

Refresh





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Crisis and the Community of Creation

by Andrew Shepherd

That we live in a time of ecological crisis shouldn't be surprising. Global industrialisation means over half of the human population experience the world as an urban reality¹. It could be argued the state of anomie that besets many in our societies is the inevitable consequence of trying to live disconnected from the land and soil from which we originate and will return, and upon which we depend for our survival.²

Were the ecological crisis neither scientific, technical, nor political, but fundamentally moral and caused by our state of 'homelessness', then the narratives we inhabit and the spiritual disciplines and practices that compose our lives are critical to any meaningful response to the crisis. In Christian thought the goal of contemplation (*theoria*) is to see God. Could it be how we 'see' God and the world plays a significant role in living in response to crisis?

North American theologian Sallie McFague thinks so. Her book *Super, Natural Christians* suggests current ecological problems stem precisely from our mode of sight³. Influenced by Martin Buber and Iris Murdoch, McFague maintains we need to learn to see differently. Buber's influential *I and Thou* was grounded upon a social ontology that 'In the beginning is relationship'⁴. He contended humanity has two forms of engagement or modes of 'relationality', i.e. we relate with the *other* (fellow humans and the world around us) either as an *It*, or as *Thou*. And because Westerners are shaped by the world view of the Enlightenment, McFague asserts we see the world of nature primarily as an *Object - It*.

Recalling Simone Weil's comment 'absolute attention is prayer'⁵, and drawing on nature writers like Annie Dillard, Aldo Leopold and Alice Walker, McFague presents a compelling case for a new way of 'seeing' the world. To see the world with a 'loving' rather than 'arrogant' eye requires the spiritual discipline of 'focus' on the distance,

Could it be how we 'see' God and the world plays a significant role in living in response to crisis?



Orion Nebula © Orion Nebula NASA

- 1 As of 2008, the percentage of the human population living in urban environments eclipsed that of the rural-based population for the first time in human history. This 'urbanization' continues at a rapid rate, with some models estimating that by 2050, 70% of the human population will be urban-dwellers.
- 2 For a helpful description of this anomie see: Steven Bouma-Prediger and Brian J. Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008). That attempts to separate ourselves from the wildness of nature and/or to domesticate and control the natural world leads to a 'sick' society, is a constant theme of the writings of American agrarian poet and philosopher, Wendell Berry.
- 3 Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Fortress, Press: Minneapolis, 1997).
- 4 Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner's, 1970), 8.
- 5 McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 29.

the difference, the particularity, the uniqueness, the 'in itselfness', the otherness, of the other⁶. This attention to detail, particularity and difference, subverts the traditional subject-object model of Western epistemology, and opens the viewer to 'an acknowledgement of and respect for the other as *subject*.'⁷

Advocating for a new form of relationality in which nature is understood not as an object (an *I-It* relationship) but as a subject (an *I-Thou* relationship) – McFague believes Christians should love nature 'by obeying a simple but very difficult axiom: *pay attention to it*.'⁸

While sympathetic to the sacramental tradition⁹, McFague believes sacramental spirituality doesn't go far enough. For her, the deficiency in 'sacramentalism' is the belief 'the natural world is...a stepping stone in our pilgrimage to God – a means to an end.'¹⁰ The problem with such thinking, she asserts, is the mistaken belief that 'value does not lie primarily in itself: other lifeforms and other natural entities do not have intrinsic value.'¹¹

Instead, McFague advocates for a move beyond sacramentalism as traditionally understood, to an 'earthly, bodily theology...that allows us to love the natural world for its intrinsic worth, to love it, in all its differences and detail, in itself, for itself.'¹² She suggests seeing the natural world as the 'Body of God'.¹³

The things of the earth do not point away from the earth to God; rather, they are themselves the 'body' of God – one of the major metaphors Christians might now use from nature to speak of God. God's body in this metaphor is not one body, but all the bodies, from subatomic to galactic ones, and all the ones in between, from robins and tigers to mountains and oceans, from mites and microbes to trees and plants, as well as, of course, ourselves. All of these millions, billions of creatures and entities, are, like us, made for the glory of God, and they deserve, as all human beings do, to be part of the language we use to speak of God.¹⁴

6 Ibid., 113.

7 Ibid., 34

8 Ibid., Italics original.

9 McFague acknowledges that the 'sacramental tradition should be acknowledged as contributing to a sense of the world as valuable – indeed, as holy – because it is a symbol of the divine and can help us reach God.' Ibid., 27

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 See Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

14 McFague, *Super, Natural Christians*, 174. McFague believes that such an understanding of nature is necessary both as a response to the ecological realities humanity faces but also 'because the evolutionary, ecological, relational, community model of nature is *the contemporary picture of reality*.' Ibid., 21. For McFague, the models we use to speak of God are human constructions, and therefore as our understanding of reality changes so must our theological construction of God. See Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

At one level, I'm sympathetic to McFague's thought. Her call to recognise our relationship with nature as one of *subject-subject* and her emphasis on *attention to the particular* are especially helpful in a globalised world of activity and distraction, fluidity and flux. To pay close attention to the world of nature that surrounds us, requires space, stillness, and silence – the time and stability to develop long-term relationships.¹⁵ All of these elements are integral to the practice of contemplative life, of course.

But while appreciative of these dimensions, I have misgivings about the underlying theology. In particular, McFague's blurring the distinctions between God, humanity and nature. Ultimately, her incarnational ecological metaphor offers an immanentist theology in which the distinction between God and creation are conflated.

With the incredible advances of the last two hundred years – in biology, palaeontology and evolutionary anthropology – we now know *homo sapiens* is indeed composed of the same stardust that originated at the dawn of the universe. Likewise, we now recognise the long process of evolution leading to the emergence of the species *homo sapiens*. But this knowledge doesn't, of necessity, require giving up a belief in the *otherness* of God.

Indeed, the very blurring of the distinction between God and creation inherent in McFague's 'Body of God' metaphor, runs counter to her emphasis on the recognition of *otherness* and relationality, and offers merely a form of philosophical monism.¹⁶

If, as McFague states, the first step in loving nature is paying attention to it, and humans are part of nature, then the practice of *contemplation* is simply engaging in the self-love of narcissism – not an exercise in *seeing* and relating with the Divine Other.

Likewise, this monist-leaning theology offers little comfort with regard to the less than attractive elements in the world of nature. How do we explain what we observe with horror and deep unease and not awe and wonder? Yes, contemplating nature in my garden stirs a sense of wonder at the fecundity of growth in the vegetable garden, and a deep joy at the vibrancy of colour, yet it also arouses anger and lament at the native bird ruthlessly killed by a feral cat.

If all these actions are simply the ebb and flow of processes within God's Body, then ultimately there's no external agent, no Divine Other, to whom we can express our alarm and distress.

15 For a brief reflection on such a spirituality, what I suggest is a spirituality of 'home-making' see my: 'Spirituality of Home-making in a Property-Dealing World', Refresh, 8:2 (Summer 2008-09): 21-25

16 On the extent to which otherness is constitutive of genuine relationality between particular entities, see John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), and *Communion and Otherness: Further Studies in Personhood and the Church*, (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

Responding to such questions of theodicy, McFague contends that 'within [her] enlarged perspective, we can no longer consider evil only in terms of what benefits or hurts me or my species. In a world as large, as complex, and with as many individuals and species as our planet has, the good of some will inevitably occur at the expense of others.'¹⁷

If this is the case, where does my sense of moral disgust and outrage at predation, death, and pain in the natural world stem from? If all these actions are simply the ebb and flow of processes within God's Body, then ultimately there's no external agent, no Divine Other, to whom we can express our alarm and distress.

Ironically, in spite of her emphasis on difference and distinctiveness, McFague's schema also blurs any distinction between the animate and inanimate natural world and humanity. While we acknowledge our evolutionary origins and bio-chemical composition are embedded and interdependent in the world of nature, there is also something unique about humanity. Cognitively and linguistically advanced, humanity is a culture-maker whose power to create, communicate, and control is unmatched by other species.

In contrast, to McFague's 'Body of God' metaphor, the Bible presents a picture which, while emphasising the relationality between God and creation, also affirms their distinctiveness from each other – their *otherness*. Likewise the Bible affirms, while undoubtedly part of creation, there's a distinctive particularity about humanity— only humans are made in the 'image of God.'¹⁸

There are various examples in Scripture where humans/humanity are called to stop and see the world and be reacquainted with their true place in this community of love. Job is confronted with a world beyond his comprehension, let alone his control. He is given a reminder the cosmos is upheld and sustained by God (Job 38-42). Such a theocentric view of the world responds to the human tendency towards hubris. Yet, God's upholding of the vastness of the cosmos doesn't make our lives insignificant. Speaking to his followers, Jesus reminds us that God's provision and care for his whole creation, includes humanity (Matt 6:25-34).¹⁹

In contrast to McFague's 'Body of God' metaphor, Richard Bauckham encourages us to rediscover the biblical metaphor of the 'community of creation'. He suggests, such a metaphor captures the relationality between God and the whole of creation, the connectedness and solidarity humanity shares with the rest of creation, and also acknowledges our particular distinctiveness. Bauckham writes:

17 McFague, *The Body of God*, 175.

18 The scholarly consensus now emerging is that the affirmation of humanity as 'image-bearers' of God is connected to our role as 'caretakers' exercising, Bauckham suggests 'delegated participation in God's caring rule over creatures.' Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010), 19.

19 These are the same emotions evident in Psalm 8 where possible feelings of fatalism on seeing the grandeur and scope of the universe (v3-4) are allayed by the recognition of the place that humanity has a role as caretakers within the community of creation (v 5-8).

In the Bible (and the Christian tradition before modern times), nature is certainly de-divinised, but it is not de-sacralised. The creatures are not divine, but they belong to God, are valued by God and point us to God. Adequately perceived, they do not let our attention rest purely on themselves, but take us up into the movement of glorification of God that is their own existence. To deny them divinity is not to depreciate them but to let them be truly themselves in all the variety of their endlessly specific ways of being and doing. Pantheism absorbs them into a vague divine synthesis. Seeing them as creatures of God allows them their quiddity, their being, each precisely that specific and different creature God has made them. It is attention to that quiddity that continually assists our praise of the God who gives them themselves and always surpasses them and us. They belong to a theocentric community of creation whose purpose is to give back to God in praise the being he has given them.²⁰

This Biblical theology of a 'community of creation' offers a corrective to Deism, where God is distant and uninvolved (inevitably leading to human hubris) and at the other extreme, Pantheism, where God and creation are conflated (leading to fatalism). Humanity is part of the community of creation, a creation that is *other* than God, but which continues to be sustained by God's ongoing agency, love and grace.

The metaphor of the 'community of creation' and an alternative way of seeing our relationship with God and the rest of the natural world is evident in Psalm 23. We're invited to experience the provision and sustenance of the cosmos by God through the wondrous beauty and bounty of the natural world.

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still water*

As well, the psalm reminds us, we don't encounter the ongoing horror in this less than perfect world, alone.

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff – they comfort me.*

20 Bauckham, *Bible and Ecology*, 86-87.

21 This imagery of the earth, not as ours, but the Lord's home, is then reinforced in the opening two verses of Psalm 24: 'The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.'

Humanity is a part of the community of creation, a creation that is *other* than God, but which continues to be sustained by his ongoing agency, love and grace.

To the Psalmist, to truly see the world isn't about the sight of ourselves absorbed into the 'Body of God', but enjoying our embeddedness in the community of creation. And therefore, to 'dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.'²²

This understanding of ourselves as part of the community of creation sustained by the ongoing graceful provision of a Divine Other, and this practice of attention to the particular in the places we reside, offer humanity the basis for a new way of living – one characterised by love and hope – essential requirements as we venture into the uncertainties of our present time.

I Thou and Contemplation

Contemplation is not trance or ecstasy
not emotional fire and sweetness that come with religious exaltation
not enthusiasm, not the sense of being "seized"
by an elemental force
and swept into liberation by mystical frenzy.

Contemplation is no pain-killer

In the end the contemplative suffers the anguish of realizing
that he *no longer knows what God is;*

This is a great gain,

Because "*God is not a what,*"
Not a "thing."

There is "no such thing" as God
Because God is neither a "what" or a "thing"
But a pure "Who,"
The "Thou" before whom our inmost "I"
springs
into awareness.

Thomas Merton
A Book of Hours

I/Thou– Closeness and Distance

by John Franklin

The I/Thou dynamic awakens in me two responses: a sense of fearful wonder, and a sense of profound intimacy.

I'm new to the South. And I marvel. The landscapes I've seen (without the need of a passport even) are awesome. In their vastness I feel my smallness and vulnerability. I sense distances beyond my walking, perilous heights, and weathers that could destroy me. And it's all so old that I sense I am less than a blink; here today, and gone! Yet, on the other hand their vastness seems to expand something in me, and I go 'Wow! I'm here! I'm part of this. I have this amazing capacity to observe, reflect and be in relationship with all that lies before me.' I feel the invitation to walk, to explore, and to enter in.

And here is the paradox that Rudolf Otto has named the 'mysterium et fascinans'; the vast mystery that is fearful enough to make us tremble, and yet fascinates and draws us. Perhaps Peter felt it when, despite his closeness to Jesus, he is prompted one day to cry out, "Go away from me!" (Luke 5:8).

God, who is utterly other, dwells in
the heart of our being.

This sense of the tension between wonder and intimacy is captured, I think, in Bernard of Clairvaux's Sermon 4, on the *Song of Songs*: where he talks of three kisses. There is first, he says, the vast gulf between us and God made by 'our iniquities' which make us feel small; hence Peter's cry. The presence of the living God is a fearful thing, the writer to the Hebrews reminds us. Adam and Eve hid – for what that was worth. Isaiah said, 'Burn my lips'.

And how do we respond when aware of the awesome majesty of God? Bernard indicates the grace that reaches out to us across the fearful gulf, and we respond – with the humble kiss of the feet. And this kiss of the feet has the sense: 'I am not worthy, but only say the word'.

And the word is spoken. We are told to arise.

And Bernard says, 'we tend to raise our heads from the dust...for the purpose of kissing, as is the custom, the hand of our benefactor'. This second kiss is a very reverential action, because 'we must give the glory to him from whom it comes'. And we presume nothing. We can't make ourselves, and we can't redeem ourselves. It is all the grace of the 'Thou', the 'You', the utterly other.

But Bernard says, 'For you glory in yourself rather than the Lord, it is your own hand that you kiss, not his, which, according to the words of Job, is the greatest evil and denial of God.' We are not God!



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So we approach the fearful majesty on the ground with the kiss of the feet, and then at the invitation of grace, we may rise and reverently offer the kiss of the hand, but it doesn't end there.

We have fallen short, 'We have sinned in ignorance; we have sinned in weakness; we have sinned through our own deliberate fault'. But, says God, we are the work of his hands, 'fearfully and wonderfully made'" [Ps 139:14]. Jesus says he abides in us [John J 15:4]. We are, says Paul, temples of the Spirit [1 Cor 6:19]. The Other One, the Thou, reaches out to embrace us across the fearful divide and draws us to the kiss of the mouth (Songs 1:2).

Well of course God doesn't have feet, hands, or mouth, says Bernard, but they represent certain modes of our encounter with him; "He is in no way what these things are". But in the image of the kiss of the mouth, we sense God's desire for intimacy and union with us, which once again is an awesome and humbling thing. The kiss of the mouth gives life to us. And as the mouth generates words, says Bernard, it imparts wisdom for the living of this gifted, kissed life.

I believe the words 'I/Thou' speak into the dynamics of a profound relationship that is at once fearful in the incomprehensibility of the Other, and fearful in the awesome intimacy of the Other.

Bernard says, 'The heartfelt desire to admit one's guilt brings one down in lowliness before God, as it were to his feet; the heartfelt devotion of a worshipper finds in God renewal and refreshment, the touch, as it were, of his hand; and the delights of contemplation lead on to that ecstatic repose – that is the fruit of the kiss of his mouth'.

And so we live in this I/Thou paradox: no one is more intimately present to us than our loving God, and no one is more incomprehensible.

God who is utterly other, dwells in the heart of our being. And in the mystery we stand – 'I' and 'Thou'.

In that stretching relationship, is life in all of its fullness.

¹ New Zealand Prayer Book

I
T
H
O
U
A
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I
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Y
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S

I Am Yours

by Jo Anastasiadis

Before God I stand
Hands bowed at my sides
Offering the little I can:
'I am Yours.'

No frills, no bells, no whistles.
Just fear and pain and ordinariness.

All that I am:
The good, the bad and all that's in-between.

A simple gift
Offered in simple words:
'I am Yours.'

And God's hand reached out to me
Accepting the gift in its totality

A smile of pleasure
In moist eyes.

And then an echo whispered
'And I am yours.'

All that God is
Offered to all that I am.

My eyes fill with tears
At the enormity of the gift.
The God of the universe
Gifting mortal me God's self.

I am unworthy
But not worthless.

I am not understanding
But totally understood.

I struggle to accept,
Yet find I am accepted.

I wrestle with such love,
And find I am still loved.

'I am yours,'
Echoes in two hearts.

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A Prayer by Sue Pickering

Jesus,
an old hymn tells me that you are
lover of my soul.
Lover.
I wriggle under the implication of
that word.
For if you are lover of my soul
you long for a response
to show you
that I have seen you for who you truly are
- gentlest Love
- warming my heart
- stirring my desire
 for more of you ...
 and more of you ...
 and more of you ...
until I am lost in the mystery
of being with you
in you, of you,
totally,
utterly,
One.
Help me to risk drawing closer to you today.
AMEN

Walking the via unitiva by Sue Pickering

As you may have done, I've read of saints who've been caught up in mystical union with God, in another-worldly instant where desire for God is fulfilled in a light burst of ecstasy and self is lost in the Beloved.

But that's never happened to me.

Even on a recent retreat where I gave myself as fully as I could to the God who loves me and whom I can trust, there were no fireworks or fanfares, just a lovely wooing and gentle healing which thrilled me to the core.

But no loss of self in the Beloved. Perhaps that is my 'fault' and in writing this article I risk exposing this deficit in my prayerfulness, or a resistance to being open to the fullness of God.

But perhaps there's another way to experience union, another way to live *the via unitiva*? That 'other way' may be more common than we have realised. Quietly shaped by those graced moments when there's an awareness of God's indwelling life that banishes doubt and suffuses the soul with joy – sanctifying the simplest action in the midst of the everyday.

When I was eighteen I was part of a rowing four, and tried to participate without 'catching a crab' or falling out. Once or twice I glimpsed the delight of a balanced boat: oars sweeping in unison, slipping through dawn's misty water with a soothing swish, silence, swish, silence – it was magic. My light frame and lack of physical strength meant an early end to my rowing 'career'. Yet that insight – into people working together, sharing a moment of intense and joyful connection – touches me to this day.

The Gospel speaks in several places about Jesus' desire for his disciples to experience close collaboration and joy. To be lovingly entwined with him – closer than breathing, Spirit permeating spirit, human will aligned with God's desire – to build the now and future kingdom of justice and peace.

'On that day you will know that I am in the Father and you in me, and I in you...

Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.'¹

But above all, for me, the
via unitiva is experienced as joy
- a deep joy that wells up from my
core when the day is full
of grace.

¹ John 14:20, 23

and

'Abide in me as I abide in you...'²

What Jesus seems to want is for his disciples, for us, to have the essence of God so woven into our being, that the decisions we make, the conduct of our relationships, the unfolding of each day, are informed by his Spirit – so that we act, speak, and think, with the compassion and wisdom of Christ.

For most of us this sense of being one with God doesn't happen in an instant, but develops gradually over our Christian journey. You will have memories and experiences of your own growth towards union with God, but for me it began with isolated moments –

- hearing myself say things far wiser than I would have thought of, and wondering 'where did that come from?'
- noticing a 'nudge' from the Holy Spirit toward some practical act of care
- being moved to tears while administering the bread at Eucharist
- feeling a surprising peace in the middle of trying circumstances
- being unexpectedly filled with a deep love for the people around me

In these moments, it was as if I were being invited to recognise the Spirit was already at work in and through me; the mind of Christ was beginning to infuse my thinking, the presence of God was calming my spirit, and the love of God was indeed warming my heart. It was the beginning of an awareness of being so close to God, there was no sense of 'I/Thou' but rather an embryonic state of union: the first steps towards spiritual intimacy.

My current perspective on walking the *via unitiva* is this – as we invite the Spirit of Jesus to guide us, as we pray with and study scripture, as we include God in every aspect of our day, no matter how painful or petty, as we engage in contemplative prayer, as we allow ourselves to name and own those attitudes which cloud our Christ-vision – the isolated moments will increase in frequency until larger parts of each day are shaped, not by *our* will and devising, but by the grace of God.

For me this process is aided by daily centring prayer – still patchy at times and rarely with any felt sense of God's presence – yet building in me a willingness to let go of my agenda, welcome the Spirit's presence and work in me, and clear a listening space in my heart so I can be inwardly still and free enough of my ego needs to be used by God for God's purposes.

Such 'God-infused' days seem to have some or all of the following elements:

- a different quality to time – slowing down or expanding to accommodate what needs to be done

² John 15:4a

- a sense of synchronicity – being in the right place at the right time
- sometimes – especially celebrating the Eucharist or preaching – physically feeling the power of God flowing
- not having to strive to make things happen
- being given fitting words for a person or situation
- speaking without premeditation as if the words arrive fresh from God's mind
- an abiding trust in the grace of God to meet every need
- increasingly 'letting go and letting God'

This view of union is anchored in an earthy, hands-on engagement with struggle and suffering, with lament and celebration – a being-with God in every situation however mundane or miraculous.

But above all, for me, the *via unitiva* is experienced as joy – a deep joy that wells up from my core when the day is full of grace. A joy which has nothing to do with outward circumstances and everything to do with surrender to God.

Jesus tells his disciples, 'I have said these things to you so my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.'³ And this joy of the Lord is indeed our strength⁴. With such a profound joy, only the language of human loving can approach the range and intensity of feelings evoked by the deep spiritual energy bubbling through our being.

Which brings us back to where we began – the ecstasy of full mystical union.

The indescribable experience of living fully in Christ and Christ living fully in us.

So I want to conclude with words from someone who seems to have known the 'both/and' of full mystical union as well as the daily presence of God within and working through her.

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body...

Teresa of Avila.

³ John 15:11.

⁴ Nehemiah 8:10

Joining the Divine Dance: Union and Relationship by Sheila Pritchard

There's a lot of discussion these days about 'unitive consciousness' being *more desirable than* a 'dualistic mindset'. Right there in the first sentence is the problem! We're wired to define things *in contrast* to something else – and that in itself is dualism! But before we leap to give dualism a bad press let's recognise that to describe anything we have to give it some shape, quality or characteristic that makes it recognisable from the things around it.

Separation is necessary for definition. Language itself doesn't allow us to communicate without dualistic categories of left/right, up/down, dark/light, in/out etc. In human relationships, there can only be an 'I-thou' encounter between two people who know they are separate individuals.

So, is all the talk of unitive consciousness rather over-rated and best left for the 'esoteric mystical' types? No! Union is at the heart of reality. (Why else do we talk of the *universe*?!) This apparent paradox dissolves when we accept that *both* dualism *and* unitive consciousness are essential.

So God in God's-self is One
and simultaneously a
being-in-relationship

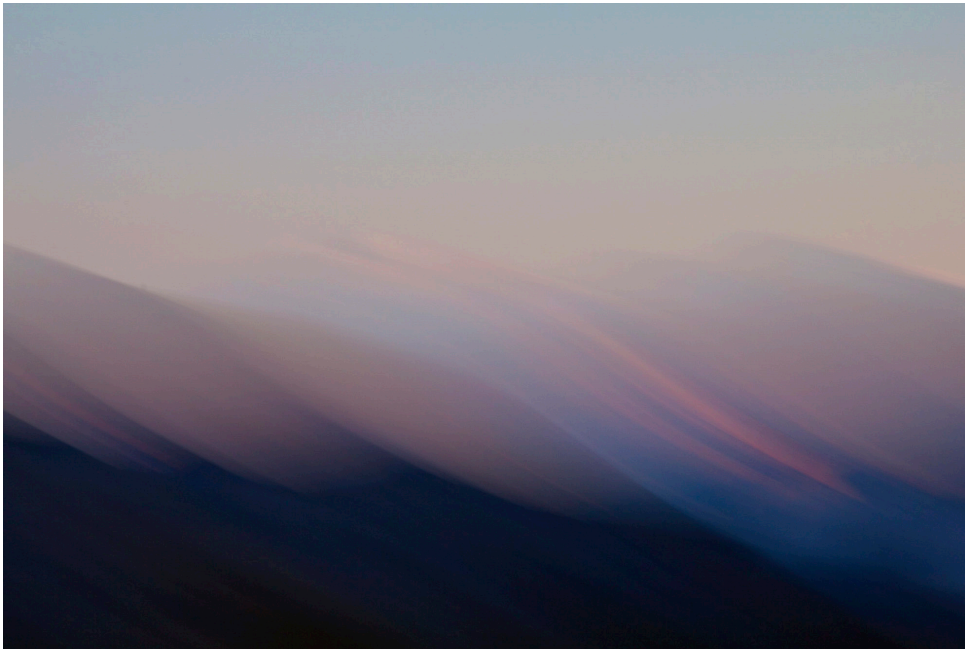
The key is to start with the reality of the whole, and see the parts in the context of the whole.¹ I find the human body a helpful example. Every separate cell in your body plays a unique part, but only when functioning in the context of the whole.

The best example of all is God! Our Christian conviction that 'God is One', sits alongside our Trinitarian description of God as Father, Son and Spirit. However difficult it is to get our finite minds around this seeming paradox, we somehow 'know' that *both* unity *and* relationship are essential to the character of God and our experience of God. Jesus clearly lived with the both/and paradox. He talked *with* God in an I-Thou relationship with his Abba. He also said: 'I and my father are one', expressing his unitive experience.²

So God in God's-self is One and simultaneously a being-in-relationship. What's more, the human Jesus could experience his union with God *and* have a relationship with God. What might this both/and view mean for us?

I remember many years ago discussing 'New Age' spirituality with a class of theology students. They tacitly classed anything new age as bad. They viewed as heresy, the claim of many new age groups that 'all is one'.

- 1 I'm grateful to Cynthia Bourgeault who expresses this point several times in her writing and recorded talks.
- 2 See also Ken Wilber's work on "The Three Faces of God" <http://www.greatintegralawakening.com/ken-wilber.html>



© Rolling Light, Photo by Barbara Lee, Wanaka barbaralee@xtra.co.nz

I recall feeling uneasy about this and trying to suggest that 'they' (i.e. new agers) may be on to something. But I was still looking at life through a very dualistic lens. And of course this meant I 'saw' the question we were discussing dualistically too! No-one can 'see' unitively with dualistic eyes. I think that's what Jesus was getting at when he said: 'If your eye is single your whole body will be full of light...'³

Like many others, in recent years, my awareness has been growing, stretching, and opening into this wonderful mystery of unitive consciousness. And this, in turn, influences how I relate to Creation, to others and to God.

Creation: I can no longer see anything in Creation as simply 'flora and fauna' with no particular relationship to me. Everything we do to any part of this planet affects the well-being of the whole. By now most of us are reasonably well informed about what it would mean for the Varroa Destructor mite to wipe out the bees that fertilise our orchards; or the impact of milling forests that are 'the lungs of the earth', or allowing toxic waste to run into our rivers.

Closer to home, consider the rubbish we send each week to the landfill, or the water we waste leaving the tap running when we clean our teeth. I can no longer claim ignorance of the intimate connection between my actions and the effect on the whole. Each plant, animal, river and tree plays a unique part in the finely balanced whole of God's good earth.

Others: Some years ago I was walking with someone who was talking about how every person was in some way part of her. At that stage of my development I found this very hard to take. I could agree up to a point. Yes, I could accept if I saw someone being selfish, I could agree I am too. Or when I admire someone's ability to be assertive, there was the same potential in me. But to say a drug addict or a prostitute (or an opera singer for that matter!) were in any way 'part of me', seemed quite outlandish.

I was definitely looking *only* through a dualistic 'us and them' lens. Sadly this lens is often the one used in religious expression. 'We're the chosen people. They're the outcasts.' 'We are the Jews. They are the Gentiles.' 'We are saved. They are lost.' 'We are righteous. They are terrorists.'

I see more clearly now why Jesus told us to 'love our enemies',⁴ and what he meant when he said: 'whatever you do to least of these, you do to me.'⁵ This isn't just a way of saying 'we' should do nice things for 'them'. It's much more radical than that! In the wholeness of the human family, we *are* part of them and they *are* part of us.

No wonder Jesus also said 'love your neighbor as yourself'⁶. And I'm coming to see he didn't simply mean 'as *much* as you love yourself', (though that's a pretty good start!).

3 Matthew 6:22.
4 Matthew 5:44
5 Matthew 25:40
6 Matthew 22:39

He may well have meant, 'your neighbor **is** yourself, so extend love to every part of yourself in this mysterious unity of life'.

God: Here I return to what Jesus modeled and taught. He was able to integrate his *union* with God with his human need to have an I/Thou *relationship* with God. He explicitly taught us to do the same. The same divine spirit that was in him is given to us.⁷ And Jesus expected we could experience this union in ways that would allow us to 'do what he did – and even greater'⁸.

I remember as a teenager being stunned when the reality of 'Christ in you, the hope of glory'⁹ really struck me. In one of those moments of true insight, I really 'got' the enormity of what this means. Now, at least fifty years later, I'm still learning the steps of that dance. And I dance with the God who sometimes feels incomprehensibly 'other', and sometimes closer than my own breath. Both are true!

Anthony de Mello tells a story about a little fish swimming in the sea and asking an older fish: What's this thing called the ocean that everyone talks about? I can't find it!¹⁰ Perhaps as we laugh sympathetically with the little fish, we can realise we have the same 'problem' which is simultaneously a blessing; for it is in God that 'we live and move and have our being.'¹¹

7 John 14:26
8 John 14:12
9 Colossians 1:27
10 *The Song of the Bird* p14
11 Acts 17:2

Psalm 103
by Anna Johnstone

*How can I explain you?
Will I ever understand you?
Talk about as far as the
east is from the west
that's what it's like
thinking of you
with my mind*

*You are so O.T.T.
in fact, over-the-topness
is what you do best*

*You laugh, glad I
recognise this in you
It's okay to recognise it
but it doesn't stop there
I'm supposed to be like you
East-west, chalk-cheese*

*It's your heart, of course, that's
where we're so different
Yours is so huge, so full of love
and mine's the standard model
limited in its functions*

*The patience component has
a short life, like some batteries
or 200 watt bulbs which
briefly boast their brilliance
then die untimely deaths*

*Patience
Head-shaking stuff
when I think of yours*

*I'd have wiped us long ago
but with gentleness you wait
encouragement not condemnation
your motto*

*And what about your memory?
You wipe slates clean then
forget what was written
yet details stick in mine like
an overcrowded blackboard*

*Is there any hope?
Could anything ever bridge
the chasm between
your nature and mine?*

*What's that, God?
There is no gap?
Surely you mock me!
Please help me understand*

*You look on the desires
of my heart and give them
the big stamp of approval
totally overlooking the messes
I make in trying to
live them through*

*That's overwhelming, God
but is it just?
Or is it your mercy
operating overtime?*

*Mercy
Now that's another area
we need to talk about*



Christ Carving by Ted Mead given to Andrew Dunn

Union with God

by Andrew Dunn

The classical description of the spiritual itinerary as 'three ways' or 'three phases' has much to commend it as steps on the journey of faith. It's a journey with ancient roots: a time of self-realisation, repentance, cleansing and forgiveness (*the purgative way*), leading to a time of illumination in the grace and love of God (*the illuminative way*), leading on to a sense of God's continual presence, indeed union with God, with Christ (*the unitive way*).

We see this pattern in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son as the lost son comes to his senses, realises his need and returns home to be met by his waiting father's lavish love and reunion with the family.

Over centuries, influential writers have left us a rich set of writings and images describing this movement: Evagria of Pontus in the 4th century AD, Teresa of Avila's 16th century works such as *Interior Castle*, the opening week of Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, John o' the Cross' spiritual classics, including *Ascent of Mt Carmel* and *Dark Night of the Soul*.

What's debated today is whether these steps, phases or landscapes are always as rigidly defined as classical spiritual writers suggest. Peter Tyler notes, 'the hold of the concept [of the three ways] on Christian imaginations has lessened in recent years. Also there's Rahner's famous critique of conceiving the spiritual life in distinct stages.'¹

Indeed, recent writers see the sense of God's presence as central to the Christian life, not just the end product or later discovery. The impact of Pentecostal teaching and the Charismatic Renewal has opened up the spiritual itinerary to more immediate experiences of dunking in the blessings of the Holy Spirit. As Rahner noted: 'the devout Christian of the future will be either a mystic – one who's experienced something – or cease to be anything at all.'²

Today more focus is upon faith development and how contemplative elements feed our faith. For many contemporary pilgrims, the 'ways' are repeated over and over again almost cyclically – often simplified and made more stark in the process. And however faith develops, there comes a time, earlier or later, when we're captivated by a sense of profound union with God.

there comes a time for many
pilgrims when they are captivated
by a sense of profound union
taking place, sometimes earlier,
sometimes later

¹ *Theological Investigations* 3 quoted in *The Triple Way*, *New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, 2005, 627

² *Theological Investigations* 7, (1971) 15

Echoes of Union in Scripture

Yes, there is reference to this union and teaching about it in Scripture.

In John 17, Jesus prays for unity: 'As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us... The glory you have given me I have given them, so they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me that they may become completely one...'³

St Paul expresses the depth of this union this way: 'I've been crucified with Christ; it's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.'⁴

Indeed, James Stewart sees union with Christ as the heart of Paul's religion. 'This, more than any other – more than justification, more than sanctification, more even than reconciliation – is the key which unlocks the secrets of his soul.'⁵ James Dunn counted 83 times Paul uses the theology of union 'in Christ' and related motifs.⁶

An Experience

And scripture points to something greater, deeper, and richer than ideas or theories. This 'something' is an experience or string of experiences we can't deny or ignore. Something that happens throughout Paul's life evoking a mysticism that pervades his writing. Paul knew experientially the profound sense of being met, embraced, loved and invited, ever more deeply into Christ Jesus, into God. So too, can we.

Paul's theology grows out of these insights and discoveries, rather than the other way round! His Damascus Road encounter with the risen Lord Jesus turns this theologian and scholar into an explorer of spirituality and its implications for faith and life. Paul's three year retreat in the Arabian Desert, allows him to tease out the implications of an ongoing encounter which shapes him for life.

The Cosmological Shift

For many of us this sense of deepening relationship, merging of heart and mind, and even physical union with Christ, is not unusual. It can shift our view of God in life and creation, from outside observer to enveloped participant.

This cosmological shift changes everything. We discover an enriching engagement within the Creation of which we're a part. We enter a relationship that involves us in the grace and love and pain and starkness of it all. A sense of profound union with all Creation may develop, and also with God.⁷

3 John 17:21-23 NRSV

4 Galatians 2:19-20 NRSV

5 *A Man in Christ*, Hodder, 1964, 147

6 *The Theology of St Paul the Apostle*, Eerdmans, 1998, 396

7 See Brian D. McLaren's *Naked Spirituality* (Hodder 2011) pages 11-16 where he describes three experiences of this radical shift at a weekend camp as 'my triune baptism into spirituality'.

An Important Distinction

We make an important distinction here. We're not talking about *pantheism* where God is seen as everything and everything as God. Rather we speak of *pan-en-theism*: the healthy Christian view that everything in Creation is in God's care and love, and God is in everything created.

Indeed as St Paul puts it, in Christ 'all things hold together'.⁸ This ennobling view of union with Christ encourages his disciples to the forefront of care for the Earth and its resources. What, for example, do we do with the fact that if everyone in the world had our New Zealand lifestyle it would take the resources of three planet earths to supply it!

It's an ennobling view of everything and everyone in union with, and held in being, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I AND THOU

I have a small framed version of Colin McCahon's painting, *I AND THOU*, on my dresser. It reminds me that in the wonder of the sense of God's presence and burgeoning love, we – God, me and everything else – aren't simply one glorious glob. As Cynthia Bourgeault notes, 'we're not all a great monism undifferentiated.'⁹ We are not and were not meant to become like that. So Buber's insight of the I/Thou which prompted the theme for this edition of Refresh, helps us keep the distinctions clear, while encouraging openness to the loving presence of THOU in all his/her lively relational intentions.

Adequate Images

Quite early on in the experience of union, words fail us. We resort to images, metaphors and similes – marriage, human loving, rain on thirsty ground, fruiting branches, the washing motion of the sea, sunrise, deep pools, the warmth of the sun; or images of emptiness, darkness, coldness, fruitlessness. There's no limit to the accounts of what it's like. And just as the classical writers give us clues as to how it was for them, each of us may legitimately describe our own. All these are permission-giving not definitive, as we explore the pathways of faith today.

My own images focus more on going deeper, coming closer, and being enveloped, than on ascending a mountain or moving through rooms and passageways. Whatever our descriptions, we must always guard against images of striving and working harder to get to some predetermined place, status or state in our relationship with God. It's safer to wait upon the lavish love that woos us, attracts us or crushes us, each in our own particular way, and to respond as cautiously or freely as we may.

8 Colossians 1:17 NRSV

9 Shalem Institute interview on The Unitive Way – Shambala website

*With or without images – Union and Kataphatic/Apophatic Shifts*¹⁰

As the journey simplifies and deepens, many leave behind familiar landmarks of experience, Scripture and belief about grace and faith. As these become empty and inadequate they are left behind. A stark sense of God's presence and Jesus' invitation to follow more profoundly, comes upon us.

We may feel crucified by him as the 'lightsome' experiences of early faith give way to the 'darksome' movements of later faith, and as the health and vigour of earlier years give way to the limitations and crippling of age – as we prepare for the transition of death to life beyond.

This *apophatic* phase of our journey isn't easy, and our sense of loss acute until we can recognise the gains of simpler presence, deepening mystery and more honest following. Thomas Keating calls this 'Resting in God beyond concepts and particular acts'.

As the mystery deepens, metaphor and simile become vital for thinking and talking about faith, as does greater sensitivity to where others are on their journey. The 'presence of absence'¹¹ can feel like loss until we learn to live in it and the invitation comes to set out once again in love and trust – come what may!

As the LORD promises, 'I will give you treasures in darkness, riches hidden in secret places.'¹²

Finally, a word of caution –we must take care our own experiences of union aren't used to control or interpret others' experiences. We must remember to give them air to breathe, and space to thrive in their own discoveries of God and grace and love.

10 'lights on' and 'lights off' or 'lightsome' and 'darksome' as Thomas Keating describes them. A most important distinction little understood in popular spirituality today. Desert times and dark night experiences often signify the beginning of this movement.

11 See SGM Newsletters Winter 2000 – *The Presence of God – exploring our mystical traditions* and Summer 2000 – *The Presence of God -The Presence of Absence*. Available on SGM website www.sgm.org.nz

12 Isaiah 45:3 NRSV

One and Other: A Contemplative exploration

by Colette Blockley

I'm a volunteer Parish Nurse¹ in a small rural community. The role involves presence and listening with the chronically or terminally ill, and the bereaved, at home or in hospital, in crisis and times of transition.

Although a Catholic, my nursing practice is inter-denominational. People may self-refer, or they're sent by local doctors, priests and ministers. My philosophy of practice comes from Matthew 25:35-36. 'For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me; sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me.'

As my mentor Mother Teresa used to say, pointing to the tip of each finger, 'You did it to me!' Matthew 25:40. As I work with the sick, I care for Jesus. Jesus is with me and in me. I am His hands, His feet, His smile and His voice.

The I/Thou theme emerges from a theological reflection I did recently on a composite scenario from my parish nursing experience using a framework by Peter Buttitta². All names are fictitious. I hope readers find the strategy useful.

Step One: Choose an event to reflect upon.

Bob and Molly were an elderly childless couple of faithful Christians living the Gospel of love given to us by Jesus. Although I regularly visited them 'to keep my eye on them,' I always came away having received more than I could ever give. This couple shone with love of each other. Bob and I would try to solve all the problems of the world whilst Molly would listen quietly, making the coffee, adding the odd gem every now and then when she could get a word in. Bob's sense of humour never failed to delight. His sense of justice and compassion was an inspiration.

Step Two: Recall the specifics of the event.

Increasingly Bob's health had been failing. I knew I had to put the hard word on him to get to the doctor. It took time and a threat I'd make the appointment, before Bob finally saw the local doctor. Too soon after this Bob was diagnosed with cancer. I was not surprised. But what did amaze was Bob's beautiful acceptance of his terminal diagnosis. 'We all have to go sometime.' His main concern was his darling wife.

**As I work with the sick, I care
for Jesus. Jesus is with me
and in me. I am His hands,
His feet, His smile and
His voice.**

1

2 Buttitta, P. Theological reflection in health ministry: A strategy for parish nurses.

As Bob became frailer my visits increased as did admissions to hospital. He hated going because it meant time apart from his beloved Molly who couldn't drive. To visit him, she had to depend on the generosity of locals to make the thirty minute trip.

When Bob was able to come home I helped arrange the district nurse, the social worker and the occupational therapist so he could remain home as long as possible.

The hardest role was looking toward the future when Bob would need full time hospital care or go to God. We talked about life, death, suffering, heaven and hell, and of course what would happen to Molly. Hard questions had to be asked and arrangements made with sensitivity, love and compassion. Near the end Bob struggled with the transition to hospital level care and died peacefully soon after. Molly in her own quiet way, accepted residential care. As her sight fades, I continue to visit, reading to her from the gardening magazines she loves and doing her washing.

Step Three: Recall your feelings and bodily sensations generated by the event.

I grew to care for Bob and Molly with great love and respect. My marriage had failed many years before, and to watch this couple who adored each other, stirred up feelings I thought were long buried. Over time I regained hope for the institution of marriage that had died. As time passed, I worried how I'd cope when Bob died and when he did, there were feelings of deep sadness. I never felt sorry for Bob or Molly, for she accepted Bob's death with the grace of a saint. But I was going to miss him terribly.

Step Four: Name the main issue(s) or value(s) at play in this situation, and the cultural factors affecting them.

From my perspective the main issue was grief. In our society, growing old can be a lonely unsupported time. The enormous grief involved in the transitions of aging, and frailty, and going into care are poorly understood. And there was my own grief at losing a dear friend. As a nurse and a practical person I had wanted to 'fix everything,' to make it all better. I was powerless to change the inevitable. All I could do as best I could, was to journey with Bob and Molly as they weathered the storm of life-changing transition. I was called to 'be with' not 'do for.'

Step Five: Create an image or metaphor based upon this event

The image that came to mind was of Mary the mother of Our Lord, as Jesus walked to His death on the cross at Calvary.

Step Six: Retrieve elements from religious tradition related to this experience

As well as she could, Mary was there to witness and support Jesus as He stumbled to Calvary. Seeing her beloved son cruelly beaten, nailed to a cross and dying in agony, Mary's feelings would have been powerful. Was she angry and outraged at the injustice, at Jesus' pain and suffering? Did she wonder about the will of God? Did she feel she'd failed in some way or wonder what life would have looked like had things been different?

Did she feel fear as she thought about the future?

Step Seven: Assert the input from Step Six with and against this event and your image of it, to clarify and challenge your questions, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions and ways of acting.

As I pictured Mary tracing Jesus' footsteps to the cross, standing there below Him as He struggled and eventually took His last breath, I wept.

My tears began as tears of frustration, anger, loss and helplessness. As I identified with the Mother of our God, I began to feel an enormous sense of peace and joy as I realised God was present and all would be well.

Step Eight: Identify insights and questions.

The following questions came to mind: What could I have done differently? How would this experience strengthen and equip me to help others in transition? What support did I need to be a more effective practitioner?

Step Nine: Make a decision about what action to take and DO IT!

I promptly made appointments for spiritual direction and supervision.

I came to realise I'd done my best. I reconnected with my belief we're all fellow travellers on a journey to God. All given gifts and talents to assist us, and responsibility to use them for the benefit of others along the way.

The International Nurse Resource Centre understands parish nursing as a specialty practice and professional model of health ministry distinguished by the following beliefs: The role reclaims the historic roots of health and healing found in many religious traditions. The spiritual dimension is central. Personal spiritual formation is essential. The practice holds all people are sacred and must be treated with respect and dignity. Compelled by these beliefs we serve and advocate with compassion, mercy and justice. We assist and support individuals, families, and communities to become more active partners in the stewardship of personal and communal health resources. We understand health to be a dynamic process, which embodies the spiritual, psychological, physical, and social dimensions of the person. Spiritual health is central to wellbeing and influences a person's entire being. A sense of wellbeing can exist in the presence of disease, and healing can exist in absence of cure.

Fire and Wildfire

by Margaret Tooley

Fire...
Warming
Enlightening
Protecting
Bringing safety

You are the fire I seek, the fire I yearn for,
the fire I invite...

But sometimes the fire is wild...

Purging
Destroying
Martyring
Consuming

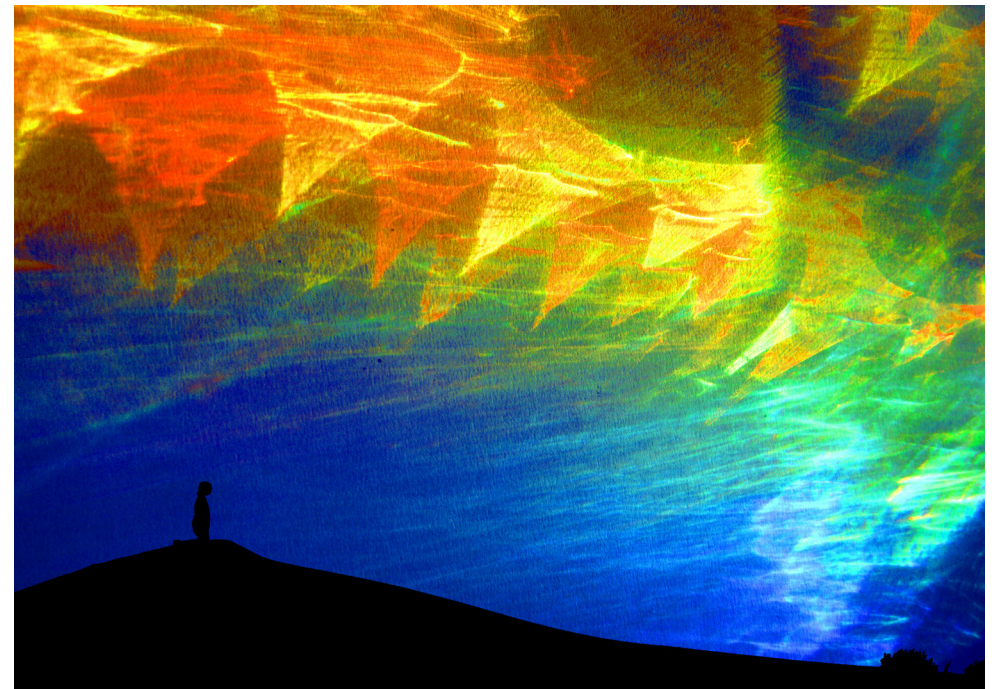
You are the fire I avoid, the fire I dread,
the fire I run from....

Until trapped, I turn to discover

The fire that consumes anger with solace
The fire that consumes bitterness with sweetness
The fire that consumes injustice with peace
The fire that consumes resentment with love.

And standing before the bush that burns yet is not consumed

The holy ground
The sacred space
I cover my eyes,
I throw away my shoes,
And pray that the flame that never dies
Will make its home in me.



©Prayer fires by Joanna Ray. See more of Joanna's work at www.veritasse.co.uk

Cosmic Intimacy by Cynthia Bourgeault

I have come to see that our yearning for intimacy is the way in which we human beings show ourselves to be most profoundly made in the image of God. Too often our pictures of God distort this essential point. When we think of God as a self-sufficient "first cause"; when we pray (as in one of those Eucharistic liturgies), "Oh God, you have no need of our prayers," we are allowing our philosophical minds to betray what our hearts know so indelibly: that God's yearning for intimacy is the real cause of everything, and the only reality in which our hearts can ultimately find refuge. The old Islamic saying puts it well when it depicts God speaking these words: "I was a hidden treasure and I longed to be known. And so I created the worlds visible and invisible."

That yearning for intimacy runs through the marrow of everything, joining together the visible and invisible realms, everything we know of our own hearts with everything we know of the cosmic heart. Quarks, molecules, human relationships in all their messiness - everything reverberates with the big bang of God's primordial yearning for self-communication, for a gravitational field of "knowing and being known." That's the profound mystical intuition the doctrine of the Trinity holds at its heart. Even the word "consciousness" begins with "con"—"with"; otherwise it's just "sciousness" - omniscient, perhaps, but all locked up in itself.

The divine energetic flow is more like *eros* than *agape*, as mystics of all spiritual traditions have intuitively known. Its yearning is palpably felt in our own hearts, with an intensity almost more than we can bear. In fact, that's precisely how one of Christianity's greatest mystics, William Blake, expressed it: "We are here on earth a little while to learn to bear the beams of love." That long over-idealized (and over-sanitized) agape, so often depicted as the primary nature of divine love, is not how the situation actually stands; agape is the Omega of Divine Love, not the Alpha.

Once again the Trinity furnishes us with the template for understanding. It shows us how Love becomes quieted in itself, serenely flowing and gentled, as the eros that originally called it into being is gently, patiently subjected to *kenosis*, or "letting go." Person by Person, Love simply empties itself into the Other. Not a renunciation, not a pushing away, but a gentle loosening of the grip on entitlement and insistence, so that eventually, in the turning of the wheel - (as the poet T.S. Eliot envisioned it):

*...the tongues of flame are in-folded
into the crowned knot of fire,
and the fire and the rose are one.*

I see this almost as a divine alchemical formula: $A=Ek$, in which *A* stands for agape, *E* for eros, and *k* for kenosis. It is the immutable law of the transformation of love, and it is the purpose to which everything on heaven and earth is bent. Ah, but at what cost!

"The presence of God is the absence of God," my hermit teacher brother Raphael (Rafe) used to remind me. It was when he showed me how to turn the ache around, to

experience it as God's yearning for *me* rather than my yearning for God, that I eventually came to experience the ache itself as the tether connecting us: the homing beacon of God's presence made manifest in the forcefield tugging at my heart.

You can do that with a human beloved as well. I learned that when Rafe died sixteen years ago, having promised me for three months beforehand that "nothing would be taken away" from the intimacy of our connection. Already during the last months of his life on earth, he had begun to prep me for this new mode of communication, training me how to sense his more subtle presence through the tether of yearning that joined together our two hermitages, a mile or so apart, in a single communion of hearts.

Learning this skill while still in human flesh has helped me to rely on it much more confidently in these sixteen years now since his death, as our human intimacy has indeed continued uninterrupted, only now mediated through "the love that moves the sun and the stars."

During the time of our human journey together - a far too short three and a half years, but evidently long enough for the lessons that had to be learned within it - I deeply resisted the standard celibate formulation that "our only real hunger is for God. No human being can fill that space."

Not only did that statement seem patently untrue (I knew very well whom it was I hungered for), it also seemed to have the dubious effect of turning God into an object, a suitor among other suitors, to whom saying "yes" required that I say "no" to a human beloved. That simply didn't ring true with my experience of God, and I resisted having my flesh-and-blood of actual human intimacy so cavalierly spiritualized.

Nowadays I see the situation somewhat differently. What I'd say now is not that we "hunger for God," but rather, that *love is an infinite yearning within us*, which cannot, precisely because of its infinite origin, be completely consumed or exhausted in the finite realm. It is, as I said, an echoing reverberation of that primordial "big bang" of God's own yearning for intimacy, and so its ultimate trajectory will always be toward the infinite. It will eventually overleap its fragile human vessels and point directly, like a finger to the moon, toward Divine love.

That does not mean we give up our human beloveds; but it does mean that Love will eventually tend to turn all our human encounters into "the bush that burns but is not consumed." By its own internal dynamism it pushes toward what T.S. Eliot (again, in one of his *Four Quartets*) calls "another intensity," where Agape-come-full will usher us into "a further union, a deeper communion."

Even in the most intense, passionate, "starcrossed lovers," one-of-a-kind human relationship, the $A=Ek$ principle still holds firm. It is only through widening space, letting

... the tongues of flame are
in-folded into the crowned
knot of fire, and the fire and
the rose are one.
T.S. Eliot

go, deferring to the trajectory of Love itself, that human desiring will put on the wedding garments of eternity.

The great human love stories all ring with this alchemy, of course. That most magnificent of metaphysical poets, John Donne, wrote about it with brilliant clarity in his "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning":

*Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go endure not yet
a breach, but an expansion,
like gold to airy thinness beat.
What part of alchemy do you not understand?*

But while the path of relationship with a human beloved is so often and authentically the gateway into divine love, the minefields are also real. It runs the risk of diverting the quest for divine intimacy into the search for the perfect partner - or worse yet, stalling out the whole process in despair or envy on the assumption that the only way to get into the ballpark in the grail quest for intimacy is if one first has first found a "somebody" to be intimate with.

Not the case! The single most astonishing discovery I have made in these decades now of spiritual journeying was put into words by Robert Sardello in his wonderful book *Silence* (Goldenstone Press, 2006). There I finally could claim the truth I had actually come to recognize in my own life of prayer: that intimacy is not simply a current flowing between two bodies; *it is an intrinsic property of the human heart and can be experienced directly as such.*

Precisely because our hearts are holograms of the divine heart and reverberate in that same vibratory tether, we can come to know "pure intimacy" as a relational field verifiable within our own being. All it takes is that we learn to sit in the stillness of contemplative prayer and find our way into our own hearts through sensation—not through memory, emotional drama, or any of those other cataphatic faculties that ruffle the surface of the heart and disturb its perfectly mirroring capacities.

And indeed, I had first become familiar with this bandwidth of pure intimacy through my long years of Centering prayer. But not until reading Sardello did I understand it for what it was; I simply recognized it as a certain "golden tenderness" that sometimes engulfed me in the nanoseconds between the thoughts.

Cosmic intimacy is the trousseau with which we come to this planet, the reverberating frequency through which we are able to realize all of this beautiful, holy, God-saturated universe as "the beloved." It is hardwired into our hearts, so that we will always be able to find our way home. And so that God's love can again and again come full and whole in the crucible of our human hearts.

This article was originally published in Radical Grace, available through The Center for Action and Contemplation cacraddicalgrace.org. Used by permission of the author.

©Sometimes

By Anna Johnstone

Sometimes the world can seem
a big place
and I often feel small
insignificant
inconsequential

Sometimes I have to
remind myself
that everything's okay
that I'm not lost
that you're right here
beside me

Not reserved for special occasions
for rare times when
I'm spiritually shining but
now as I eat my Weetbix
and think I need more milk
now as I make a to-do list
senior momenting about
some important omission
now as I wonder what to wear
for the book launch
and consider
a new shirt

Ordinary stuff, God, yet
warmed with your presence
imbued with your life

You love me to bits
sharing my moments
assuring me that
the future's as safe
as this minute now
as I breathe gently
and the tui
sings a love song
on the branch
close by

Musings on Metaphors

by Trish McBride

Augustine is supposed to have said all language about God is metaphor.

On reflection, this seems self-evident: no words can 'capture' the One beyond words. The Bible is, among other things, a compendium of metaphors to help us understand differing aspects or modes of the Holy One. With metaphors, there's always both the 'Is like this' and the 'Is not like this'.

And words are themselves metaphors – if we think of a four-legged creature that moos and gives milk, the reality of its being isn't affected by whether it's named in the various European languages as cow, *vache*, *kuh*, *mucca* etc. The words point to the reality of the animal, but do not share its identity. And so it is with the Holy One, the Divine Presence: 'namings' and their variety do not affect the Ultimate Reality.

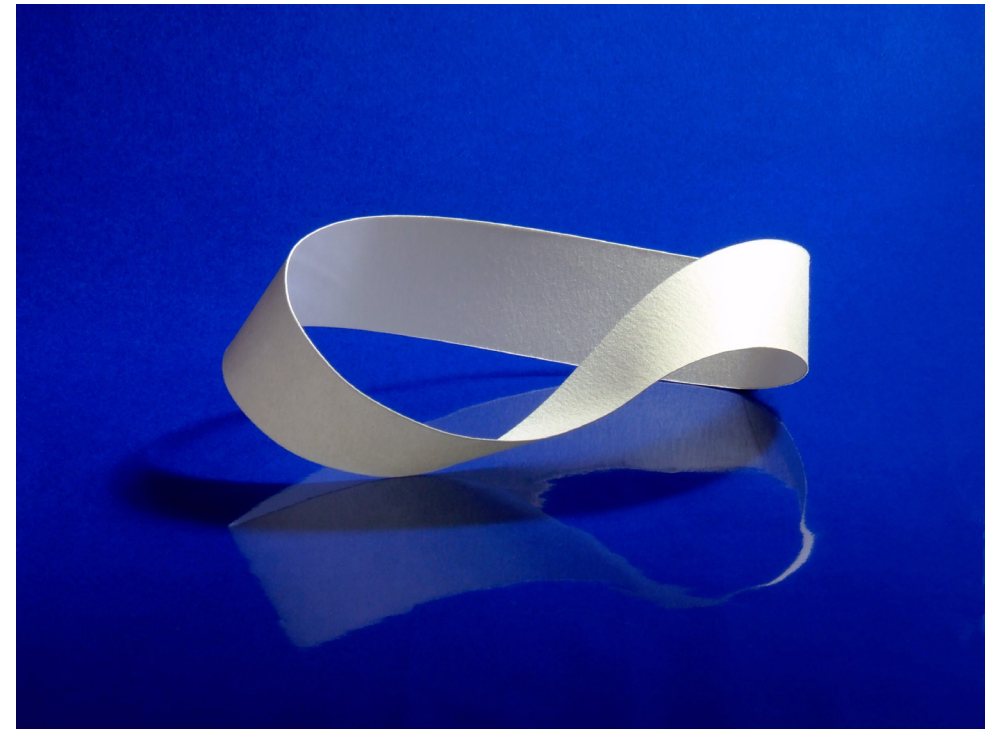
I came across another metaphor recently that had something profound to say about the nature of faith and Reality. While in faith we 'know' nothing can separate us from the love of God (Rom 8), there's the paradox of the all-too-real sense of separateness and sometimes alienation we feel from each other and from the Divine One. How can these be reconciled?

There's a growing understanding among Christian people of faith that the Divine Presence is at work in and through all that is, and there is an essential unity, a real connectedness of 'All that Is' i.e. *panentheism* – 'God in everything'. Not *pantheism*, the more limiting 'God is everything'.

This pervading Presence is the perspective that many Eastern and indigenous faiths never lost. The ancient symbol of the net of Indra is a beautiful image for this connectedness – All-that-Is as one net with, at each joint, a multifaceted jewel which reflects all the other jewels. Everything is present everywhere!

The same concept is supported by the newer Western scientific perspective from the quantum physicist David Bohm: "*In the enfolded [or implicate] order, space and time are no longer the dominant factors determining the relationships of dependence or independence of different elements. Rather, an entirely different sort of basic connection of elements is possible, from which our ordinary notions of space and time, along with those of separately existent material particles, are abstracted as forms derived from the deeper order. These ordinary notions in fact appear in what is called the 'explicate' or 'unfolded' order, which is a special and distinguished form contained within the general totality of all the implicate orders.*"¹

And Bohm suggests the world – and we, and everything – are like holograms, each fragment containing everything. Despite the limited 'small picture' information provided



© Moebius Strip by Martin Green martin.green@xtra.co.nz

¹ Bohm, David (1980), cited in Wade, Jenny: Changes of Mind: A Holonomic Theory of the Evolution of Consciousness. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996, 7 -10

to us in daily life by our senses and ordinary experience, there is this bigger picture of unity whose existence can now be discerned scientifically.

I asked myself, 'What if Bohm's understanding of these orders (*deeper, implicate and ordinary, explicate*) is simply another way to describe the Mystery we call the Divine? What if this is the convergence of scientific and spiritual realities and language? What if this is the scientific discovery of the spiritual reality we have already known?'

And then I met an extraordinary and exciting visible metaphor for Bohm's explicate (obvious, discernable) and implicate (deep, invisible) orders. One which essentially equates to the paradox of sense and faith. Do try this at home!

Take a strip of paper that is about 3cm wide and about 25-30 cm long. Give one end a half twist, then join the ends with tape or staple.

You have just made a Moebius strip, a fascinating mathematical oddity discovered by August Moebius in 1858. What you have is, paradoxically, a one-sided solid. Prove this to yourself by running a finger or drawing a line along the centre of the strip: you will traverse twice the length of the original strip and arrive back where you started. It does indeed have only one side!

Now focus on a short section of the strip. Hold it between your index finger and thumb. Your eyes and sense of touch tell you quite clearly that the paper has two sides. But then focussing back on the larger reality of the whole construction, you have already ascertained that it has only one side! Your 'small picture' sense information has proved inadequate to give you the full truth of the bigger picture.

The world of sense is so limited! Yet we so often act and think as though our 'small picture' sensing information is all there is. Faith calls us to the acceptance and knowledge of the larger reality, where we are part of this amazing whole, where quite literally, no one and nothing is ever separated from the loving energy of the Holy Presence. The One Body of St Paul, the Vine and the Branches of Jesus! And not just the knowledge, as of an interesting but esoteric fact, but an ongoing awareness to be lived into daily life and mindfully!

Here with that little scrap of paper formed into a Moebius strip is a physical demonstration of what Brian Swimme in his lecture series of the same name calls the Powers of the Universe which move through all that is and has ever been.

The Oneness of it All.

And doesn't St Paul say essentially the same thing? *Neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Rom 8:38-39. The entire cosmos is one fabric, one whole, of which we are all visible manifestations. All is One!

'no one and nothing is ever
separated from the loving
energy of the Holy Presence'

Te Moana by Liz Maluschnig

Te Moana
Papa Tuanuku
Ko te whae koutou
Mother of us all

Your flowing eternal rhythm
Draws me into your embrace
with a magnetic attraction
I can't resist

Dancing, singing, walking
in the playground of your womb

Being

Finding Oneness
where ocean and sandy shore
dance playfully together

dancing, crashing rhythmic waves
receding,
approaching
inviting me
into their welcoming maternal arms

breathing salty, damp air
healing the lifeless places
restoring energy
deep within

being nurtured,
receiving,
from you

Te Moana
Papa Tuanuku
Ko te whaea katou
Mother of us all

On Bardsey by Paul Heppleston

Low cloud shrouds Mynydd Enlli
and the lighthouse disappears.
Fog banks and swell separate the island
from the world that some call real
and block the passage of the lifeline boat.

But wading Oystercatchers know their home
and fly through all-enveloping mist-darkness
on a purposeful journeying
to known, instinctive destinations.
Theirs is a continuing pilgrimage,
each year a moving on,
yet returning to Base.

Can I rely on innate wisdom?
For what am I seeking on my journey?
Is it God - or am I trying
to reach myself again and again?

Or maybe the One is in the Other.



Storm

Beginning Again

by Jane Hansen

I had thought 'growing up' meant
Gaining independence.
Taking my first reckless steps
As I stumbled across the living room floor,
Then, later on, into
Adult life.
Creating a 'me' shaped by
My visions, my goals,
My desires –
Accompanied by some
Steepcliffs of learning and a
Painful chastening at times
As I looked back on earlier
Behaviours and their consequences with
Disbelief and regret.

I realise now that I have had the
Map upside down and been
Reading from back to front.
The landscape has changed;
Familiar landmarks are gone.
And I discover that
All I tried so hard to avoid is really
The pathway to what I most desire;
I am exchanging the freedom that confines for
The discipline of love;
Finding my freedom 'in' You.
Finding, in this unfamiliar place, that
I feel strangely at home;
A growing sense of belonging despite
My aloneness at time, as
Walls tumble, lines blur and
Resistance evaporates –
Until there is no longer
Thee and Thine or
Me and mine.
Until I am Yours,
Yours alone, and
You are mine, and we are just us.

I

being with another

watching

listening

hearing

noticing

clarifying

responding

wondering

wrestling

affirming

marvelling

god present delighted

THOU

By Terry Alve

Unseen

by Jo Anastasiadis

I gaze toward Light, blinded by darkness;
I seek Your face unable to see;
I love by choosing What
and Whom I cannot fathom,
spending time with;
feeling only distance.

You are here, yet there is nothing.
Only knowledge and
belief being crowded out
by distraction following distraction
leaving doubt choosing again
the unexperienced
or fading to distractions' dominance.

I am held in arms I do not feel;
gazed upon by Love incomprehensible;
kissed by lips invisible;
caressed by tenderness unfelt;
consumed by restrained overwhelming passion,
neither seen nor heard nor felt.

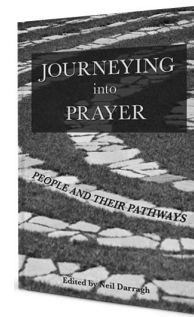
Present yet invisible, untouching yet in contact,
God meets me in the stillness of silence.

Book Reviews



Joy Together: Spiritual Practices for Your Congregation
Westminster John Knox Press September 2012, pp 192
Review by Marva Dawn, Theologian, author of
Keeping the Sabbath Wholly and Unfettered Hope

“Lynn Baab exuberantly, and realistically, displays the way spiritual practices can strengthen groups or whole congregations of Christians. Her illustrations are convincing; her experiences, vast and confirming; her explanations, constructive. I heartily urge every Christian to read this book, significant as it is, because we who respond to the Trinity with practices need to learn to live more as a community!”



Journeying into Prayer: People and their pathways
Edited by Neil Darragh
Accent Publications, Ponsonby, Auckland, 2012, pp. 289
<http://www.accentpublications.co.nz/>
Reviewer Liz Maluschnig

In this fascinating anthology, thirty three people from various Christian traditions and world religions share their experience and practice as they answer the question 'how do we pray?'

Here we have a treasure-trove of wisdom and diversity in six sections: Praying in community, Praying in the world around us, Personal prayer and meditation, Prayer in parish situations, Praying from Scripture, and Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and multi-faith prayer.

A few treasures:

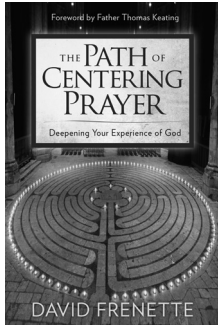
Mike Noonan: prayer is 'kindling the empty space'.

Glen Cardy: in silence 'the explicable Holy infuses one's body and soul'.

Mary Betz: 'Contemplation is a way of seeing and listening, touching and engaging with God in our world, immersing ourselves in stillness, and allowing mystery to infuse us.'

Joy Cowley: 'separation from God is an illusion'

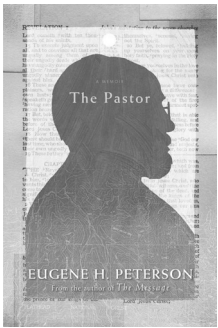
This book with its many voices, many threads, shows us there's no definitive way but only diversity and personal preference to determine how we pray. To have so much lived experience in one volume makes it a taonga for our unique Christian journey in Aotearoa.



***The Path of Centering Prayer;
Deepening Your Experience of God***
By David Frenette
Publisher: Sounds True; 1 edition September 2012

A valuable resource by David Frenette who began searching for meaning as a young man in the 1970s and practising daily meditation in Hindu and Buddhist traditions. He became a Christian in 1981 and changed his contemplative practice to centering prayer. David has taught centering prayer and led retreats since 1985, with Thomas Keating as his mentor.

He has an M.A. in transpersonal counselling psychology, guides clients as a spiritual director, and is an adjunct faculty member in the Religious Studies Department at Naropa University.



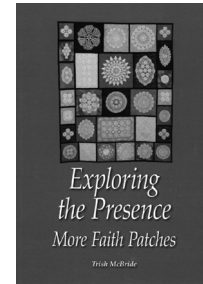
The Pastor A Memoir
By Eugene H. Peterson
Harper Collins Publishers: New York, 2011. pp 317
Reviewed by Khaw Cheng Cheen

This life story is hard to put down. Peterson is acclaimed author of *The Message* translation of the Bible and books including *Practice Resurrection*, *The Contemplative Pastor* and *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.

At the outset, Peterson assures us he wanted his life shaped by God, scripture, and prayer, not North American culture and values which treat 'God as a product to be marketed'. As the stories of his life unfold we see not only the pastor but the theologian and the poet. In Part I – Topos and Kairos, Peterson shares the importance of staying alert to place and time in shaping his pastoral vocation as well as his faith. His family home in Montana became a holy place to which he regularly returned to ground him.

Parts 2 to 3 intriguingly titled '*Intently Haphazard*', *Shekinah*, and *Good Deaths*, conclude with an Afterword: Letter to a Young Pastor.

Peterson shares his mother's story-telling, her songs and her passion for Jesus and how they left their mark on him. How his father's butcher shop was his introduction to the world of congregation. How he learned to love 'the Edomites' in his own life and how a summer job watering grassy, tree-studded boulevards in the middle of the night accustomed him to silence and solitude.



On life's transitions, Peterson writes, 'We practice our death by giving up our will to live on our terms. Only in that relinquishment of renunciation are we able to practice resurrection.' On community: 'pay attention and call to attention to what is going on right now between men and women, with one another and with God – this kingdom of God that is primarily local, relentlessly personal, and prayerful "without ceasing."'

This is a book not only for pastors but for all followers of Christ.

A book to be read and savoured with much wisdom in its pages.

Exploring the Presence – More Faith Patches
by Trish McBride
Reviewer Anon

Exploring the Presence both chronicles a profound 'journey of the soul' and provides a valuable narrative 'herstory' of cultural, social and spiritual life in New Zealand over sixty plus years. Trish's reflections on her overseas pilgrimages (England, Poland, Crete, America, Australia), are inner journeys that have informed and shaped the woman living in this land. Either the journey insights alone or the historical cameos alone make this book a worthwhile read, together they make it a book to be valued and savoured. Trish's life, contained in and emanating from these pages, speaks of courage and integration. Experiences are examined openly and generously. Neither the early simple experiences of the child's faith nor passing enthusiasms and commitments, nor injustices and institutional abuses are denied or rejected, rather they are integrated positively into the matured and maturing life.

For me three clear strands run through *Exploring the Presence*

- spiritual reflection
- justice
- a woman's experience of life.

I have appreciated and learnt from all three emphases.

Film Review

The Fox and the Child

Reviewed by Paul Heppleston

French language, 2007 Director: Luc Jaquet 90 mins.

With one actor playing an unnamed 10-year old girl, and narration by Kate Winslet, this film is inspirational and capable of touching the senses on many levels. For me, far more than a girl's relationship with a fox. The scenery is stunning evoking Northern Canada or the Alps. And I watched it with my two grand-daughters, 8 and 6. They were as transfixed as I was! So I decided then and there to write it as I saw it: an allegory for our journey toward wholeness, interspersed with quotations from the girl.

On our journey towards Wholeness we search for Truth; once seen, even a fleeting glimpse, we are drawn onwards, towards God.

I found the forest more and more mysterious, now I knew my fox lived there.

On the Journey we are given further glimpses of God's great generosity and power – views, sounds, forests, wild-life.

One evening I was struck by how small I was in all that nature...

but I knew he had to be in here somewhere, right under my nose.

This movement towards God is a journey of delights.

I loved it when she appeared by surprise as if she'd always been there.

There are also times of darkness and fear, danger, longing and confusion.

Sometimes life gets in a tangle despite our best efforts and persistence.

In these times God pulls us through (not round) and leads us towards a greater intimacy and closeness, a new dimension in the relationship. And just as there are (many) times when we're aware of needing God, there are times when God needs us.

Every day after school I went to the tree, to let her know I was still there for her.

In this story a limit is reached akin to trying to capture and control God. It's then our relationship with God is strained – and can lead to the apparent 'death of God', or (at least temporarily) the death of our relationship with God.

The presence of darkness always accompanies love and though it may seem to win, it is love that shines through on all levels. It would seem that the war between Man and Fox would never end.

But from death there comes some form of redemptive resurrection ('without death there is no life'); perhaps in bodily form (young fox cubs) or a transformation of body and of thought.

The child's final statement is one of wisdom: of the truth she was unknowingly seeking.

I confused possession with love.

And

I was sure from that day on that the fox knew what love is.

So this leads to one final question: 'who represents God (good) in this film – the girl or the fox?'

The Fox and the child is a film to savour, to rest in, reflect upon (as I have done here), to enjoy in all its moods of colour, emotion and simplicity; you may even sense in it the echoes of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Or be led to a place of stillness. For there aren't many films where two young children sit absolutely still and quiet for five minutes after it has ended.

And so did I.



SGM News Summer 2013

'Where is God?' ... uttered as a cry of desolation and anguished longing were the opening words of Sunday morning's sermon based on the First Testament reading, Job 23:1-9, 16-17 (14 October).

A few days earlier, the first Anglican to address the Synod of Catholic bishops in Rome, Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury said, *'To put it boldly, contemplation is the only ultimate answer to the unreal and insane world that our financial systems and our advertising culture and our chaotic and unexamined emotions encourage us to inhabit.'*

This 'I and Thou' issue of Refresh, which explores so deeply profound challenges of relationship between the little 'i am' of self and the great 'I AM' of Being touches both of these themes:

- how are we to relate to a God who seems sometimes close, sometimes absent?
- how does our contemplative practice help in our engagement with God in our healing and the healing of our hurt and hurting world?

This is the work of Spiritual Growth Ministries!

2013 marks the 25th year of SGM's Spiritual Director Formation Programme and 30 years of facilitating contemplative spiritual growth through retreats, quiet days, workshops, writing, speaking and prayer! One sentence to say it, but what a HUGE commitment by so many ordinary and gifted, humble and influential people that represents! What a testimony to the call, provision and grace of God that is!

In 2014 we plan to celebrate the completion of these milestones and to embrace the challenge of the years ahead. A series of celebratory events involving, story, food, laughter and inspiration is in the planning. Likely venues will be Auckland, Palmerston North and Christchurch. Anyone with a connection to SGM is invited. It will be a great opportunity for catching up with friends and colleagues as we celebrate what has been achieved and commit to what lies ahead. While our mailing/emailing list is good we want to make sure we have contact details for as many interested people as possible.

If you know of people who have been connected to SGM over the years who may not be on the mailing/emailing list please encourage them to make contact:

SGM Administrator sgm@clear.net.nz or 36 Buller Crescent Manurewa, Manukau 2102.

So, what else is happening?

- Because of changed and increased ministry commitments Fr John O'Connor, a long-standing member of Workgroup and the Formation Advisory Group, tendered his resignation to the September Workgroup Meeting. John's depth of experience and personal insight has been much appreciated and will be sorely missed. As a result we are now considering addition(s) to Workgroup. Being ecumenical and national we look to keep a broad denominational and geographic balance to Workgroup.
- Our recent administrative and accounting changes have proceeded very smoothly and are now soundly established.
- Applications for the 2013/14 intake for the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme are currently being processed and interviews arranged. Particularly noteworthy is a good number of applications from the South Island and a significantly higher proportion of men applying than has been the case.
- The response to SGM's seven day, silent, directed retreat (February 2012, the first we have offered for several years) was very encouraging. The retreat was full (16 retreatants) and a waiting list grew. Feedback from the retreat was deeply affirming. We are offering a similar retreat in February 2013 and indications are that this too will be oversubscribed. I highlight too a seven day retreat specifically for spiritual directors offered in Auckland beginning September 28 and there are a number of other retreats in the Calendar of Events for 2013, offered by a variety of teams through the country – see Regional listings for details.
- The Bi-annual Training Event for members of ACSD takes place August 22-25 2013 at Bishop Julius Hostel Christchurch. Watch www.acsd.org.nz for further details.
- With this mailout we have included copies of updated and reformatted brochures **What is SGM?** and **Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme**. You are our most effective means of promoting this ministry and encouraging people to consider formation as a spiritual director. Please use these brochures to that end and contact Joanne at sgm@clear.net.nz if you can effectively use more.

As I close this edition of SGM news I am deeply grateful for God's work – in us, amongst us, through us. Thank-you!

Blessings

Andrew Pritchard

Convenor

The Last Word

As each new edition of Refresh unfolds, many images appear on the screen of my spiritual imagination. Wonderfully one morning as I enjoyed my silent time, it came to me that contemplation is like a hongi with God that turns into a sharing of eternal life, or as the Greek New Testament writers called it 'Zoe'. Almost immediately I opened my email and found my predecessor, Andrew Dunn, had sent the image of a wonderful bone carving created by Ted Mead. Also that day David Frenette shared this reflection in relation to his new book.

God breathes us in that we may rest in fruition

and God breathes us out that

we may love

and do good works.

John Ruusbroec

'Contemplative practice helps us realize God, like our breath, is always within us... Using the breath as our sacred symbol in Centering Prayer helps us learn how to relate more fully to God's indwelling presence and action.'

Blessings

Diane [dianegw@actrix.co.nz]

Winter 2013 Edition

Contributions are welcome before February 28, 2013 on the theme of 'Waiting' – with God, on God, for justice, for peace, for healing, for birth or death, keeping vigil, and the greatest challenge of all: 'going beyond waiting'.

Writers please

use single quotation marks

conversational in style using conjunctions if possible

reference all quotes as endnotes



© Investiture of Millie Te Kaawa

Ruach _____ by Marlene Marburg

As I drew breath
fullness drenched me truly.

The movement in my heart
splintered light so I could see
a vulnerable colour
holding every cell of me.

Fear was gone,
and in its place, silence;
clear indelible desire;
hope full of consequence,

and loving kindness
from the depths of anywhere
breathing yes with me.

Contributors

Andrew Shepherd works as a freelance teacher/researcher in areas of theology, missiology, ethics, and environmental studies, and is the Education Coordinator for Christian Conservation movement, A Rocha. He enjoys living with his wife and three daughters in the small community of Makarora in Western Otago.

John Franklin loves being with family, and is loving landscaping a new section that overlooks Mosgiel, the Taieri, and the Maungatuas. Spiritual direction and supervision have been at the heart of his ministry for over 30 years (since the beginnings of SGM), and with that he is currently chaplain to the Anglican bishop of Dunedin (half time), working with the bishop to call God's people to prayer.

Jo Anastasiadis is a born and bred Wellingtonian, wife, mother of grown children and spiritual director. She enjoys being outdoors, particularly walking on the beach, taking time out for retreats, and utilizing creativity in her relationship with God.

mail4jo@xtra.co.nz

Sue Pickering wonders often about retreating to a bach at Kinloch and being a granny, but in the meantime is engaged in a stimulating mix of aged care chaplaincy; writing; SGM Workgroup; spiritual direction, retreats and supervision; Cathedral governance; learning the piano and occasional quilting. Helping others recognise the sacred Presence in the midst of life is a continuing passion.

Sheila Pritchard lives on the North Shore in Auckland and enjoys a self-employed lifestyle offering spiritual direction, supervision and retreats. She is the author of *The Lost Art of Meditation* (England: SU, 2003) More of her writing can be accessed from her Blog: <http://sheilapritchard.blogspot.com/>

Anna Johnstone and her husband Kerry are part of the editorial team for Refresh. They continue to enjoy Auckland's North Shore and explore new paths of creativity.

www.johnstone2.co.nz

Andrew Dunn lives in the bush of Albany where, with his wife and quilter Margaret, he leads Oasis Retreat Centre. <http://www.oasisretreatcentre.org.nz/>

Colette Blockley is a registered nurse and lives in a seaside town north of Dunedin where she volunteers as a parish nurse. Colette also works as a nurse in Dunedin Hospital. She has three adult children and two beautiful grandchildren and is passionate about gardening.

Margaret Tooley lives in Auckland where she works as a spiritual director and church musician. She believes her most vital calling is to encourage others to discover and use their gifts for the glory of God.



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Title: I and Thou. Reproduction courtesy of the Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust.

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Cynthia Bourgeault is the principal Teacher and Advisor to the Contemplative Society, an ecumenical, not-for-profit association that encourages a deepening of contemplative prayer based in the Christian tradition. She is the author of *Mystical Hope*, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing*, and *Centering Prayer* and *Inner Awakening* among many books.

Trish McBride's writings come from life as a pilgrim, as a privileged hearer of other people's stories, then reflection on these and on her own. She's a Wellington spiritual director, counsellor, and chaplain in a mental health context.

Paul Heppleston belongs to the Iona Community and, after 20 years in the Orkney Islands, is currently living in the Derbyshire Dales, England, where he is a musician, writer and worship leader. He has a passion for encouraging gathered song and leads holiday/retreat groups to the wilder parts of Britain in an ambience of Celtic spirituality - but not necessarily at the same time.

Jane Hansen is married to Jim, and is also a mum and grandma. Jane enjoys country life close to the Wairere Falls beneath the Kaimai Ranges, visits from family and friends and writing in response to God's grace in the blessings and challenges of everyday life.

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Andrew Pritchard is passionate about personal and spiritual growth ... his own and others. Andrew is Convenor of SGM, a teacher, spiritual director and supervisor. Outside of work - family life, reading, walking, golf and pottering in his sheds bring pleasure and relaxation.