and coming in at critical moments when the need of its sympathy is greatest; the conclusion being that where ever

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<sup>42</sup> In a *Tablet* interview, entitled, "What Science can't answer," (Nov 24<sup>th</sup> 2012) Prof Greenfield, admitted that she attends retreats and has changed her mind. She appears to be much more open to religious experience, albeit in an agnostic way. She said, "The issue is more the experience that people have that is above and beyond the material. And that, for me, is what seems to be at the heart of people who believe in God: they don't believe in God because someone's proved it to them or because they believe literally in the sea parting. [What matters is] you are having an experience that you know is the case, it's unshakeable. That's what faith is." p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> *The Faith of a Scientist* (London: Lindsey Press, 1948)

<sup>44</sup> Quoted by David Hay, *Religious Experience Today: Studying the Facts* (London: Moberly, 1990), 29.



there is a soul in darkness, obstruction or misery there is also a Power which can help, deliver, illuminate and gladden the soul."<sup>45</sup>

In the light of these quotes, Hardy asked, had the readers ever been conscious of and perhaps influenced by, a power, whether they called it the power of God or not. This power might either appear to be beyond their individual selves, or in part outside and inside their being. If the readers had such an experience they were asked to write to Hardy about it, describing the experience and its effects.

When Hardy had assessed the information he received, he wrote a book about his findings entitled, *The Spiritual Nature of Man: A Study of Contemporary Religious Experience*.<sup>46</sup> In typical scientific fashion, he tried to classify the available material under twelve different headings such as sensory or quasi-sensory experiences of a visual or auditory nature. Much of the book is devoted to explaining each category, while providing concrete examples drawn from the responses. A few years later, two women, Meg Maxwell and Verena Tschudin went to the Alister Hardy Research Centre where there are 5,000 testimonies on file. They gathered representative examples, under four main headings, and published them in a book entitled, *Seeing the Invisible: Modern Religious and Other Transcendent Experiences*.<sup>47</sup>

In the 1970's and 80's David Hay of the Alister Hardy Research Centre did similar research in England. He asked Hardy's question, "Have you ever been conscious of a presence or power, whether you call it God or not which is different from your everyday self?" Again 35% of the people said yes.<sup>48</sup> This indicated that religious experience wasn't necessarily tied to church going. Hay a Catholic, and later the head of the Alister Hardy Research Centre for a few years, was teaching science at Nottingham University at the time. He decided to do an in-depth survey of 172 of the students on his campus. Besides using a questionnaire, he interviewed each respondent. The results were surprising because although many of the young men and women interviewed, didn't go to church services, as many as 62% said they had had a religious experience.<sup>49</sup>

In 1973 Greely and Mc Cready of the National Opinion Research Centre, Chicago, asked a sample of people whether they ever had an ecstatic type experience. 35% responded that they had. In 1978, Princeton Religious Research Centre, a subsidiary of Gallup Polls, confirmed the Chicago figures. It asked the following question in interviews, "How often have you felt as though you were very close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?" About 35% of the replies said once or more than once. When one looks at the research done on both sides of the Atlantic in recent years it indicates that at least one third of the population have had a significant religious experience. Many of those who had such experiences were not church goers, and a surprisingly high proportion of those who reported such experiences were men, in fact in some surveys they constituted a small majority.

In the year 2000 David Hay and Kate Hunt published the most recent research findings in an article entitled, "Is Britain's Soul Waking Up?" on June 24<sup>th</sup> 2000, in which he said that paradoxically as institutional religion declined the number of people reporting that they had a religious experience had doubled to around 66%. He said that often they hadn't the traditional religious language to express their experiences, and were inclined to borrow terminology from New Age spirituality to do so.

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<sup>45</sup> Quoted by Hay, op. Cit. 29-30.

<sup>46</sup> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983)

<sup>47</sup> (London: Arkana, 1990)

<sup>48</sup> When challenged about his definition of religious experience, Hay said that it was true that the A-H Center had too wide a definition. Currently he thinks of it as "relational consciousness," presumably a transcendental sense of ultimate relationship.

<sup>49</sup> David Hay, *Reports of Religious Experience by a Group of Postgraduate Students: A Pilot Survey* (Nottingham: University School of Education, 1978)

To the best of my knowledge this kind of research has not been done in Ireland. However, every few years The European Values Report is published which contains data from each country, including Ireland. It has a section containing statistics about religious beliefs and practices, however it doesn't deal specifically with the subject of religious experience. While the reports indicate that a fairly significant proportion of people still think that God and religion are important in their lives we do not know what correlation there is, if any, with the incidence of religious experience. The last public findings published on the website of the bishops of Ireland was in 2013. When the latest report is compared to previous ones it is obvious that church affiliation, practice and belief are declining especially among young adults. For a long time now, I have seen the need for someone to research the incidence of religious experience in Ireland and whether it does, or does not, correlate with the incidence of religious practice and church attendance. There is a good PhD to be gained for anyone who does it well!

### **Conclusion**

Empirical research has indicated that a surprisingly large percentage of the population in the secularized, English speaking countries report having had religious experiences. Neuroscientists have discovered that part of the brain which makes such experiences possible. Just as the eyes can see an objectively existing world, the ears can hear objectively existing sounds, the nostrils can smell objectively existing odours, and the sense of touch can feel objectively existing surfaces, so I believe that the areas of the brain which are hardwired for religious experience get in touch with objectively existing transcendental realities. To suggest otherwise, as Professor Greenfield and others have suggested, seems like an unjustifiable, *a priori* prejudice, to me.

## Talk Four

### Religious Experience and Spiritual direction

Around 1981 my provincial superior sent me to do a year long course on spiritual direction at the Centre for Religious Development, which was run by the Jesuits in Cambridge, Mass, quite near to Harvard University. If the truth be told, I wasn't enthusiastic about the prospect and didn't know much about spiritual direction at the time. I had two images of what it was like based on my past experience.

Firstly, during my eight years in the seminary I would visit my director on a regular basis. It was a bit like visiting the doctor. I would tell him about my spiritual state of health, and he would offer advice on the basis of what he heard, on such topics as prayer, spiritual reading, avoiding temptation, growing in specific virtues and the like. I can remember reading during my student years how St Teresa of Avila wrote, "I have already said that a spiritual director is necessary, but if he has no learning it is a great inconvenience. It will help us very much to consult learned men, provided they are virtuous; even if they are not spiritual they will do us good and God will show them what they should teach and may even make them spiritual so that they may be of service to us."<sup>50</sup> Notice how didactic such a method of direction is.

Secondly, by the early eighties I had already been in the Charismatic Renewal for seven years. So at that time I had developed a rather charismatic understanding of direction, one in which the director would be rather like a Russian starets, i.e., a person known for his or her spiritual wisdom, who would offer guidance of an inspired and prophetic kind to those who came to him or her for guidance.

#### The centrality of religious experience

When I got to the Centre for Religious Development in 1982, my previous understanding of spiritual direction was immediately challenged by my main mentor, Fr. Bill Connolly, S.J. From the get-go, he stressed the fact that what food is to cooking, religious experience is to spiritual direction.<sup>51</sup> He describes the art of the *anamchara*, or soul friend, in these words:

"Spiritual direction is the help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally

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<sup>50</sup> *The Life Of Teresa Of Jesus: The Autobiography of Teresa of Ávila*, scanned by Harry Plantinga, planting@cs.pitt.edu, 1995, 85.

<sup>51</sup> Madeline Birmingham and William Connelly, *Witnessing to the Fire: Spiritual Direction and the Development of Directors, One Centre's Experience* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1994)

communicating God, to grow in intimacy with God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship. The *focus* of this type of spiritual direction is on experience, not ideas, and specifically on religious experience, i.e. any experience of the mysterious Other whom we call God." <sup>52</sup>

I can remember Bill saying repeatedly, that as directors it would take us at least three months to get good at identifying religious experience in the lives of our directees. He was right. Although, I grasped what he was saying at an intellectual level, it took me a long time to have an instinctive ability to tune in to the religious experience of those who came to me for direction.

Bill Connolly taught us about religious experience in many ways, one of which was by doing a careful analysis of the *Autobiography of St Ignatius of Loyola*,<sup>53</sup> which he maintained was an essential pre-requisite for a proper understanding of the saint's spiritual exercises, and the central role of discernment of spirits during the four weeks of the Ignatian type retreat.

Ignatius tells us that while he was recuperating from a war wound, he experienced two desires. On the one hand he wanted to imitate Christ and the saints,<sup>54</sup> and on the other, he wanted to serve a beautiful woman at court. Ignatius noticed that the two desires had different effects upon him. While he thought of serving the lady at court he was happy, but as soon as he stopped thinking about her he was "dry and discontented." While he thought about our Lord and the saints he was also happy, but when he stopped thinking about them he remained "content and happy." As a result:

"His eyes were opened a little, and he began to marvel at the difference and to reflect upon it, realizing from experience that some thoughts left him sad and others happy. Little by little he came to recognize the difference between the spirits that agitated him, one from the demon, the other from God."<sup>55</sup>

It was this experiential realisation that gave birth to the Ignatian form of discernment of spirits which relies upon subjective awareness of inward states of consolation and desolation for its efficacy. As a result Ignatius believed that true spirituality needs to reach beyond notional ideas, about God and the divine will, to a contemplative awareness of the One who reveals the God-self and the divine will to the receptive human heart. That is why Ignatius encouraged the person who prays, to ask for "an intimate knowledge of our Lord," and "an intimate understanding and a relish of the truth."<sup>56</sup> Note how experiential this desire really is.

### **Spiritual direction focuses on religious experience**

Let's look at a rather typical experience of direction. A man or woman gets in touch and asks if you can become their director. You ask them to come for a preliminary interview. You try to do two main things. Firstly, the director seeks to discover why the person wants direction. Is it to get counseling, therapy, advice, instruction or to grow in conscious relationship with God? Secondly, the director explains that his/her focus will be on the experience of God, the feelings and affective attitudes it elicits, and the responses it invites. To do this the directee has to be willing and able, at least to a certain extent, to articulate what he/she experiences at an emotional level. If the director and the directee can come to a consensus about these two points then they agree to a five or six week probation period, after which they will both be free to terminate the relationship.

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<sup>52</sup> William Barry; William Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 8.

<sup>53</sup> (New York: Fordham University Press, 1993). Ignatius dictated this autobiography to a Jesuit colleague.

<sup>54</sup> He read the only two books available at the time, one *The Life of Christ* by Ludolf of Saxony and the other, *The Golden Legend* about the saints, by Jacobus de Voragine.

<sup>55</sup> *The Autobiography of St. Ignatius of Loyola with Related Documents* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 24.

<sup>56</sup> *Spiritual Exercises*, par. 2.

Cardinal Newman once wrote: "God's presence is not discerned when it is upon us, but afterwards, when we look back upon what is gone and over."<sup>57</sup> Surely this observation is correct. Often its only when an experience is finished that we come to recognize that it seemed to have a religious dimension. I have found that a director can use the following four questions to help a directee to reflect upon such experiences in a beneficial way.

- 1) At what point were you most aware of God's presence?
- 2) How did you find yourself responding? What feelings and affective attitudes were elicited, e.g., of joy, fear, peace, awe, delight, unworthiness, desire, reverence etc?
- 3) Could you describe what God was like as he revealed himself to you that evoked the feelings you have mentioned? Was God loving, understanding, accepting, compassionate, attentive etc. ? Did the God who was revealed challenge your image of the divine in any way? The emphasis in this question is on the God of the word rather than the word of God.
- 4) Did your feeling response to God find expression in any decision or resolution, e.g., to disclose your feeling response to the Lord, e.g., as thanks or praise, or a resolution to do something that would give expression to your experience of God such as being more accepting of another person and the like.

The director also pays attention to the following kinds of thing.

- 1) What thoughts, feelings, images, urges, desires, impulses etc are moving the directee toward or away from deeper relationship with the Lord? Where were such movements/dynamics coming from, the self, the evil one, or from God?
- 2) Is the person in a state of interior consolation or desolation? If it is desolation what is its cause? e.g., being lukewarm or being motivated by the consolations of God rather than the God of consolation. How should the director handle the directee at such a time? e.g., urging him or her not to make any life changing decision during the time of desolation lest the devil becomes his or her spiritual director.
- 3) Because the 'contemplative attitude' opens a person to God's self revelation what moments of contemplation were present in the person's experience if any? What are the blocks to such an attitude, e.g., self-absorption; control of experience because of fear, resistance, etc?
- 4) Is the directee's sense of self and inner freedom increasing as a result of his/her experience of God? What are the key life issues, how are they affecting this issue.

Toward the end of the interview the director might ask the directee what he or she got out of it. The director might suggest some passage/s for prayer based on where the directee is experientially at that time. The director might also talk briefly about issues like desolation and how to handle it. He/she then makes an appointment for the next meeting.

Ideally the director would take time to reflect on the interview in a prayerful way. Besides considering many of the questions noted above, he/she would assess how he/she had listened, how they felt about the directee and his/her sharing. Some directors like to write notes on the interview, perhaps the occasional verbatim which they would share with a supervisor, or supervision group, i.e. a group of fellow directors.

### **The examen of consciousness**

Directors who are trained in an Ignatian way are particularly inclined to recommend the use of an examen of consciousness, in contrast to an examen of conscience. It is worth noting that St. Ignatius of Loyola, considered a regular examen of consciousness so important in the life of any apostolic person that s/he should not omit it except for a serious reason. It could begin with a prayer like this.

“Lord, you enlighten every heart. Enlighten mine to recognize how you have been drawing me to yourself. Help me to appreciate your presence and to distinguish those inspirations that came from You, and those that came from either myself or from the Evil One.”

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<sup>57</sup> “Christ Manifested in Remembrance” in *Parochial Sermons* IV (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1909), 256.

Then one could pray as follows.

1. *Father in heaven, help me to recall with gratitude those occasions when I was aware of your presence today and to savour again what you meant to me ... (Pause for a moment's reflection)*
2. *Help me to become aware of the promptings and inspirations you have given me today, and to know whether I responded to them or not...(Pause for a moment's reflection)*
3. *Enlighten my heart to recognise any un-loving mood, attitude, desire or action that saddened your Holy Spirit today. (Pause for a moment's reflection)*

One could end the examen with the following prayer.

“Father in heaven, Thank you for the gift of your Spirit. Today, it has urged me to see you more clearly, to love you more dearly and to follow you more nearly. As for my shortcomings, please forgive them. And now, bless me, so that refreshed by your Spirit, I may live to praise you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

### **Conclusion**

In this talk we looked at a number of points, how religious experience lies at the heart of spiritual direction, how the director tries to facilitate such experiences, while helping the directee to notice what might be inhibiting it. We saw that discernment is necessary, a grace filled ability to identify the origin and orientation of religious experiences. Were they emanate from the self, God or the evil one. We noted how the examen of consciousness can enable a person to do that discernment for him or herself.

## Talk Five

### A Typology of Religious Experience

When I returned from the United States in 1983 I devoted a good deal of thought to the whole question of the dynamics of religious experience, which were mentioned in the previous talk. At this point I would like to propose a brief and tentative typology. It suggests that religious experiences usually have a fourfold structure. They begin in desire, are expressed in the form of contemplative attention, are often graced with revelation and have a number of possible knock-on effects.

#### A) **Desire**

A few years ago I formulated the following maxim. There is no growth or blessing in the spiritual life without preceding desire. The deeper and stronger the desire, the greater the openness to subsequent blessing and growth. Desire for transcendence, meaning and God, originate in the human soul, i.e. the *pneuma*, as distinct from the human psyche (cf. 1 Thess 5:23). These spiritual desires are prompted by the Spirit of God. To become aware of them is to become aware of the primordial movement of the Spirit within the personality. In Christian terms, to acknowledge such "holy desires" is to become aware of the Father drawing the human heart, by the activity of his Spirit, into conscious relationship with him through his Son. As Jesus once said: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws that person" (Jn 6:44). Pope St Gregory the Great, known as the "Doctor of Desire." He believed that when a person desires God because he or she perceives God's absence, the very desire is a form of presence. "Whoever desires God" he wrote, "with the whole mind already has the one he or she loves."<sup>58</sup> There is truth in that saying because God is present by the action of grace in the very desire for God.

The Lord prompts these desires in a number of ways. Firstly, God can allow a person to suffer e.g. as a result of predictable and un-predictable crises in life.<sup>59</sup> Afflictions of this kind attack one's ego defences, thereby releasing the suppressed voice of the deeper, constricted self which can only be satisfied by numinous experience. Secondly, the Lord can allow one to experience moral failure, e.g. as a result of an addiction like alcoholism, or marital infidelity. Typically it leads to a situation where in the words of Paul "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Rm 7:19) The consequent sense of disillusionment can uncover a need for God and God's liberating power. As Paul put it after his conversion: "All I want...is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection" (Phil 3:10). Thirdly, desires for transcendence can be evoked by the witness of an admired person who already enjoys a deep sense of union with the Lord e.g. a happy or virtuous acquaintance or a saintly person like Mother Teresa.

Holy desires can be blocked or repressed in a number of predictable ways. Some people are inhibited by a moralistic attitude. Because they are always motivated by a sense of duty - by what they "ought, must, should or have to do" - they lose touch with their deeper spiritual yearnings. Despite the fact that they may have positive ideas of God at a conscious level of awareness, many people are inhibited by the fact that, at an unconscious level of awareness, they have negative images of God as someone who is distant, hard to please and demanding. These images are often associated with negative feelings, such as fear, guilt and anger, which

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<sup>58</sup> *Hom. in Ev.* 30.1 (PL 76:1220C). quoted by Bernard Mc Ginn *The Growth of Mysticism* (London: SCM, 1994),

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<sup>59</sup> See Pat Collins "The Pain of Self-Discovery" *Intimacy and the Hungers of the Heart* (Dublin: Columba, 1991), 58-73.

can cause unconscious resistance to closer relationship with God. Unacknowledged and unresolved, negative feelings such as grief, hurt, shame, resentment, etc., which are the result of hurts and disappointments in life, can also inhibit awareness of one's deepest desires. A self-centred desire for physical or psychological satisfaction and fulfilment e.g. by means of wealth, status, power and pleasure, can deafen a person to the deeper aspirations of the Spirit within. As Jesus said: "the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word (in this instance the word of desire) and it proves unfruitful" (Mt 13:22).

Spiritual writers such as Pope Gregory the Great have pointed out that God prompted desires for God tend to grow when denied for a time. The Lord does this in order to strengthen, purify and deepen them. Meanwhile those which originate in the psyche, and *ipso facto* are not prompted by God, tend to wither through denial. St. Gregory wrote: "Holy desires grow with delay: if they fade through delay they are no desires at all." Genuine desires for God are mainly associated with consolation of spirit, e.g., inner peace and joy, whereas, those which are not from God, are mainly associated with desolation of spirit, e.g., agitation and sadness of spirit.

### B) **Attention**

If a person has a desire to have transcendental experience, it will only be satisfied when he or she decides to pay attention to reality because it alone can mediate the immediacy of the Lord's presence. As Simone Weil wrote: "Attention animated by desire is the whole foundation of religious practices."<sup>60</sup> The *Catholic Encyclopedia* says in similar vein: "Attention is the very essence of prayer; as soon as attention ceases, prayer ceases." The person who makes the decision to attend, needs to surrender intellectual and imaginative control over the object of attention, e.g., nature, another person or a biblical passage. He or she has to allow it to be itself, and refrain from projecting personal thoughts, symbols or memories and interpretations upon it. It is also important that the person attending to reality allows it to evoke a spontaneous emotional response.

Sustained attention to reality needs to be self-forgetful. It moves away from self-absorption by allowing its concentration to become absorbed by the object of attention. It beholds the object of contemplation in a respectful way that goes beyond appearances and the gravitational pull of personal needs to reverence the unique value and worth of whatever it looks at, listens to, or touches. This form of contemplative attention is humble in so far as it submits to the reality of the other, the "letting-be of being," to use John Macquarrie's phrase. As the "isness" of the contemplated reality is revealed, it can call for a sort of cognitive conversion, a revision of previous ways of thinking, perceiving, valuing and feeling.<sup>61</sup>

### C) **Revelation.**

The scriptures make it clear in a number of places that revelation is possible. For example, in Jer 33:3 the Lord says: 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.' In Isa 48:6-8 the Lord says: "From now on I will tell you of new things, of hidden things unknown to you. They are created now, and not long ago; you have not heard of them before today. So you cannot say, 'Yes, I knew of them.' You have neither heard nor understood; from of old your ear has not been open." In Eph 1:17 St Paul prayed, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better."

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<sup>60</sup> "Forms of the Implicit Love of God," in *Waiting on God* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951)

<sup>61</sup> I have dealt with this subject in greater detail in "Contemplative Attention" in *Spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Dublin: Columba, 1999), 86-93.



Revelatory experiences are firstly discerned in the form of the feeling reaction that is evoked, and not willed, by the new sense of awareness. This emotional reaction can have two interrelated dimensions. Firstly, there is the feeling reaction which is evoked by the immediate object of attention, e.g., a beautiful lake or a saying of Jesus in the gospel, such as awe, delight and well being. Secondly, there are other feelings which are evoked not so much by the lake or a word from the Lord, as by a numinous sense of Presence which it mediates. It can evoke feelings of wonder, mystery, joy and peace. I will not give examples of revelation at this point because I will do so in future talks.

#### **D) Effects**

In a genuine religious experience feelings have intentionality, i.e., they are responses which are evoked by what is revealed about God, God's word, and God's will. Following the initial emotional *response* to the revelatory awareness, a secondary emotional *reaction*, sometimes referred to as resistance, can occur, e.g., a sense of apprehension to do with the possible implications of the experience such as a need to change one's beliefs, values, priorities, or behaviour. Genuine religious experiences lead to a new recognition of who God is and what God is like. Implicit in such experiences is the ethical imperative, "be for others what God is for you." For instance, if you have found God to be understanding, compassionate and accepting, be understanding, compassionate, and accepting in your daily life.

Genuine experiences of God tend to expose, challenge, and displace false images of God. In other words a person's *professed* (conscious) and *operative* (unconscious) spirituality begin to coalesce. Genuine experience of God motivates the graced person to express his or her appreciation in a prayerful way by means of thanks, praise and worship, and sometimes in the form of heartfelt sorrow for having failed in many ways to give due honour to God in the past. Genuine experiences of God also give new life and meaning to beliefs already held, while at the same time activating the person's inner potential for a closer relationship with God. As a result of this growing intimacy, the person relates more deeply to his or her spiritual self and begins to see it as God does, i.e., in a loving, accepting way. Jesus once said: "As the Father loves me, so I love you" (Jn 15:9). Pope John Paul II has written: "the man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures must.... draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter him with all his own self, he must 'appropriate' and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deeper wonder at himself."<sup>62</sup>

This growing sense of intimacy can have positive knock-on psychosomatic repercussions also. As growth in wholeness and holiness occurs, the person has an increasing sense of inner freedom. As St Paul said in Gal 5:1, "Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." He or she moves from living a dutiful life on the basis of impersonal moral imperatives to living it on the basis of inner convictions born of heartfelt relationship with God. Genuine growth in relationship with God prompts the desire and provides the power to change by means of appropriate forms of action, e.g., a preferential option to work for poor people. Religious experience, therefore is the true source of ethics. They are a response to revelation, instead of being a substitute for it, as is often the case. This distinction captures the meaning of Paul's differentiation between living by the Spirit and living by the law (cf. Gal 5:16-26).

#### **Conclusion**

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<sup>62</sup> *Splendour of the Truth* par. 8.

Before it was ever a creed, Christianity was a Pentecostal experience. However, those of us who are born into a well established Christian tradition are often catechized without having being truly evangelized. In other words, instead of our beliefs being the expression of heartfelt religious experiences, they can become dry and life denying substitutes for it. Carl Jung went so far as to say, "One of the main functions of formalized religion is to protect people against a direct experience of God."<sup>63</sup> In the present day culture of experience, it is important that people would relive those religious experiences, which first gave birth to the faiths to which they belong. Hopefully, this talk helped to show one way in which this can be done.

## Talk Six

### Examples of Theistic and Non-theistic Religious Experience

Having looked at the four constitutive aspects of genuine religious experiences let's examine an example in the autobiography of Therese. It was shared with her sister Celine.

"Those were wonderful conversations we had, every evening, upstairs in the room with a view. Our eyes were lost in distance, as we watched the pale moon rising slowly above the height of the trees. Those silvery rays she cast on a sleeping world, the stars shining bright in the blue vault above us, the fleecy clouds floating by in the evening wind - how everything conspired to turn our thoughts to heaven! How beautiful it must be if this, the obverse side of it, was so calm and clear! Perhaps it's silly of me, but that opening-up of our hearts has always reminded me of St Monica and her son at Ostia, rapt in ecstasy as they contemplated the wonderful works of the Creator.

I feel as if we'd received graces belonging to the same high order as some of those bestowed on the great Saints: as the *Imitation of Christ* says, God has two ways of making himself manifest; he shows himself to some people in a blaze of light, to others under a considerable veil of symbols and figures. Well of course it was only this second kind of revelation he saw fit to give to Celine and me, but how light and transparent it seemed, this veil which hid him from our sight! How could there be room for doubt, how could there be any need of faith or hope? It was love that taught us to find, here on earth, the Bridegroom we searched for. "He came upon us alone, and greeted us with a kiss: henceforward we need fear no contemptuous looks."

If you read this testimony carefully, you will notice that it illustrates the four points mentioned in the previous input.

**Firstly**, Therese and her sister had a loving desire for God. To begin with, there was their fundamental option that led them both to join the Carmelites, it informed this experience. Toward the end of the account Therese refers to the fact that the Lord they experienced was the "Bridegroom we searched for." When you read Therese's writings, you will notice that she often stresses the importance of holy desires.

**Secondly**, the two sisters paid self-forgetful attention, of the sustained, contemplative kind, to the beauties of the evening sky. As she says, "our eyes were lost in the distance." In other

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<sup>63</sup> *Psyche and Symbol* (New York: Doubleday, 1958)

words, theirs was an ecstatic experience, they were literally standing outside of themselves, captivated by the beauty of the evening sky.

**Thirdly**, creation's beauty became the sacrament of the divine presence, of the beauty of the One in heaven who created the beauties. Therese and Celine had a heartfelt sense of the mediated immediacy of the Divine presence. As the poet Hopkins wrote, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."

**Fourthly**, this consoling experience had the effect of doing away with the need for faith or hope, because their sense of God was so vivid, so intimate, so immediate like a kiss. One is reminded in this regard of an interview of Carl Jung by John Freeman on BBC television in 1959. When asked whether he believed in the existence of God, he replied, "I don't need to believe, I know." Therese said much the same. You will recall that in 1 Cor 13:13 Paul says that in heaven faith and hope will be subordinate to love. The two sisters were so reassured by the awareness of God that it meant that they wouldn't need to be afraid of God in the future. As John says, "perfect love casts out fear" (Cf 1 Jn 4:18).

Therese made a number of observations about the experience she and Celine shared. Firstly, it was similar to the experience Monica and Augustine shared at Ostia. They too, for a brief instant, had a heartfelt sense of heaven. Therese was confident that her contemplative experience was of the same high quality as other mystical experiences recounted by some of the great saints. She adverts to the distinction between *kataphatic* and *apophatic* experiences. The former are positive, and mediated by either thoughts or images as was the case when Therese and Celine found that the evening sky mediated God's presence and attributes. The latter are negative. The person is led into an acknowledgment of the un-knowability of God because neither thoughts or images adequately mediate the divine presence. The person has to cling to the Lord solely with his or her loving will in a cloud of unknowing. The illumination of the person's spirit about the incomprehensibility of God is one that takes place in the will without the aid of the mind, imagination or feeling, i.e., accompanied by the cloud of unknowing.

### **Non-theistic religious experience**

In modern culture there are a growing number of people who maintain that people can have religious experiences without believing in God. This belief can be traced back to Ludwig Feuerbach's book *The Essence of Christianity*, which was published in 1841. The aim of his work, he declared, was to destroy theistic religion as an utterly pernicious illusion. He believed that God was a projection of human potential on to an imaginary supreme being. He argued that all theological concepts should therefore be translated into anthropological ones. Here are a succession of key notions from Feuerbach.

"The historical progress of religion consists in this: although at an earlier stage religion was regarded as something objective, it is now recognized as something subjective, so that which was formerly viewed and worshipped as God is now recognized as something human. But that which in religion ranks first – namely God – is as I have shown, in truth and reality something second; for God is merely the projected essence of man. What therefore, ranks second in religion – namely, Man – that must be proclaimed the first and recognized as the first. If the nature of Man is man's highest being, if to be human is his highest existence, then man's love for man,

must in practice become the first and highest law. Man's God is man. This is the highest law of ethics. This is the turning point of world history."<sup>64</sup>

Although Feuerbach did not believe in God, he did believe in a humanistic form of religious experience. When one reads modern sociology and psychology, it is clear that the founder of modern atheism has had many disciples.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) was the son of a rabbi. By the time he wrote his sociological classic *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* he was an atheist. Having made a thorough study of Australian aboriginal society he wrote:

"Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all who adhere to them."<sup>65</sup>

He maintained that religious experience was a form of *awe* and *effervescence* which was evoked by a sense of the sacred. He maintained that communal gatherings intensify, electrify and enlarge religious experience. Bringing people together in close physical proximity generates a kind of electricity that quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation. However, instead of believing that a transcendent God was the focus of this religious sense, he believed that God was nothing other than a symbol for people's projected feelings which are evoked by the mystery of society. God in effect, is a symbol of society. God is an imaginary being unconsciously created by the collective as an instrument whereby the community exercises control over the thoughts and behaviour of its individuals. He wrote:

"The sentiment of the divine is evoked in collective ceremonial, during which, as a result of the intense emotionality and involvement which is generated, the individual feels himself swamped by the action of an entity superior to himself. Although this force *emanates from the collective assembly*, (my italics) it only realizes itself through the consciousness of the individual, who feels it to be both transcendent over him and yet immanent in him."<sup>66</sup>

In more recent times a number of well known psychologists and humanists have advocated a kind of non-theistic religious experience. Like Feuerbach, Erich Fromm (1900-1980) talked a lot about alienation, about the fact that many people seem to be separated from their true selves and their inner potential by the fact that they are subservient to an authoritarian God. Fromm proposed to replace theistic religion of the authoritarian kind with a non-theistic, humanistic form. Commenting on this type of religion he wrote:

"The question is not religion or not but what kind of religion, whether it is one furthering man's development, the unfolding of his specifically human powers, or one paralysing them.<sup>67</sup>....Religious experience of this kind of religion is the experience of oneness with the All, based on one's relatedness to the world as it is grasped with thought and love."<sup>68</sup>

In another place he says:

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted by Paul Vitz in *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 96. (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 47.

<sup>66</sup> Anthony Giddens, Introduction to *Emile Durkheim: Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

<sup>67</sup> *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, 26.

<sup>68</sup> *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, 36

“Not fear and submission but love and the assertion of one’s own powers are the basis of mystical experience. *God is not a symbol of power over man but of man’s own powers.*”<sup>69</sup> (My italics)

Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) was also a disciple of Feuerbach’s. He found that highly actualized people were inclined to have so-called, “peak experiences,” many of which can be religious in nature. However, as a declared atheist, Maslow believed that such mystical experiences did not have to be theistic. He pointed to the fact that Buddhism, as one of the world’s great religions, was not explicitly theistic. He agreed with Margharita Laski who suggested that people could have religious experiences, of an ecstatic kind, without necessarily believing in God.<sup>70</sup> Speaking about those who enjoyed peak experiences, Maslow said that they were inclined to experience contemplative moments of heightened awareness when the usual subject-object dichotomy of everyday perception would give way to a sense of ecstatic union with the mystery of a beautiful world.

“A few centuries ago, these would all have been described as men who walk in the path of God or as godly men. A few say that they believe in God, but describe this God more as a metaphysical concept than as a personal figure. If religion is defined only in socio-behavioural terms, then these are all religious people, the atheist included. But if more conservatively we use the term religion so as to include and stress the supernatural element and institutional orthodoxy, then our answer must be quite different, for then almost none of them is religious.”<sup>71</sup>

It would probably be true to say, that as he grew older Maslow himself believed in non-theistic forms of religious experience He seemed to enjoy some of them in later life. At one point when he was living in Massachusetts, he caught sight of the Charles River. He found the vista overwhelming.

“The first time I saw the river, I almost died . . . It was a very, very great experience, profoundly aesthetic . . . I remember collapsing in a chair and looking at all this in just perfect wonder . . . the place was so beautiful that it could crack your skull open, it was almost painful.”<sup>72</sup> This experience led him to believe that humans are by nature never permanently content, but seek higher and higher “heavens.”

However he contended that “otherworldly” experiences of this kind did not require a belief in a divine order. Rather mystical experience, however ecstatic, can be explained as Feuerbach had maintained, wholly within the province of human nature and its hidden potential.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, 48

<sup>70</sup> *Ecstasy: A Study of Some Secular and Religious Experiences* (London: Cresset Press, 1961)

<sup>71</sup> Maslow quoted these words of Dr David Levy in his book *Motivation and Personality* (New Delhi: Prabhat Books, 1981), 169.

<sup>72</sup> Edward Hoffman, *The Right to be Human: Biography of Abraham Maslow* (Wellingborough: Crucible, 1988), 267.

<sup>73</sup> In par 38 of his Encyclical, *Dominum et Vivificantem* (On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World), St John Paul II wrote, these significant words, “For in spite of all the witness of creation and of the salvific economy inherent in it, the spirit of darkness is capable of showing God as an enemy of his own creature, and in the first place as an enemy of man, as a source of danger and threat to man. In this way Satan manages to sow in man’s soul the seed of opposition to the one who “from the beginning” would be considered as man’s enemy-and not as Father. Man is challenged to become the adversary of God! The analysis of sin in its original dimension indicates that, through the influence of the “father of lies,” throughout the history of humanity there will be a constant pressure on man to reject God, even to the point of hating him: “Love of self to the point of contempt for God,” as St. Augustine puts it. Man will be inclined to see in God primarily a limitation of

## Conclusion

Although, a number of modern thinkers argue that one can have a non-theistic spirituality two points can be made about this point of view. Firstly, one could argue that although it is non-theistic at a conceptual level, such a spirituality secretly and anonymously does acknowledge the existence of God. In his book *L'Action*, Maurice Blondel (1861-1949) argued that people's true beliefs are discernible not just in what they say but also in what they do. Even when people consciously deny the existence of God, the intentionality of their actions may imply such a trust in absolute meaning that it would amount to an unconscious but implicit belief in God.<sup>74</sup> Karl Rahner was later to refer to this kind of transcendental experience as an un-thematic and anonymous knowledge of God.<sup>75</sup> Secondly, although I can see that a person could profess a non-theistic, secular spirituality, it would be seriously defective in so far as it had no room for prayer or worship. As Schleiermacher once said in one of his sermons: "To be religious and to pray - that is one and the same thing."<sup>76</sup>

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himself, and not the source of his own freedom and the fullness of good. We see this confirmed in the modern age, when the atheistic ideologies seek to root out religion on the grounds that religion causes the radical "alienation" of man, as if man were dispossessed of his own humanity when, accepting the idea of God, he attributes to God what belongs to man, and exclusively to man! Hence a process of thought and historico-sociological practice in which the rejection of God has reached the point of declaring his "death." An absurdity, both in concept and expression! But the ideology of the "death of God" is more a threat to man, as the Second Vatican Council indicates when it analyzes the question of the "independence of earthly affairs" and writes: "For without the Creator the creature would disappear...when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible." The ideology of the "death of God" easily demonstrates in its effects that on the "theoretical and practical" levels it is the ideology of the "death of man."

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Henri Bouillard, "Philosophy and Christianity in the Thought of Maurice Blondel" in *The Logic of Faith* (Dublin: Gill & Son, 1967), 171.

<sup>75</sup> *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 21.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted by Heiler in *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997), xii.

## Talk Seven

### Evangelisation and Gifts of revelation, proclamation & demonstration

A few years ago I published a book entitled, *Gifts of the Spirit and the New Evangelisation*.<sup>77</sup> When I was writing it, it occurred to me that the gifts of the Spirit referred to by St Paul, especially the ones mentioned in 1 Cor 12:8-10, were evangelistic in orientation and could be classified under three headings as gifts of revelation, proclamation, and demonstration. When I read what St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), a member of the Order of Preachers, had to say about those same gifts I was delighted to find that he also understood them within an evangelistic context. He wrote, “some charisms freely given relate to knowledge [revelation], some to words [proclamation] some to deeds [demonstration].”<sup>78</sup>

The charisms of revelation are wisdom, knowledge, prophecy and discernment of Spirits (Cf. 1 Cor 12:8-10). They are what the Church refers to as private revelation. Writing about it Pope Benedict XVI wrote in par. 14 of his Apostolic Exhortation, *Verbum Domini*,

“The value of private revelations, is essentially different from that of the one public revelation: the latter demands faith; in it God himself speaks to us through human words and the mediation of the living community of the Church. The criterion for judging the truth of a private revelation is its orientation to Christ himself. If it leads us away from him, then it certainly does not come from the Holy Spirit, who guides us more deeply into the Gospel, and not away from it. Private revelation is an aid to this faith, and it demonstrates its credibility precisely because it refers back to the one public revelation.”

Here is a brief description of the revelatory charisms which enable private revelation to be received.

1. The gift of wisdom is a special ability that enables members of the Christian community to discern the Lord’s will and how it may best be applied in a specific situation. That is why St Paul prayed in Col 1:9, “we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” St James encouraged believers to ask confidently for this practical gift (cf. Jm 1:5-8). The utterance of wisdom in 1 Cor 12:8 refers to a graced ability to share such insights in a verbal way
2. The gift of knowledge has more to do with deep, Spirit given insight into the Person and attributes of the Lord together with an ability to understand the meaning of the Scripture and the Christian mysteries, such as the Trinity. That is why St Paul prayed in Eph 1:17, “may the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.” The utterance of knowledge mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor 12:8 refers to a Spirit given ability to teach and preach Christian truth in an inspired and inspiring way.
3. The gift of prophecy is the special ability that God gives to some members of the community to receive a supernatural message from the Lord. As scripture says, “For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pt 1:21). St Paul added, “prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers” (1 Cor 14:22-23), and it affirms people, “everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort”

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<sup>77</sup> (Dublin: Columba, 2009)

<sup>78</sup> *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. Timothy McDermott (London: Methuen, 1989), 444.

(1 Cor 14:3). A common form of prophecy is what Charismatic refer to as words of knowledge. It is a supernatural endowment of knowledge, factual information that could not otherwise have been known without the Spirit's aid, such as frequently occurs in the prophetic tradition. I have found them helpful in confession to know a person's sins, praying for inner healing by knowing about a forgotten, repressed memory, and knowing who will be cured at healing services.

4. The gift of discernment of spirits in 1 Cor 12:10 is an ability, given by God to some people, which enables them on their own or the community's behalf, to know whether a prophetic utterance was prompted by God or not. In a wider sense it is an ability to know whether any inspiration, prompting or revelation is from God or not (cf. 1 Thess 5:21).

Over the past forty years or so I have noticed two things about private revelations. Firstly, although they have been associated, down through history, with saintly mystics nowadays they are relatively common in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles. Secondly, rather than being concerned with conveying a message to the wider Church or with instigating a new devotion, they are usually received in more mundane and restricted circumstances such as ministering to a person, or getting a message from the Lord for a group of people, e.g., at a conference.

### **Prophetic revelation**

When one reads what St Thomas and Prospero Lambertini (1675 – 1758), who later became Pope Benedict XIV, wrote about the charisms in 1 Cor 12:8-10, a number of points become clear.

Firstly, revelatory gifts are prophetic in nature. Thomas wrote,

“Charisms relating to knowledge can be summed up in the word prophecy. Prophecy consists first and foremost in knowing certain far off things outside the normal knowledge of men. But secondarily it involves speech, since a prophet proclaims to others what God has taught him in order to build them up.”<sup>79</sup>

It is clear that, among other things, both men thought that prophecy often had to do with intimations of future events. Scripture supports that point of view. In Is 41:22-23 we read,

"Can your idols make such claims as these? Let them come and show what they can do! says God, the King of Israel. Let them try to tell us what occurred in years gone by or what the future holds. Yes, that's it! If you are gods, tell what will happen in the days ahead!"

Secondly, Thomas did not believe that a person needed to be holy or even in a state of grace in order to receive a prophetic message. Rather than being an inevitable sign of sanctifying grace, prophetic revelation is a gratuitous gift which is given in order to help others to grow in sanctifying grace. Cardinal Lambertini agreed. He wrote,

“We readily admit that a good and modest life is not necessary as an evidence of true prophecy; for there are well known instances of some most wicked men, whom God made use of as instruments to publish his oracles, as we have seen in the case of Balaam and Caiaphas; but these instances are rare.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*, ed. Timothy McDermott (London: Methuen, 1989), 444.

<sup>80</sup> *Heroic Virtue*, vol. 3 (London: Thomas Richardson & Sons, 1852), 394.



Benedict also pointed out that, “In the causes of canonization and beatification, no account will be made of prophecy,” that is, unless there is firstly proof of virtue. But then Benedict went on to imply that normally holiness was needed when he added,

“Although moral goodness is most profitable to a prophet it is not absolutely necessary . . . It is necessary for prophesying that the mind should be raised to the highest contemplation of spiritual things, this may be prevented through violent passions and inordinate attention to outward things. . . For the most part, therefore, this gift is bestowed by God upon holy men.”<sup>81</sup>

Thirdly, Thomas has very interesting things to say in both of his *Summas* about the way in which revelation is imparted to the human mind,

“This light, which inwardly enlightens the mind, is sometimes borne out by other aids to knowledge, both exterior and interior. They may be formed by divine power such as some utterance, or locution, heard by the external senses [ears]. Or it may be an inner locution, caused by God, and perceived by fantasy [image]. Or there may be bodily appearances, external and visible, formed by God [i.e. apparitions]. Or such corporeal appearance may be inwardly depicted in fantasy [e.g. a dream or vision]. By these means, aided by the light inwardly impressed on his mind, man receives a knowledge of divine things; whereas the inner light is sufficient of itself without them.”<sup>82</sup>

Echoing the teaching of St. Thomas, St Alphonsus Liguori (1696-1787) expressed what Thomas had in mind when he observed more succinctly,

“the revelations of hidden or future events to do with certain people, e.g., their death, their promotion to some position, and other similar things, may occur in three ways: by visions, by voices and by the simple apprehension of truth.”<sup>83</sup>

In my experience, the most common way in which God communicates in a revelatory way is firstly by means of an inner voice or by an inner vision which is like a video clip that conveys a message and secondly, by a spontaneous and un-thought out awareness or understanding of something, e.g. of a hidden fact about a person’s past.

Let me give a personal example, which I recount in my latest book entitled, *Holistic Healing: A Christian Approach*.<sup>84</sup> A few years ago I led a healing service in Kilkenny. At one point I felt that God was telling me that a woman was present who suffered from bad headaches. Then I was given to understand that her condition was related to her periods. Then the name of a medical condition came into my mind. I could not pronounce it properly and I had no idea what it referred to. When I struggled to enunciate what it was, a doctor who was present said that the word was endometriosis while explaining that it was a problem of the womb. When I asked if any woman present was suffering from those symptoms, immediately, a lady put up her hand and we prayed for her. After Christmas, I received a card which contained the following message, “I had asked the Lord to heal me during the service. You said you

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 394.

<sup>82</sup> *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Chapter 155 —*Of Graces given gratuitously*

<sup>83</sup> *Homo apost*, Appendix 1, no. 22. Quoted by R. P. Poulain, in *The Graces of Interior Prayer* (London: Kegan Paul, 1910), 301-302.

<sup>84</sup> (Dublin: Columba, 2020), 132.

hadn't heard this in a long time but there was somebody in the room suffering from headaches relating to her periods and endometriosis. I am overjoyed to say – all of my symptoms have disappeared - and I constantly praise the Lord.”

Needless to say, discernment of spirits is necessary in this whole area in order to establish whether an inspiration is coming from one's own human nature, from God, or from the evil One, who can come in the disguise of an angel of light. Jack Deere, a Pentecostal scripture scholar makes an added point where private revelation is concerned.<sup>85</sup> He maintains that it is important to distinguish between

(A) The revelation itself which is the message from God.

(B) It's interpretation. Speaking about this point Prospero Lambertini wrote, “a revelation could be true and from God, and the human explanation of it false, for man may interpret it *otherwise than God understands it.*”

(C) It's application. We can have a true revelation, a correct interpretation and a wrong application., e.g., if a Catholic got a word of knowledge for a Protestant, it doesn't necessarily imply that the Protestant person should become a Catholic.

We have to be right at all three stages if a message from the Lord is going to benefit people.

### **Conclusion**

It is by belief that the advent of the Charismatic Renewal Movement has done a great deal to restore the rightful place of religious experience to Catholic theology and spirituality with its emphasis on such things as baptism in the Spirit and the recovery of the charisms of revelation, especially that of prophecy. I want to conclude with some poetic words of St Paul VI which he uttered on Nov 29<sup>th</sup>, 1972,

“The Church needs the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. He it is who animates and sanctifies the Church. He is her divine breath, the wind in her sails, the principle of her unity, the inner source of her light and strength. He is her support and consoler, her source of charisms and songs, her peace and her joy, her pledge and prelude to blessed and eternal life. The Church needs her perennial Pentecost. She needs fire in her heart, words on her lips, prophecy in her outlook. She needs to be the temple of the Holy Spirit. This is what the Church needs; she needs the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit in us, in each of us, and in all of us together, in us who are the Church. So let all of us ever say to him, ‘Come.’<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *The Beginner's Guide to The Gift of Prophecy* (Ventura: Regal, 2008), 81.

<sup>86</sup> Edward O'Connor, *Pope Paul and the Spirit* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1978), 183.

## Talk Eight

### Religious experience and Models of evangelisation

In the 1980's I preached a lot of retreats to priests, nuns and lay people. At the time I noticed that, while some people really liked what I had to say, there were others who were not nearly as enthusiastic. For a period, I wondered why this was so. At one point I read a very helpful chapter entitled, "Contemporary Spiritualities and the Spirit in John C. Haughey's book *The Christian Conspiracy*. In it he proposed that there are three models of spirituality at work in the contemporary Church, programmatic, pneumatic and autogenic.<sup>87</sup> It made complete sense of what I had been experiencing. It was clear that the content of my preaching had been informed by a pneumatic/charismatic model of spirituality. As a result, the listeners who espoused the same model liked what I had to say, whereas those who espoused different models, were not nearly as appreciative. Later I found that Cardinal Avery Dulles had been the first Catholic theologian who had used models, or ideal types, to clarify people's different approaches to religious topics. He did so notably in his influential book *Models of the Church* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1988). Subsequently, inspired by those book, I decided to use models theory to look at the topic of evangelisation.<sup>88</sup> I suggested that there were three of them. Very briefly, they were as follows.

#### 1) The Didactic/Sacramental Model

Didactic/sacramental evangelisation focuses on the head and is mainly concerned with *orthodoxy*, i.e., right teaching. Adherents of this model, presuppose that Catholics are already evangelised as a result of receiving the sacraments of baptism and confirmation and living in the Christian community, so evangelisation is seen in largely catechetical terms.

#### 2) The kerygmatic/charismatic model

The Kerygmatic/charismatic model of evangelisation focuses on the heart, and is mainly concerned with *orthokardia*, i.e., right experience. This model of evangelisation is informed by the belief that faith is primarily a matter of trust in the person of God. Consequently, there is a strong appreciation of the need for primary or kerygmatic evangelisation where the aim is to lead people to the experience of Christ centered salvation. It aims to bring people into a heartfelt awareness of God, his forgiveness and love.

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<sup>87</sup> (New York: Doubleday, 1973)

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Pat Collins, C.M., "Models of Evangelisation," in *Encountering Jesus* (Dublin: Columba, 2017), 23-31.

### **3) The Political/Developmental Model**

Political/Developmental evangelisation focuses on the hands and is mainly concerned with *orthopraxis*, i.e., right action. This model is informed by the belief that faith is primarily a matter of remedial action on behalf of the less well off and oppressed. As scripture reminds us, "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (Jm 2:17). It sees Jesus as an exemplar of this approach to evangelisation, e.g., when Jesus cleansed the temple by chasing out the unjust moneychangers and those selling sacrificial animals for extortionate sums of money.

#### **Evaluation of the models**

It can be asked, which of these models of evangelisation is best suited to meet the needs of our culture? Because the didactic/sacramental model of evangelisation focuses on the experience of authority in the form of Christian doctrine, rather than the authority of experience, it is not well adapted to the needs of the time. However the kerygmatic/charismatic and the political/developmental models of evangelisation are both pragmatic and experiential in orientation and therefore more attuned to the modern mind set. Which of them is to be favoured? It is arguable that in the New Testament that the kerygmatic/charismatic model with its emphasis on conversion to Christ and deeds of power, was the primary model which was augmented later on with relevant aspects, of the didactic/sacramental and the praxis/developmental models. In the rest of this talk I will focus on the importance of religious experience, especially in kerygmatic evangelisation.

#### **Crossing the threshold of faith**

As you may know, Fr Raniero Cantalamessa has been the papal preacher for the last 40 years. In a book entitled, *Remembering Jesus Christ*, he makes a striking observation about Catholics in Europe when he says,

“What do those who call themselves believers really believe in? Most often they believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, a creator, and in an afterlife. However, this is deist faith but not yet Christian faith. . . In practice, Jesus Christ is absent in this kind of religiosity.<sup>89</sup>

In other words although many nominally Christian people have been sacramentalised and catechised, they have not been fully evangelised. In par. 19 of his Apostolic Exhortation on *Catechesis*, St John Paul II said that many nominally Christian people had not yet crossed the threshold of faith, “because they are still without any explicit personal attachment to Jesus Christ.” How can they cross that threshold, how will they arrive at a point when Christian truth about the person of Jesus will drop the vital eighteen inches from their heads to their hearts? John Paul gave an answer in a talk to members of the Neo-Catechumenal Way in 1991, “it is not a matter of merely passing on a doctrine, but rather of *a personal and profound meeting with the Saviour.*” In the *Instrumentum Laboris* preparing for the 2012 Synod on Evangelisation it was stated in par. 18,

“The Christian faith is not simply teachings, wise sayings, a code of morality or a tradition. The Christian faith is a true encounter and relationship with Jesus Christ. Transmitting the faith means to create in every place and time the conditions which lead to this encounter between the person and Jesus Christ.”

#### **Baptism in the Spirit**

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<sup>89</sup> (Frederick: The Word Among us, 2007), 15.

Many people, including myself, have had an encounter with the person of Jesus as a result of experiencing what is referred to in English speaking countries as “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” This experience, already familiar to Pentecostals and Charismatic Protestants came to prominence in Catholic circles, in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council. Firstly, a word about the state of the Church at that time. Fr Charles Davis, a well known and respected English theologian, was one of the thousands of Catholic priests who left the ministry in the stormy period after the Council and the publication of *Humanae Vitae*, Paul VI’s controversial encyclical about artificial forms of contraception. A few weeks before his final departure, in 1966, he wrote these striking words,

‘Much speaking in different places on themes of renewal has brought me into contact with many people seeking to revivify their faith. I have found a sense of emptiness, but together with it a deep yearning for God. There is an emptiness at the core of people’s lives, an emptiness wanting to be filled. They are troubled about their faith; they find it slipping. I am not speaking of those who are worried about recent changes. These people are not. But they are looking for something more; they are looking for something that will fill the void in their lives, and what they hear does not do that. The more perceptive know they are looking for God. He seems to have withdrawn from the world and from them. They come to talks by speakers like myself. They hear about the new liturgy, about the new understanding of the lay-man’s role, about the Church and the world, about a thousand new and exciting ideas. But who will speak to them quite simply of God as of a person he immediately knows, and make the reality and presence of God come alive for them once more.’<sup>90</sup>

On February 17<sup>th</sup> 1967, twenty five students from Duquesne University attended a memorable retreat in The Ark and the Dove Retreat House on the outskirts of the city. Kevin and Dorothy Ranaghan have described their state of mind in this way,

“There was something lacking in their individual Christian lives. They couldn’t quite put their finger on it, but somehow there was an emptiness, a lack of dynamism, a sapping of strength in their lives of prayer and action. It was as if their lives as Christians were too much their own creation, as if they were moving forward under their own power and of their own will. It seemed to them that the Christian life wasn’t meant to be a purely human achievement.”<sup>91</sup>

Each of the people who attended the retreat read David Wilkerson’s *The Cross and the Switchblade*, the first four chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, and asked for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Patti Mansfield, who was present on that occasion, has described her experience in the words.

“A few days before the retreat, I knelt in my room and prayed, “Lord, I believe I’ve already received your Spirit in Baptism and Confirmation. But if it’s possible for your Spirit to be more at work in my life than He’s been up until now, I want it!”

A few days later, when the retreat was in progress, she recounts,

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<sup>90</sup> Quoted by Ralph Martin in *Unless the Lord Build the House* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1971), 9-10.

<sup>91</sup> *Catholic Pentecostals* (New Jersey: Paramus, 1969), 7.

“I wandered into the upstairs chapel...not to pray but to tell any students there to come down to the (birthday) party. Yet, when I entered and knelt in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, I literally trembled with a sense of awe before His majesty. I knew in an overwhelming way that He is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. I thought, “You had better get out of here quick before something happens to you.” But overriding my fear was a much greater desire to surrender myself unconditionally to God.

I prayed, “Father, I give my life to you. Whatever you ask of me, I accept. And if it means suffering, I accept that too. Just teach me to follow Jesus and to love as He loves.” In the next moment, I found myself prostrate, flat on my face, and flooded with an experience of the merciful love of God...a love that is totally undeserved, yet lavishly given. Yes, it’s true what St. Paul writes, “The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” My shoes came off in the process. I was indeed on holy ground. I felt as if I wanted to die and be with God. The prayer of St. Augustine captured my experience: “O Lord, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” As much as I wanted to bask in His presence, I knew that if I, who am no one special, could experience the love of God in this way, that anyone across the face of the earth could do so.”<sup>92</sup>

What Patti, and subsequently, millions of other Catholics experienced was baptism in the Holy Spirit. In 2012 the Doctrinal Commission of the International, Catholic, Charismatic Renewal Services published a short, but important book entitled, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*. It argued that a Pentecostal in-filling of the Spirit is *integral* to the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, and *normative* for all Christians. It is both a *release* of the graces we received in a sacramental way when we were baptized and confirmed, and is also a *reception* of charisms which are necessary for effective evangelisation. In an important definition the book states that,

“Baptism in the Spirit is a life-transforming experience of the love of God the Father poured into one’s heart by the Holy Spirit, and received through a total surrender to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This grace brings alive sacramental baptism and confirmation, deepens communion with God and with fellow Christians, enkindles evangelistic fervour and equips a person with charisms for service and mission.”<sup>93</sup>

To experience baptism in the spirit does not necessarily mean that the recipient has joined a movement, any movement. Rather it is an appropriation of the fullness of Christian initiation, which belongs to the church. It is also an empowerment for evangelisation. Pope Francis believes that every Christian needs to have this experience. On June 12th 2015, he spoke about the Life in the Spirit Seminars which prepare people to receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, when he said to priests and religious,

“I ask all of you, each of you, that as part of the stream of grace of the Charismatic Renewal to planning seminars of life in the Spirit, in your parishes, in your seminaries and schools ... share your teaching on the Baptism of the Spirit, because it is produced by the work Holy Spirit through a personal encounter with Jesus, which changes lives.”

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<sup>92</sup> <https://www.swordofthespirit.net/bulwark/february2017p11.htm>

<sup>93</sup> (Luton: New Life, 2012).

In a speech on June 8<sup>th</sup> 2019 to 4,500 members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Rome Pope Francis said,

‘What does the Pope expect of you? I expect this movement to share baptism in the Spirit *with everyone in the Church*. It is the grace you have received. Share it!’

### **Evangelisation today**

Those who evangelise will be effective to the extent that

- Firstly, they themselves enjoy a personal relationship with Jesus and are filled with the Holy Spirit. As an old Latin saying puts it, “you cannot give what you haven’t got.”
- Secondly, effective evangelisers back up their proclamation of the kerygma not only with appropriate scripture texts but also with the fruit of personal contemplation. As John Paul II said in par. 91 of *The Mission of the Redeemer*,

“The missionary must be a “contemplative in action.” He or she finds answers to problems in the light of God’s word and in personal and community prayer . . . the future of mission depends to a great extent on contemplation. Unless the missionary is a contemplative he or she cannot proclaim Christ in a credible way. He or she is a witness to the experience of God, and must be able to say with the apostles: “that which we have looked upon...concerning the word of life...we proclaim also to you” (1 Jn 1:1-3).”

This can be done by means of personal testimony, their own and that of other people, not to focus attention of themselves but rather to illustrate how Christian truth can and does change lives. As Tob 12: 7 says, “A king’s secret is prudent to keep, but the works of the Lord are to be declared and made known.”

- Thirdly, those who evangelise need to demonstrate the truth of what they say by deeds of mercy, action for justice and by means of charisms such as words of knowledge, deliverance, healing and miracle working.

Let me offer a personal example of the latter point. For reasons I do not really understand, about four or five travellers contact me every day about a wide spectrum of problems. Sometimes they call to see me. Just before Christmas, three travellers arrived from another part of the country, two sisters and their brother. They had a tale of woe to tell, the two girls had bad thyroid problems and their brother was depressed. However, it was obvious that they loved one another and had strong faith. As I listened I was deeply moved, so much so that the tears dripped down my cheeks. When they asked me what was wrong I said, nothing really, it was simply because I felt a strong sense of God’s presence and his compassion. I felt that my desire to see the two women being healed was a share in the Lord’s desire for them, and therefore an expression of his will. I anointed both of the women and prayed with the laying on of hands for their brother. A few weeks later their mother rang to say that doctors who examined both women in hospital had confirmed that, inexplicably, their thyroid problems had disappeared. Happily I have seen many travellers being healed in this way. By the way, I have written a book entitled *Holistic Healing: A Christian Approach* which will be published in July. Anyone who is interested in the healing and deliverance ministry might find it helpful.

### **Conclusion**

As Pope Paul VI said on the occasion of the publication of Cardinal Suenens’s book, *A New Pentecost?*, “How wonderful it would be if the Lord would again pour out the charisms in increased abundance, in order to make the Church fruitful, beautiful and marvellous, and to

enable it to win the attention and astonishment of the profane and secularized world.”<sup>94</sup> The Pope’s desire has been fulfilled, because the charisms of power have indeed been poured out in abundance.

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<sup>94</sup> Edward O’Connor, *Pope Paul and the Spirit* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1978), 212.



## Talk Nine

### Religious Experience: and Mental and Physical Health

In recent years psychology has also tried to establish whether religion and spirituality are good for people's health and happiness.

#### Two psychologists on religious experience & mental health

Unlike Freud, Carl Jung believed that unless people had spiritual experience they would be neurotic. He felt that the decline of religion in the modern era had, in fact, led to widespread neurosis. He wrote, "I am sure that everywhere the mental state of European man shows an alarming lack of balance. We are living undeniably in a period of the greatest restlessness, nervous tension, confusion, and disorientation of outlook."<sup>95</sup> Jung said that the human psyche could only be fulfilled if the self - his word for the soul - enjoyed a conscious sense of the divine. In his book *Psychology & Western Religion* he wrote, "In thirty years I have treated many patients in the second half of life. Every one of them became ill because he or she had lost that which the living religions in every age have given their followers, (i.e. religious experience) and none of them was fully healed who did not regain his religious outlook."<sup>96</sup> Jung went on to add, "This of course has nothing whatever to do with a particular creed or membership of a church."<sup>97</sup> It is interesting to note that many of his patients were practicing Christians, indeed some of them were clergymen. He argued that although they were committed to Christian doctrines and rituals, they got ill because, ironically, they were starved of conscious experience of God.

Viktor Frankl, a Jewish psychiatrist was imprisoned in a number of concentration camps, during World War II. He noticed that, all things being equal, some prisoners were better able to survive than others. He discovered that it was the prisoners who had a sense of unconditional meaning who could endure great hardship, whereas, those who hadn't such a sense of meaning, often lost the will to live and died as a result of such things as disease or suicide. Consequently, Frankl tried to introduce into psychotherapy a point of view that saw in human existence not only a Freudian will to pleasure, an Adlerian will to power, a Jungian will to individuation, or a Maslonian will to self-actualization, what he referred to as the will to meaning. He recounted, "Perhaps the deepest experience which I myself had in the concentration camp was that, while the concern of most people was summed up by the question, 'Will we survive the camp?' - for if not, then this suffering has no sense - the question which in contrast beset me was, 'has this whole suffering, this dying a meaning?' - for if not, then ultimately there is no sense in surviving. For a life whose meaning stands or falls upon whether one survives or not, a life, that is, whose meaning depends upon such a happenstance, such a life would not really be worth living at all."<sup>98</sup> Frankl believed that the consequent lack of meaning leads people to suffer from a vacuum, an emptiness at the centre of their lives, what he called "existential frustration." It can lead to boredom, depression, ennui and neurosis. He felt that if people suppressed the spiritual sense, they would end up in a kind of idolatry by making things like pleasure, power, and popularity into unsatisfactory substitutes for absolute meaning. He maintained that this existential vacuum can also result in addictions or suicide. In other words when the human spirit is deprived of the oxygen of meaning the person becomes psychologically unbalanced and self-destructive.

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<sup>95</sup> *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (London: Routledge, 2005), 236.

<sup>96</sup> (London: Ark, 1988), 202.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>98</sup> *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Pocket Books, 1963), 183.

## **Advantages of Religious Practice**

Religion and regular church attendance tend to improve health because practicing Christians get support from other members of the community and because church goers are inclined to have healthier life-styles. They tend to smoke less, have lower alcohol intake, better diets and avoid risky sex. Furthermore, it is quite likely that people with genuine spirituality will be more at peace and therefore less stressful. There is clear evidence that if these practices are motivated by faith there is a 25 – 33% less risk of premature death. Between the years 1987 and 1995 Hummer et al, conducted a random survey of 21,204 adults in the U.S.A. They found that the average age of death for non-church goers was 75.3 years as compared to 81.9 years for churchgoers. This age advantage was particularly obvious in the case of women and Afro Americans.

Dr Patricia Casey, a professor of psychiatry in University College Dublin is the author of *The Psycho-social Benefits of Religious Practice*, which was published by the Iona Institute in 2008. She has said, “the overwhelming weight of evidence so far is that being actively engaged in religious participation is psychologically beneficial for individuals, and also carries a range of social benefits relating to everything from marital stability to crime and to suicide.” The booklet examines various scientific studies conducted in this area which show that religious practice is associated, on average, with lower levels of, depression; of marital breakdown; of alcohol and drug abuse; of pregnancy among teenagers; faster recovery from bereavement and illness; together with longer life expectancy, etc. While Dr Casey focused on religious practice, I think that her booklet would have been even more helpful if it had focused more directly on religious experience.

## **Prayer and Health**

Gordon Allport made a well known distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic religion. It can be noted in passing that St Paul makes a similar type distinction when he says: “I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it....Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil” (1 Cor 3:2; Heb 5:13-14). Those who espouse extrinsic religion:

"Are disposed to use religion for their own ends..... Persons with this orientation may find religion useful in a variety of ways - to provide security and solace, sociability and distraction, status and self justification. The embraced creed is lightly held or else selectively shaped to fit more primary needs. In theological terms the extrinsic type turns to God, but without turning away from self."<sup>99</sup>

Typical examples of extrinsic religion would be: “One reason for my being a church member is that such membership helps to establish a person in the community” or “The primary purpose of prayer is to gain relief and protection.” By and large, the prayer life of people who espouse this kind of sociological religion focuses on what God can do for them as opposed to who God is, or what they can do for God. As a result, they often split prayer from life. What they believe doesn’t necessarily impinge upon the way in which they live. They tend to re-write the commandments, e.g., in business matters and sexuality, to suit themselves. If others object, they say, “everybody is doing the same.” If and when religion and God seem to fail to meet their needs, they are like the people who found it hard to accept the teaching of

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<sup>99</sup> Allport and Ross "Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* no 5, p. 432-443

Jesus on the Eucharist, "Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went with him" Jn 6:66.

Allport says that those who espouse intrinsic religion:

"Find their master motive in religion. Other needs, strong as they may be, are regarded as of less ultimate significance, and they are, as far as possible, brought into harmony with the religious beliefs and preoccupations. Having embraced a creed, the individual endeavours to internalize it and follow it fully. It is in this sense that he lives his religion."<sup>100</sup>

In an article entitled: 'Religious Orientation and Psychological Well-being: The Role of the Frequency of Personal Prayer,' which was published in *The British Journal of Health Psychology*, three researchers examined the effects of intrinsic religion on mental health. As has already been noted, people who have intrinsic, as opposed to extrinsic, religion are those who have internalised their faith in such a way that it influences every aspect of their everyday lives. Consequently, they are more inclined to have conscious awareness of the divine, and are more likely to have higher than average levels of self-esteem together with lower than average levels of anxiety and depression. These conclusions have been confirmed by a number of other studies.

### **Mystical Experience and Happiness**

People with intrinsic faith are more inclined to have mystical type experiences of the extreme and mild kind described by James Pratt in his classic work. Both kinds report experiencing "the sense of the presence of a being or reality through other means than the ordinary perceptive processes or the reason."<sup>101</sup> As was noted in the opening chapter, anything between 33 and 66% of the population in G.B and the U.S.A. claim to have had such experiences. We noted in passing that many of them, especially in Britain were not churchgoers. Apparently research in America has indicated that those who have had mystical type of experiences – they sound like Maslow's peak experiences – correlated positively with the Positive Affect Scale which is a good indicator of psychological well-being. As David Fontana says: "overall the mystics emerged as notably happier and notably freer from mental disorders than the norm."<sup>102</sup>

### **Health Outcomes and Prayer for Others**

Besides investigating whether prayer is good for personal health, researchers have also tried to establish whether prayer for others can have positive health effects. As I have dealt with this subject elsewhere I will not say too much about it here.<sup>103</sup> We will look at just one typical experiment. In 1988 a Dr Byrd of San Francisco General Hospital randomly divided a group of 393 coronary care patients into two groups, one of which was to receive prayers for healing plus medical help and the other which would receive medical help but no prayer. Over a ten month period, a panel of doctors assessed the patients for medical outcomes. When the results became available it was found that the people who had been prayed for, had done better than those who had not been prayed for. For example, while 3% of the people prayed with needed antibiotics, 16% of those who didn't receive prayer needed them. 6% of the people prayed for, developed fluid on the lungs, whereas 18% of those who were not prayed for did so. None of the people prayed for needed mechanical ventilation but 12%

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<sup>100</sup> Allport & Ross, Op. cit.

<sup>101</sup> *The Religious Consciousness: A Psychological Study* (New York: McMillan, 1920), 337.

<sup>102</sup> *Psychology, Religion and Spirituality* op. cit., 217

<sup>103</sup> Pat Collins, "Is Prayer Good for your Health?" *The Broken Image* (Dublin: Columba, 2002), 86-92.

of the others did. Finally, and most importantly, 13% of the people prayed for died, and 17% of those not prayed for, passed away.

Dr Larry Dossey has indicated in a number of his books, e.g. *Prayer is Good Medicine*,<sup>104</sup> that there are many other studies which come to similar conclusions.<sup>105</sup> He cites the fact that currently, Dr. Mitchell Krucoff at Duke University Medical Centre, is studying the effects of prayer on patients undergoing cardiac procedures such as catheterization and angioplasty. Those receiving prayer have up to 100% fewer side effects from these procedures than people not prayed for. These are double-blind studies, meaning that no one knows who is, or is not receiving prayer. This eliminates, or at least reduces the influence of the placebo effect which is the power of suggestion and positive thinking. It would seem that intercessory prayer is good for the health of other people.

### **Conclusion**

In view of all these points it is not surprising to hear that more and more medical schools, especially in the United States, are integrating spirituality into their courses. For instance, Duke University has established a Centre for the study of Religion, Spirituality and health. The fact that young doctors are now learning about these issues is an important indicator of impending developments. Indeed, it has even been suggested that, in the future, disappointed patients might take legal action against those doctors who overlook the spiritual dimension of healing because research has indicated so clearly that it is important in any holistic notion of health. I suspect that the same trends could develop here in Europe.

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<sup>104</sup> (New York: Harper/Collins, 1997)

<sup>105</sup> Cf. <http://www.godandscience.org/apologetics/religionhealth.html>

## Talk Ten

### Dangers implicit in the experiential approach

I can remember when we had that strange phenomenon of moving statues around Ireland in 1985. At that time I participated in a discussion on the Late Late show about the phenomenon in Ballinaspittle, in County Cork.<sup>106</sup> I said that I was inclined to interpret such experiences in a Jungian way as like day-dreams. Therefore I believed that they should be understood in a symbolical manner as expressions of wishful thinking. For example, if one looks up the entry on "religious statues" in Tom Chetwynd's insightful and well researched *Dictionary for Dreamers*, it says that when inanimate figures are seen to move in a life-like way it is a sign that, "what was a dead theoretical concept suddenly has new inner meaning for the dreamer" and that "new potentialities are awakening in the dreamer."<sup>107</sup> As we know, a dry doctrinal approach to religion does very little for people. Evidently, what the supporters of popular piety were looking for, were doctrines that come alive with experiential meaning. In this context it is interesting to recall something Jung wrote: "Today Christianity is devitalized....."God" has in fact become unconscious to us. This what always happens when things are interpreted, explained, and dogmatized until they become so encrusted with man-made images and words that they can no longer be seen."<sup>108</sup> So as this course comes to an end, I'm sure that you can see that I'm inclined to think that what the soul is to the body, orthodox religious experience is to religion. Without it, it dies and we are left with a lifeless corpse.

When I was teaching the psychology of religion, however, I used to say to my students, half joking and whole in earnest, that a good deal of religion is a sickness that mistakes itself for a cure, because it is rooted in psychological pathologies, and is often subject to illusions, false inspirations and unrealistic wish fulfilments. As St Paul warned, the devil can manifest his presence and influence as an angel of light (cf. 2 Cor 11:14). So as, 1 Jn 4:1 advises, "test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world."

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<sup>106</sup> Pat Collins, C.M., "Popular Devotion and Primal Piety," in *The Broken Image: Reflections on Spirituality and Culture* (Dublin: Columba, 2002), 113.

<sup>107</sup> (London: Paladin, 1979), 171.

<sup>108</sup> Carl Jung, "Jung and Religious Belief," and "Letter to Brother Klaus" *Psychology and Western Religion* (London: Ark, 1988), 289; 229.

The Protestant reformers, who stressed the primacy of the experience of being saved, said that their Christian lives were based on scripture and faith alone. While this may have been an understandable and even a welcome reaction to the rationalistic nature of a good deal of scholastic theology, I think that history has shown that their more subjective, experiential approach tended to develop two main problems.

### **A] Subjectivism can lead to conflict and divisions**

I have always thought that the Lutheran notion of *sola scriptura* is highly suspect. Implicit in this notion is the idea that the Holy Spirit acting in believers reveals the truth of God's word. As Jesus said in Jn 16:13, "when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth," and in 1 Jn 2:27, "you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don't need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know, and what he teaches is true—it is not a lie." That is true of course, but only up to a point. How will I discern whether my understanding of God's word is correct, and has not been distorted by some illusion or false inspiration? Surely there is a need for some external authority to adjudicate whether one's interpretation is orthodox or not. For example, in the early Church there was a dispute about which Christian writings were inspired and canonical and which were not. The scriptures themselves could not answer that question. It was the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, that made that judgement in 382 AD at the Council of Rome. So while the Catholic Church acknowledges the role of religious experience it believes that its authenticity has to be determined by the *sensus fidelium* as expressed through the Church's infallible teaching authority or *magisterium*.<sup>109</sup> Because the reformers downplayed the role of tradition and the *magisterium* in favour of *sola scriptura*, endless splits have occurred in Protestantism as a result of differing interpretations of the scriptures. As a result it is estimated that there are at least 200 major Protestant denominations in the United States.<sup>110</sup>

### **B] Subjectivism can lead to relativism**

He is constantly aware of the danger of relativism, e.g. the widespread belief that all religious experiences have the same authority and value as a way of revealing something about God or the All. That is the idea that is taken for granted in Matthew Fox's book, *One River Many Wells*.<sup>111</sup> where religious experience is the river, and the wells are the different religions. In that view, Christianity is, at best, merely *primus inter pares*. Pope Benedict challenges such an assumption. In par 5 of *Dominus Jesus* he says: "Only the revelation of Jesus Christ, therefore, "introduces into our history a universal and ultimate truth....By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is at the same time the mediator and the fullness of all revelation." Christians have *faith*, in the form of free assent to the whole truth revealed by God in Christ, while non-Christians do not have faith in that unique theological sense, rather they can have *belief* as a result of their religious experiences. "This distinction is not always borne in mind in current theological reflection" says the Pope in par 7, "Thus, theological faith (the acceptance of the truth revealed by the One and Triune God) is often identified with belief in other religions, *which is religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself* (my italics). This is one of the reasons why the differences between

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<sup>109</sup> Arguably the *Mishnah* and later the *Talmud* played an analogous role in the Jewish religion. In Catholicism the word dogma is an interesting one. Etymologically it is derived from a Greek word, *dokein*, meaning, "to seem good." It is related to the English word, "decent," which means, "fitting, proper, or suitable." So dogma helps to establish the parameters of orthodoxy as far as subjective religious experience is concerned.

<sup>110</sup> Stephen Beale, "Just How Many Protestant Denominations Are There?" *National Catholic Register* (Oct 31<sup>st</sup> 2017) <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/sbeale/just-how-many-protestant-denominations-are-there>

<sup>111</sup> (New York: Penguin, 2000)

Christianity and the other religions tend to be reduced at times to the point of disappearance.”

Implicit in this statement is a notion of two types of religious experience, one distinctively Christian, the other specific. All experiences, including religious ones, have a subjective and an objective aspect. They are objective in so far as they have intentionality, i.e. they are *about* something, be it a reality or a truth. When a Christian has a religious experience, e.g. as a result of *Lectio Divina*, it is a subjective experience yes, but it is also about an absolute truth, whereas, when a devout Moslem, Hindu or Buddhist has a subjective religious experience as a result of reading his or her sacred texts,<sup>112</sup> rather than encountering ultimate truth, which is only revealed in Christ, they have, at best, an anticipatory intimation of a truth which has not yet been fully revealed to them.

### **C] Subjectivism can lead to agnosticism and atheism**

Protestant thinkers like Schleiermacher, Hegel and the liberal theologians they influenced, have had a tendency to move to anti-supernaturalism, agnosticism and even atheism. Protestant scholars like Rudolf Bultmann<sup>113</sup> and E. P. Sanders<sup>114</sup> have tended to strip out the supernatural aspects of the Gospels such as angels, healings, exorcisms and miracles in the name of demythologising the scriptures. Ludwig Feuerbach’s writings pointed to another vulnerability in the subjectivist approach. He argued that Christian talk about the subjective experience of God was in actual fact a way of talking about human potential. In his view all theology, therefore, should be converted into anthropology. He stated, “God did not, as the Bible says, make man in His image; on the contrary man, as I have shown in *The Essence of Christianity*, has made God in his image.”<sup>115</sup> When I was a student in 1966, a book was published by Altizer & Hamilton with the ironic title, *Radical Theology and the Death of God*. Nowadays when one reads the books of men like Don Cupitt who lectured in Cambridge University, and retired Bishop Richard Holloway of Edinburgh, it becomes clear that both of them, like many others, have abandoned the notion of an objectively existing God and replaced the notion of a transcendent Deity with a vague nature mysticism and an idea of prayer as mere compassionate mindfulness. It strikes me that they are closer to Buddhism than orthodox Christianity.

### **D] The Danger of Neo-Gnosticism**

Another danger that can arise in a relativist, post-truth, secularized society is that when a lot of emphasis is placed on the primacy of subjective religious experience, that it expresses itself in the guise of a modern form of Gnosticism. It is a recycled and updated version of an old heresy which dates back to the early days of Christianity. Paddy Quinn describes it as follows in his *Philosophy of Religion A-Z*,

“A religious and philosophical movement that existed in the early centuries of Christianity and declared that a higher form of knowledge (gnosis) leading to a deeper understanding of God and salvation occurs by means of a special revelation and esoteric spiritual knowledge. . . It was regarded as an early Christian heresy in that it declared that privately revealed knowledge was superior to scripture.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> In par of *Dominus Jesus* Cardinal Ratzinger says that, strictly speaking, the sacred texts of other religions are not inspired. “The Church’s tradition, however, reserves the designation of *inspired texts* to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, since these are inspired by the Holy Spirit.”

<sup>113</sup> *New Testament & Mythology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989)

<sup>114</sup> Cf. *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 1995).

<sup>115</sup> *Lectures on the Essence of Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 187.

<sup>116</sup> (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 82.

I noticed that, speaking about modern Gnosticism, Pope Francis says in par. 36 of his Apostolic Exhortation, *Rejoice and be Glad*, “Gnosticism presumes a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings.” In par 40 he adds, “Gnosticism is one of the most sinister ideologies because, while unduly exalting knowledge or a specific experience, it considers its own vision of reality to be perfect.” Writing about New Age, Gnostic religion in his book, *Truth and Tolerance*, Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI) said,

“It offers a completely anti-rationalist pattern of religion, a modern “mysticism” the absolute is, not something to be believed in, but something to be experienced. God is not a person distinct from the world; rather, he is the spiritual energy that is at work throughout the universe. Religion means bringing my self into tune with the cosmic whole, the transcending of all divisions.”<sup>117</sup>

Whereas early Gnosticism synthesized Christian, Platonic and pagan beliefs, its contemporary, syncretistic counterpart adds in contemporary elements such as science, psychology, the occult and spiritualism. Its followers enter the supermarket of meaning and pick from the shelves whatever belief or practice which seems to be relevant and useful. But just as many Gnostic beliefs were unacceptable in early Christianity, so the document *Jesus Christ the Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian Reflection on the New Age*,<sup>118</sup> shows which New Age beliefs are unacceptable in modern Christianity. Nevertheless, in spite of its obvious defects, New Age religion has been surreptitiously introduced into the life of contemporary Christian community like a latter day Trojan horse, where it secretly disgorges its false teachings and practices.

A number of years ago I was asked to teach a course on contemporary spirituality in the Milltown Institute. As part of it I included a talk on New Age Spirituality. However, I did not mention that fact at the beginning. Instead I disguised New Age ideas and practices, by using Christian language throughout. When I concluded my talk I asked what the class participants thought about my presentation. They were effusive in their praise. They said such things as, “that was the best description of spirituality I have ever heard ... You put into words what so many of us believe... You made spirituality seem so alive and relevant.” Then I went on to inform them that in actual fact I had been describing New Age spirituality.<sup>119</sup> I pointed out that it is not only pagan, it is also anti-Christian. As Pope Francis has observed, “these deceptive ideas, reflect an anthropocentric immanentism disguised as Catholic truth.”<sup>120</sup>

### **Some Implications**

I believe that before it was ever a religion, Christianity was an experience which was made possible by the action of the Holy Spirit. Later the New Testament scriptures expressed that experience in words which not only expressed the primal Pentecostal experience but which also made it possible to mediate that same experience to future generations.<sup>121</sup> In recent years I have published a number of books that try to champion the cause of religious

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<sup>117</sup> (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 127.

<sup>118</sup> Published by the Pontifical Councils for Culture & Interreligious Dialogue in 2003.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Pat Collins, C.M., “New Age Spirituality” in *Spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Dublin: Columba, 1999), 106-113.

<sup>120</sup> Par. 35 of *Rejoice and be Glad*.

<sup>121</sup> As Herman Gunkel said of the writings of St Paul, “The theology of the great apostle was an expression of his experience, not of his reading . . . Paul believed in the divine Spirit, because he had experienced him.” Quoted by James Dunn in *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1978), 4.



experience while insisting that it needs to be tested, as St Ignatius of Loyola would have pointed out to see whether it originated from the self, God or the evil Spirit.

In *Prayer in Practice: Our Dialogue with God*,<sup>122</sup> I indicated that prayer in the words of St Theresa of Avila is nothing but an intimate friendship with God, a heart to heart conversation with him by whom I know myself to be loved. Yes, I disclose my inner self to the Lord, but I firmly believe that God wants to disclose the divine self, word and will to me. In my book, *Guided by God*,<sup>123</sup> I focused on the ordinary and charismatic ways in which God can reveal the divine purposes to us. In my book *Prophecy: Truth for Today Light for Tomorrow*<sup>124</sup> I indicated that prophecy is telling something that God has spontaneously brought to mind by God. I do believe that this kind of private, as opposed to public revelation, is part of the Christian life (cf. 1 Cor 14:1). Knowing it to be a controversial topic I submitted the books *Guided by God* and *Prophecy* for the imprimatur, which I pleased to receive.

As our brief course ends, I want to include an extended quote from par. 14 of Pope Benedict XVI's Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* on the subject of private revelation, because it sums up, by extension, my own views on the more general topic of the value of religious experience.

“The value of private revelations,” the Pope wrote, “is essentially different from that of the one public revelation: the latter demands faith; in it God himself speaks to us through human words and the mediation of the living community of the Church. The criterion for judging the truth of a private revelation is its orientation to Christ himself. If it leads us away from him, then it certainly does not come from the Holy Spirit, who guides us more deeply into the Gospel, and not away from it. Private revelation is an aid to this faith, and it demonstrates its credibility precisely because it refers back to the one public revelation. Ecclesiastical approval of a private revelation essentially means that its message contains nothing contrary to faith and morals; it is licit to make it public and the faithful are authorized to give to it their prudent adherence. A private revelation can introduce new emphases, give rise to new forms of piety, or deepen older ones. It can have a certain prophetic character (cf. 1 Thess 5:19-21) and can be a valuable aid for better understanding and living the Gospel at a certain time; consequently it should not be treated lightly. It is a help which is proffered, but its use is not obligatory. In any event, it must be a matter of nourishing faith, hope and love, which are for everyone the permanent path of salvation.”

## Conclusion

I want to conclude by quoting something that Bishop Ignatius of Laodicea wrote in 390 AD,

“Without the Holy Spirit, God is distant, Christ is merely an historical figure, the Gospel is a dead letter, the Church is just an organisation, authority is domination, mission is propaganda, liturgy is only nostalgia, and the work of Christians is slave labour. But with the Holy Spirit, Christ is risen and present, the Gospel is a living force, the Church is a communion in the life of the Trinity, authority is a service that sets people free, mission is Pentecost, the liturgy is memory and anticipation, and the labour of Christians is divinised.”

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<sup>122</sup> (Eugene, OR: Whipf & Stock, 2020).

<sup>123</sup> (Luton: New Life, 2015)

<sup>124</sup> (Luton: New Life, 2018)

In this course I have tried to show how the subjective and objective realms can be linked in a mutually beneficial and dynamic way.

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