

Refresh

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Image of God



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The Pearl

A song by Emmy Lou Harris

O the dragons are gonna fly tonight
They're circling low and inside tonight
It's another round in the losing fight
Out along the great divide tonight

We are ageing soldiers in an ancient war
Seeking out some half remembered shore
We drink our fill and still we thirst for more
Asking, if there's no heaven what is this hunger for?

Our path is worn our feet are poorly shod
We lift up our prayer against the odds
And fear the silence is the voice of God

And we cry Allelujah Allelujah
We cry Allelujah

Sorrow is constant and the joys are brief
The seasons come and bring no sweet relief
Time is a brutal but a careless thief
Who takes our lot but leaves behind the grief

It is the heart that kills us in the end
Just one more old broken bone that cannot mend
As it was now and ever shall be amen

And we cry Allelujah Allelujah
We cry Allelujah

So there'll be no guiding light for you and me
We are not sailors lost out on the sea
We were always headed toward eternity
Hoping for a glimpse of Galilee

Like falling stars from the universe we are hurled
Down through the long loneliness of the world
Until we behold the pain become the pearl

Cryin' Allelujah Allelujah
We cry Allelujah

And we cry Allelujah Allelujah
We cry Allelujah

Silence...is where I meet G-d¹

by Gabrielle Daly-Fong

Whenever I ponder upon the notion of the image of G-d, I tend to retreat, and go within, where I meet G-d in the safe silence of my heart. It's not a selfish practice; it's more an intra-personal practice. So my immediate image of G-d isn't a picture, it's a loving and loved experience, that leads me to become a more kindly, compassionate person.

As I began this article I found myself reviewing childhood pictures of who this personal G-d was for me back then. As an Enneagram FOUR personality, I'm in the feeling arc, so I also seek the face of G-d through emotion, affect, sensation, and wonderment.

Yet, still true is the fact that I, and many of my generation (1950s babies), were taught from an early age that G-d looked a certain way: that G-d was a male image, watching to see if we do wrong, huge, powerful, and sometimes angry, causing damage to the environment with droughts, famine, pestilence and storms of great magnitude.

G-d was to be both feared and loved. Yet mostly G-d was someone to be highly concerned about.

I and many of my generation (1950s babies) were taught from an early age that G-d looked a certain way

However, as a small child, I loved G-d despite this nonsense – possibly because I had a loving and benign father myself. So my Father-G-d was not as the other kids believed.

Then as a teen and young adult, it was the hippie-like Jesus I adored and emulated.

I even dressed similarly: long hair, long robes, bare-feet – yes – to Mass.

My image of G-d was partly imaged from the music of 'Jesus Christ Superstar'. Our Young Christian Workers (YCW) group played the LP one Easter Saturday at mid-night in a forest park camp in the Hunua Ranges. We were deeply, deeply moved by it. We sat or lay on our mattresses around my small portable stereo and listened, danced, wept, drank a little cider, and slept. We fell in-love with Jesus, fell in-love with G-d, fell in-like with one another as contemporary apostles of Jesus. It was heady, hearty stuff.

¹ The custom of substituting the word "God" with G-d in English is based on the traditional practice in Jewish law of giving God's Hebrew name a high degree of respect and reverence. There is no prohibition in Jewish law against writing out or erasing the word "God" in English. However, many Jews have afforded the word "God" with the same level of respect as the Hebrew equivalents; because of this, many Jews substitute "God" with G-d so that they can erase or dispose of the writing without showing disrespect to God. Some Jews also use G'd in the same way, utilizing the exclamation point to convey their enthusiasm for Judaism and God. Retrieved 24.04.14 from <http://judaism.about.com/od/judaismbasics/a/Why-Do-Some-Jews-Spell-God-G-D.htm>

And since the 1980s, I have had a daily profound awareness of Holye Spirite; yes spelt the feminine way, because while I needed and still need to declare that the feminine face of G-d is in all three persons of the Trinity, yet, for me (and I speak for myself here) more so in Holye Spirite. Therefore I rarely speak of Mother-G-d, yet I can, and I do see Jesus' feminine side so much more, now I am looking for it and how we are all made in G-d's image and likeness. (Genesis 1:27).

Some years ago, my good friend *Patrice wrote 'Godde' on a whiteboard during a spiritual refreshment day for some teachers. She was a brave woman indeed; she was not appreciated for this act. Now I do not say that G-d is solely feminine, yet I also no longer hold that G-d is solely masculine. G-d is G-d, and we are made in G-d's image.

Now I do not say that G-d is solely feminine, yet I also no longer hold that G-d is solely masculine. G-d is G-d, and we are made in G-d's image.

So what is my Imago Dei now?

My grand-daughter, *Beatrice, aged four, came to visit. Her dad is my son, and he no longer practises formal Christianity yet he lives a good and a kind 'other-focused' life under the teaching of the Tao, and other wisdom traditions that resonate with him. Recently *Beatrice stood by my prayer space and picked up a long-stemmed rose (memorabilia from the tour of the relics of St Therese of Lisieux). She held the rose across her chest, closed her four-year-old darling little eyes and said softly in a Peppa Pig voice, 'Dear G-d, please keep Mummy and Daddy and me and *James safe on this trip...(long pause) ...Amen.' Family friends who have a lot to do with my son's family, have permission, as I do too, to teach *Beatrice about God, because as my son said, 'she won't be receiving that kind of teaching from us, and we appreciate that you will do it sincerely.'

For me, today, the image of G-d appears

- in my Silence...when I choose to sit under the loving gaze of G-d
- in my son, and his heart for G-dliness and goodness in people and in the environment
- in my beautiful grand-daughter, and her simplicity of word, her pure intention
- in my mother, who in her chronic pain, most often is able to put others first and place them in G-d's hands
- in my husband, and his heart for the unborn, the elderly, and for Christian Apologetics, whereby he defends and proves G-d to atheists through historical writings, and science
- in my alternative education students who hardly know themselves, yet are learning to do unto others more positively these days

- in my eleven siblings, who no longer seek G-d in traditional ways, and even appear not to be connected, yet they privately tell me otherwise
- in my clients, who bravely get up each day and face their 'stuff'; many weaker souls would not bother or have the resilience to do so; thank G-d for G-d.

To this day, the best actual image of G-d pictorially for me is that of a Tree.

I use The Tree drawing in my spiritual direction, counselling and supervision work.

When one ponders the Tree, one notices – branches, leaves, foliage, fruit, seasonal changes, bark, a trunk, deep roots, sometimes a knot-hole, and sometimes a bird's nest. In my awareness of G-d in this way, I see the following. (it will be different for everyone):

- branches – reaching out, as G-d reaches out to everyone; yes, everyone
- leaves – what to leave, what to leave out, when to take your leave? Possessions and Timing; all in G-d's time, *Ecclesiastes 3: 1-13*.
- foliage – G-d growing towards us, growth is what G-d hopes for in each of us, our growth towards G-d, growth towards wisdom, growth that never ends. (Life-long learning I call it).
- fruit – G-d has endowed each of us with many gifts (fruits) which G-d has available to hand on to us; we need to learn to use these fruits wisely and liberally.
- seasonal changes – change is what creation is all about and G-d ensures we get plenty of it, G-d however is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow; yet G-d seems uniquely different in each circumstance we meet G-d.
- bark – protective covering, guarding us, keeping us safe, like the guardian angels we once heard about; I am still sure they really are there for us.
- a trunk – a strong upright part of the tree; this could be the established Christian church, yet sometimes I wonder how healthy it is under the bark, whether there is any rot that needs to be removed? Maybe G-d has put Pope Francis the First in place to do this very thing? I believe so.
- deep roots – where we have come from, where G-d has come from, we have all come from G-d who knew us before the beginning of time. We are of G-d and G-d is in us; yet we are not G-d despite what some people will tell you!
- sometimes a knot-hole – in therapy these knot-holes may mean a trauma experienced by the artist at a certain age. In this case it could be the pain G-d feels when we are unstable, disobedient, undisciplined, and distant.
- and sometimes a bird's nest – that could be the fun part of G-d present in us, or present around us; the odd remark made by someone that shows G-d's sense of humour, or an interesting cloud shape perhaps.

Yet, now... let us pray!

"G-d of this life of ours,

Bless us with eyes to truly see you, ears to really hear you, hands to gently touch you, noses to infinitely smell you, and words or even silence to deliciously praise you;

Bless us with self-deprecation when we feel foolish;

Bless us with generosity when we have nothing to give;

Bless us with good-grief when a loved one goes home to you.

These things we pray in Holye Spirite's precious and powerful name,

Let it be so!"



The Deer

by Margaret Dunn

Fleeting glimpses of the deer
Create delightful surprise
As she darts across our path
Back into the foliage.

Awareness of your presence, God,
Is sometimes just like that –
So fleeting and surprising
The delight is in the memory.

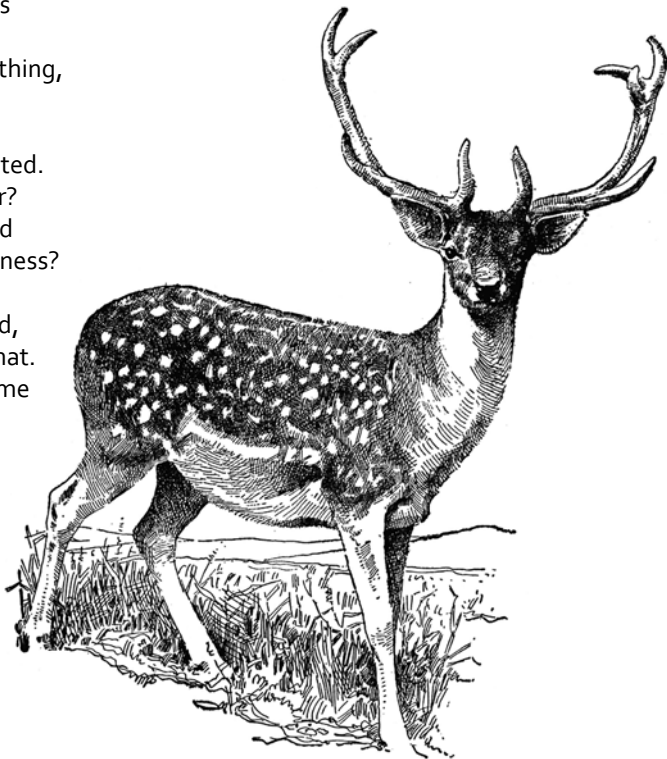
It seems You won't be known
Just for our whim and pleasure.
You remain completely Lord
In how You'll be to us.

But once, in my utter stillness
A grazing deer drew near.
I sat immobile, scarcely breathing,
Lest she dart away.

Our eyes locked and penetrated.
Did she meet me as I met her?
Did she feel she was accepted
In this encountering of otherness?

Sometimes Your coming, God,
Is as profound and deep as that.
Encounter, losing sense of time
In the meeting of the holy.

Genesis 28:16



YouAre

by Pip Nicholls

In the interests
of calling us home
You became as we are.

You willingly
experienced all that
it is to be prodigal,

to be in this homeless
land of superficial selfhood.
You too, had to know

the loneliness of separation,

like us, you had to
be blinded by transient influences.

And You awoke to there
being no self to cling to,
You fully experienced I Am.

You saw through the
illusion of self
as a human perception

so Your life became our
alarm bell that we too
would wake to the same.

YouAre the prodigal son, the father,
the unsung mother, the brother,
the fatted calf, the storyteller, the story...

Awaken within us
draw us home to You -
welcome us as WeAre.

Praying with Images of God

by Jo Anastasiadis

Rock, Fortress, Creator, Father, Mother Hen, Midwife, Author, Flame, Water, Alpha and Omega – all images used to describe God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit – all describing the different ways God relates to us.

Some of the Biblical images of God are very easy to imagine and relate to. Others are more unusual – not as attractive or easy to understand. These latter images were more likely to get only a cursory glance by me, until I was introduced to a way of praying with images of God that opened up new perspectives for me.

Rather than assume I'm actually connecting with everything an image has to say to me – about who God is and how God relates to us – this way of praying invites me to sit with, ponder and explore the image in greater detail to allow features to come to the fore I didn't initially see.

For many images of God there's a corollary – they're images 'in relationship' or with attributes that lead to a role or a purpose. A Rock is solid – something to stand on; a Fortress affords shelter within; a Creator creates creations, a Father provides for, encourages, supports and cherishes his children; a Mother Hen protects and raises her chicks; a Midwife assists mother and child during birth and the first few months of a baby's life; an Author conceives and writes books; a Flame burns – giving light and warmth; Water refreshes and cleanses; Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters which frame the Greek Alphabet. Praying with images of God allows us to sit with these qualities.

Being nestled in the middle
feels like a place of safety
with God before me and God
behind me.

Here is how it goes:

- Choose an image of God and work out the relationships involved and their role or purpose, i.e. Hen/baby chick (Matthew 23:37); Water/something needing moisture like a dry plant or thirsty person (Isaiah 44:3, 55:1, John 7:38-39); Potter/clay (Jeremiah 18).
- Meditate – working on the natural relationships and roles. What is their individual purpose and qualities, i.e. Hen = the mother, protective, nurturing, warm, attentive, has knowledge about survival. Chick = helpless initially, seeking to learn then striving to be independent.
- Ask how the relationships and roles relate to one another i.e. the hen looks after the chick, warns of danger, is prepared to put herself between danger and her chick, takes under wing, finds food. The chick looks to the hen for protection and nurturing; it can be determined but needs to be trained, it can go astray and needs to be brought back.



- Bring to mind any other associations this image evokes. (Using resources like a thesaurus can extend your initial perspective of some words.)
- Now link all this back into how God wants to relate to you and you to God.
- Are there any limitations to the image? How do these limitations affect your view of God and your relationship with God?
- What might God's invitation be to you as you consider what you have discovered? How would you like to respond to God?

Here are some reflections that arose for me as I sat with Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8):

- God/Christ are at the front, go ahead, leading the way. They are also at the end; they come behind completing things. Making sure so one gets 'left behind, everyone stays together'. That is comforting and encouraging.
- If You are the first and the last letter, that puts me in the middle. Being nestled in the middle feels like a place of safety with God before me and God behind me.
- The first and last letters frame the rest of the alphabet. There's a lot of variety in the middle. I am not alone in the middle.
- We need all the letters to make words, to write, to speak. Alpha and Omega are needed; God is needed. In Greek, both are vowels. In English, vowels, or their surrogate, are present in every word.
- Most letters cannot make much on their own. Letters need to be used in conjunction with other letters to make words, sentences and paragraphs.
- Some letters are used often, others moderately so, and a few infrequently. Just as some people seem perhaps more used by God, and others, maybe think themselves only occasionally of use, or perhaps more 'difficult to use'.
- The alphabet is used to make words to express thoughts, ideas, feelings, hopes, purpose; to bring about communication between people, and between us and God; to establish, grow and maintain communication and relationship.
- God is first and foremost at the beginning of relationships. Relationship and communication are important to God. God is a part of, embedded in, enables our communication, even with God's self, even as Alpha and Omega are throughout sentences and paragraphs.
- In the game Scrabble, the rarer letters have a greater 'face value' and when placed strategically, can earn lots of points. However, in both crosswords and Scrabble, it's more often the 'lesser valued' or commoner letters that are necessary – particularly at the intersection of two words and without which the 'higher value' words couldn't be formed. Every letter has its value and place, even the 'apparently' common ones. Each letter can be used in many different words.

- Whether I think of myself as somewhat unique and different, or plain and ordinary, of high value or common, I am just as much needed and of value as anyone else. We are all nestled together within God's framework. And I, too, am needed, am a part of the alphabet making up the crossword of relationships, called to interact with God and with others to complete the 'writing of life'. Writing initiated by God and completed by God; and throughout which the presence of God can be seen and heard, holding all together.

Below are a few other images I've used. You might like to sit with these in prayer:¹

GOD

My glory (Psalm 3:3)
 My Defence (Psalm 94:22)
 A Woman in labour (Isaiah 42:14)
 A Midwife (Psalm 22:9-10, Isaiah 66:7-11)
 Lover (Song of Solomon)
 A Woman giving birth (Deuteronomy 32:18)
 A Parent (Hosea 11:3-4)
 A nursing Mother (Isaiah 49:15)
 My Portion (Psalm 119:57)
 Gardener (John 15:1)
 Master (Malachi 1:6, Matthew 23:8, 10:24)
 Comforter (2 Corinthians 1:3)
 A Mother Eagle (Deuteronomy 32:10-12)
 My hiding place (Psalm 32:7)
 My Song (Isaiah 12:2)

HOLY SPIRIT

Teacher (1 John 2:27)
 Guide (John 16:13)
 Counsellor (John 14:16-17, 26)
 Spirit of Truth (John 15:26, 16:13-14)
 Spirit of Grace (Hebrews 10:29)
 Spirit of Adoption (Hebrews 8:15)
 Dove (Matthew 3:16)
 Water (John 7:37-39, Isaiah 44:3)
 Wind (John 3:8, Acts 2:2-4)
 Anointing Oil (Luke 4:18, 1 John 2:20, 27, Acts 10:38)
 Fire (Acts 2:3, Hebrews 12:29)
 A Seal (Ephesians 1:13, 4:30, 2 Corinthians 1:22)
 A Deposit (2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5, Ephesians 1:14)

JESUS

King of Peace (Hebrews 7:2)
 King of Righteousness (Hebrews 7:2)
 A Man of Sorrows (Isaiah 53:3)
 Physician (Luke 4:23)
 Friend (John 15:14)
 Brother (Mark 3:35)
 Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14)
 Author and Perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2)
 A Vine (John 15)
 Lamb (John 1:29)
 Lion (Revelation 5:5)
 Living Bread (John 6:51)
 A Refiner's Fire (Malachi 3:2)
 The Door (John 10:7, 9)
 The Life (John 14:6)
 The Truth (John 14:6)
 The Way (John 14:6)
 Word (John 1:1)

¹ For a full list email: mail4jo@xtra.co.nz



A light brush in hand

by Andrew Norton

In the early hours of each new day, I walk with my dog, a miniature Poodle Maltese cross. This is when I walk with God!

There we go, the three of us on our morning walk, engaging in conversations that change the world we live in. The following reflections have their origins on these morning walks.

As a keen photographer, I've come to love varied textures and layers of light. The word photograph means "to paint or draw with light". In the opening words of the Bible, God begins the work of creation with a light brush in hand.

'And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.' Genesis 1:3-4

As I read this text and follow the light throughout the day, I've come to realise I've been struggling with a part that's not even there! Here's how I think we tend to read it: 'And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was **good** (and God saw the darkness was **bad**), and (so) he separated the light from the darkness.'

Taking this a step further we associate moral values with the elements of light and darkness and support our thinking with verses like John 8:12: 'When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"

But this misreading of the text fails to recognise that darkness and light are co-dependent! Without the night, there can be no day. The light of a candle needs darkness in order to be visible. A photographic image is, at its very best, at the edges of darkness AND light.

Could it be that God creates out of both darkness and light?

'Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You,
But the night shines as the day;
The darkness **and** the light *are* both alike to You.' Psalm 139:12

It seems to me, God is comfortable in his own skin where **darkness AND light** are as one. This has huge significance when it comes to Genesis 1:26, 'Then God said,

"Let Us make humankind in Our image, according to Our likeness".'

If we transpose the dualism of darkness and light upon ourselves, we'll forever be at war within. We'll deny or hide from the darkness as much as we deny and hide from the light

If we transpose the dualism
of darkness and light upon
ourselves, we'll forever be at
war within.

– for fear of being seen or exposed. We're afraid of this glorious mixture of darkness and light and do everything we can to keep them separated.

Imagine Rembrandt's art without darkness!

Yet when we see in the image of God as ONE – darkness AND light – a whole new picture begins to emerge. It's in the darkest of moments I discover the light. It's in the shadows I'm illuminated by grace.

Being created in the image of God is an invitation to be both the photograph and the photographer²; to be painted and to paint with light and to allow that light to give expression to the wonder of all colours – including black and every shade of grey.

The Invitation by Andrew Norton

Come with me and stand before the dawn,
let us be still,
without words
and wait,
wrapped in the blanket of darkness
within and without.

Watch with me
as sun splinters break into our worlds,
to see and to be seen,
never giving ourselves in total to the light,
but living in the threshold of shadows to protect this precious gift.

The invitation of this day comes
through the mist across the vast sea
inviting the mystery of our adventure,
the known and the unknown,
consummated through our eyes,
a revelation, a constant re-veiling,
for to see fully would be not to see at all
as it is in the familiar of things that we lose our sight.

From this dawning may we awaken
tired eyes blinded by the ordinary
and welcome the wonder of this new day.

² Most photos are overexposed giving a washed out look. If you want better images, increase the contrast, lower the exposure and lift up your blacks.

A new day by Andrew Norton

With eyes acquainted with the dark
may the first light of morning awaken within you a beautiful question;
one that unlocks doors
bolted by yesterday's grief
and the harsh and unforgiving words
you have spoken to yourself.

May the sun spill light
into the cracks where the residue of darkness hides
inviting you to walk without fear of what lies within.
On these virgin sands of time coming to you as pure gift,
may you be embraced by a concept of grace
that sets you free to begin again.

Untie the string around your finger
as you remember forgotten dreams,
like a song that has been waiting to be sung,
listen for the long note played by the most gentle touch of the bow.
May it resonate with the one true note within that is you
and dance your dream into this day.



© Andrew Norton



© Renee Lindstrom

Praying the Beach

by Fran Francis

I stood
in the heart of God
at Pakiri

a labyrinth
in the sand
drew me
after I
drew it
arms straining
to keep the tension
of the rope
and driftwood compass

walking
this drawing
I am
drawn
inwards
and a strange
rising anticipation
builds
as I stand at the
threshold
of the next circle

until -
a little unnerved
I arrive
in the heart
of God

Did you know
there are children's footprints
in the heart of God?
And an east wind?
gulls are crying
and godwits raise their young
readying them
for the long
journey
home



© Barbara Lee

Just imagine...!

by Fuzz Kitto

I think we work to our imagination. The image we have of our country will determine how we treat our nation. The image we have of friends, family and associates will determine how we treat them. The image we have of politicians, police and people groups will determine how we treat them. The image we have of animals, pets and the environment will determine how we treat them.

The image we have of ourselves, will determine how we treat ourselves. If we have a low self-image, we may not treat ourselves well, or at least as being important. If we have a good and healthy self-image, we may treat ourselves much better.

I think the image we have of God, also determines the way we see, treat and relate to God!

I've spoken to just about three quarters of a million students in high schools around Australia and New Zealand. Talking to many of these, listening to their conversations, watching the reactions and reading hundreds of thousands of response cards, has given me a glimpse of the diverse images young people have of God.

Some see God like a judge or the deputy principal - mostly male. They see him sitting on some golden throne up in the clouds and when he sees us doing things wrong, doing 'naughties' or being bad - he sends down thunderbolts, natural disasters and accidents to 'smite us'!

I think the image we have of God also determines the way we see, treat and relate to God!

Others see God like some invisible force like magnetism, gravity or kinetic energy. Usually a good force! After all, God's supposed to be good. They don't imagine God has a personality or feelings, or may want a spiritual yet personified relationship with us.

Others see God like some sort of being in the sky and humans no more than God's play things. Perhaps a little like the Greek pantheon of the gods.

I remember working in a shearing shed. If it rained after we started on a contract, we couldn't shear but got paid anyway. One of the roustabouts used to go to the shearing shed door look up at the sky and call out, 'Send 'er down, Hughey!

I've buried people and often heard references to the deceased like: 'I guess their time was up' and 'well, God must have decided that was that for them!'

Others see God as a lucky charm spirit. Do the right thing and respect God and you'll have a lucky life. More prayers are offered to this god around lotteries, casinos and sporting events in the hope of success and winnings and good times - like currying favour with a very rich uncle.

Another common image can touch deep hurts. I remember years ago when I was starting out in ministry and mission, attending a drop-in-centre run by a wise Christian social worker. We were working there as a team for a week.

One of the gang leaders sized us up. Working out we were 'into the God Sales business' he cut to the quick. He asked 'So what's God like?'

We were right in the middle of studying the Lord's Prayer, so I thought what a good place to start. So I said, in a stern serious tone, 'Well, God's like a Father!'

I'll never forget him spitting between clenched teeth 'WELL IF HE'S ANYTHING LIKE MY OLD MAN, YOU CAN STICK IT UP [a particular place in your anatomy]' or words to that effect.

I must have looked shocked because the social worker came over asking, 'Are you ok, I just saw Jonno storm off after you speaking to him?'

When I work in evangelism, mission, justice, worship and the sacraments – the image of God takes on a perfumed existential presence.

I told him what I had said and how Jonno responded.

He asked, 'Did you ask him about his family circumstances before telling him God was like that? If you had, you'd have found out his father comes home drunk most nights, beats up his wife and abuses and rapes his daughter. You may want to get to know the situation of a lot of these people before you cast an image of God like that.'

I learned my lesson.

While not all fathers are like Jonno's, there are enough to justify finding out before painting an image of God as Father for someone. Sometimes I'll say, 'God can be "like" a perfect dad and mum all rolled into one'. But even then, for some I know, the hurts are so deep they can't even imagine what a great parent could be like.

In the last 15 years, I've travelled around the world extensively and done a number of interfaith seminars and work. I live in Egypt for 3-4 months of the year. I get to hear how a number of faiths imagine God and their gods. In so many people, there's a deep yearning to connect with what they imagine the 'otherness' of a god beyond themselves is like.

Some dear, dear friends of other faiths, and Christians, particularly in the West seem to have developed 'boutique' faiths. They enjoy sharing their beliefs, spiritual experiences, their hearts and imaginations over fabulous food and stunning wine.

Amongst these myriad imaginations of God, I've clarified and honed my personal imaginations of God.

I love the interfaith sessions we do in schools about tolerance, education and friendship, building with people different from us and our family. I come home to Carolyn [my best

friend that I am married to] and share my amazement that, after all the Christian school seminars I've done, in interfaith sessions, I can speak much more directly about Christian and Biblical images of God! And I'm surprised by how much we share in common, especially in how God calls us to treat others and the environment.

More and more, my image of God is concretised and beautifully earthed as I campaign against human trafficking¹. As I walk in the shoes of William Wilberforce, Shaftsbury, Ghandi, Mandela and Desmond Tutu, an image of God emerges as compassionate, liberator, and redeemer with a heart of love for people to live as we were created – an image which moves from grey and black and white to colour.

When I work in evangelism, mission, justice, worship and the sacraments – the image of God takes on a perfumed existential presence. Here the image of God flips the binoculars around from God looking far off, to God seen in immediate sensory details.

When I'm praying for specific things in desperate situations, my expectations and openness help me look for God's holistic, helping hands. Often here I experience what Shane Claiborne calls *becoming the prayers that we pray*.

When I move into the space of listening prayer, my image of God comes through the spiritual senses of sensations and feelings.

When I'm praying through a theological, ethical or Bible passage, God comes to me through the imaginations of the great Teacher with the 'Uh huh!' of revelation, wisdom and insight. Here, I imagine sitting at God's feet like a child in wonder, listening to a story that draws me into an intriguing adventure.

When I'm praying and get so full of God's Spirit I can't even find words to describe my image of God and what I want to say – a new language breaks from my lips and just spills out.

I'm intrigued by the Apostle Paul's insight in 1 Corinthians 2 about understanding spiritual things and *the mind of God* – about the need to have the Spirit. In my work as a consultant in strategic missional planning, I help churches and organisations grow spirituality in their corporate local culture. We ponder of late how to discern the call of God corporately. How can the leading of the Spirit and our images of God help us see and hear what God is doing – and join in?

I find the more I imagine God, the more I discover there is to imagine about God. The more I delve into these images, the bigger and bigger God gets. The bigger and bigger God gets, the more mystical and detailed the Kingdom of God is revealed.

What shifts, is my imaginations of the past to the imaginations of the future.

¹ Fuzz is coordinator for STOP THE TRAFFIK Australia, a coalition of NGO's, churches, Jewish women and Trade Unions who campaign against human trafficking.

A Warm, Moist, Salty God

by Edwina Gateley

Deep in the forest
I found my God
leaping through the trees,
spinning with the glancing sunlight,
caressing with the breeze.
There where the grasses
rose and fell
fanning the perfumed air,
I smelt her beauty,
elusive, free,
dancing everywhere.

Deep in the city
I found my God
weeping in the bar,
prowling beneath the glaring lights,
dodging speeding car.
There where the women
were pimped and raped,
cursing for the light,
I felt her presence,
fierce, deep,
sobbing in the night.

Deep in myself,
I found my God
stirring in my guts,
quickenning my middle-aged bones,
stilling all my butts.
There where my spirit
had slumbered long,
numbed into a trance,
A moist, warm, salty God
arose,
and beckoned me to Dance.

Your God too

by Terri Ashton

I praise your God too
you sky-larking moon
spotlighting
back lighting
down and up-lighting
the local scene

And you palm trees
ground-pinned
spell-struck
high on wind

Your God too
air-light sand that melts within
the hollows of our ticklish feet
Our quivering
bare-breezy
evening toes

And you pearl-tossed waves
shimmering with stars
rolling out the melody of inner time
Cymbals swishing
marking the return to home
I praise your Beloved too

I praise you
our beach-combing
love-making God
Your paua cup of paradise
is running full over

The Jigsaw Puzzle.....on retreat!¹

a parable by Lois McMillan

* What is it about?

“What is it all about?”

Making a picture, bit by bit.

A life is created out of a multitude of “bits”
brought together moment by moment
seemingly randomly.

* The Big Picture

The reference point.

Oh, so important to have One,
to patiently keep coming back to,
peering, trying, keeping an eye on.

In God I live and move and have my being.

* A Place fit for Purpose

~ Space to lay it all out (The round table wasn't big enough!)

~ Time, uninterrupted by responsibility
noise
crowds
busyness

* Sorting the pieces

Discerning

Getting to grips with

~ edge bits of the picture
boundaries of my life
~shapes of pieces
facts of the matter
~colours with their subtle variations
my feelings around

~first things first
what's my priority
focus?

* Is this MY jigsaw ?

The part others can play

Is there room for another ?

Perhaps many will play a part.

We bring different “eyes ”

Some plan

initiate

pop a few bits in, now and then

some delight in completing a section

A richness.

* Do I HAVE to do this ?

It is my choice

~ when

~ for how long

~ how

* Will the jigsaw puzzle be solved by Friday?

Is the need for completion “set in concrete ”?

Maybe the doing

the questioning

the living

are in themselves valuable.

Can I finish “my course ”

having left unsolved, incomplete

questings along the way ?

* What we left 'til last

'til the “3rd age ”

After completing the colourful, apparent areas

~ there was that expanse of beach

stony, gritty sand

the place on which the multi-coloured sheds stand

Have I found MY place to stand ?

a place where I am “in God”

~and then all that blue and bluish white

the ever-changing, free flowing clouds in the sky

So many shades of blue!

My immense God

mysterious

close as breath

overarching all peoples

all people

without whom we die

in whom we die

My in-spiration

The Alpha and the Omega

¹ En Hakkore, January 2014

So what is God like for you?

by Andrew Dunn

That's a good question to ponder. It's also a wonderful question for a spiritual director to ask at an appropriate time.

'*What's God like for you?*' assumes God is best described by a person out of their own experience of God and of grace, God's presence and absence, encounters near or distant, images and language that are true for them in the moment.

There are no limits to the ways God draws near or attracts our attention. Nor to how we might describe these moments. Scripture writers suggest there are no outside edges to God's grace nor how and when it is met. Remember Moses at the fiery bush (Exodus 3), Elijah on the mountain (1 Kings 19), the lovers in the Song of Songs, David's shepherd Psalm (23), Mary Magdalene on Easter morn (John 20), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9), John the apostle at Patmos (The Revelation).

There are no limits to the ways God draws near or attracts our attention.

Further, most Biblical descriptions aren't couched in doctrinal forms or theological truths. They contain the descriptive language of encounter and relationship; precursors to forms and truths as later needs for definition are met. So the raw materials of grace-encounters and God-meetings are often described in story, poetry, image, simile, and metaphor, that are fresh, immediate and apt.

This suggests, no matter how new to the journey or how further along – each of us will have ways to see and describe what's happening in our relationship with God that are current, timely and apt!

Yet, at times of profound discovery, there may be no words or images to describe what is seen or felt. I read a story about Thomas Aquinas who, after a profound mystical experience of God, later in life, couldn't write another word! The depth and insight of mystical experience often can't be described, at least initially.

As the experience settles, it may well acquire content or structure which allows words or art or colour or image to emerge.

Some of our deepest experiences of God's loving would be diminished were we to articulate them. Indeed, to speak of them might be to empty them and lessen the impact. But sometimes drawing or painting can help us express it. I think Colin McCahon's darkness paintings express how he was seeing God and faith as an absence – an apophatic expression of depths beyond words.

Indeed, art and music can penetrate more deeply than words in expressing real things. A colleague recently described how Bach's St John Passion has become for him a deeply nourishing way to listen for God. For me, Chopin's Andante Spianato in G never ceases to

express God's gentle yet elusive and playful ways of enticing me and drawing me deeper in. It's become a way to hear with my heart and my feelings.

'*What's God like for you?*' can encourage a person to find a way to give expression to depths of experience with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that are creative and timely, deep and true, and delightfully fresh as well. And listening to how it is for others is privilege indeed and not without its spin off in raising our own horizons!



© Andrew Dunn

Accessing another's image of God

by Fran Francis

How does one access the image of God of another? Or even our own?

It isn't always immediately clear how God is presenting to us – as we so easily become enthralled (or get stuck) with the most compelling image of the moment.

Can we see what God looks like to someone entirely 'other' than ourselves? Can the barriers of culture, socio-economics, age, language, gender or health (physical or mental) be surmounted, so I can sit with another person and understand what God is like to them, or equally, show someone else who God is for me right now?

Thanks to God's preference for the symbolic and the visual, this can be done.

In so many ways, the work of spiritual direction is about uncovering the image of God and being with another as they explore the relationship with our ever-changing, many-faced, wholly One yet Trinitarian God. This changing of God is expressed well by the experience of CS Lewis' character Lucy who notices Aslan has got bigger. He actually hasn't but he explains to her that as she grows he will appear bigger as a result¹. The truth is, God is so big he becomes small enough for us.

I read somewhere the work of the Christian is to 'wash the face of Christ' – just as you'd clean a dirty window or the layers of grime off a famous portrait. We're to represent Christ in such a way that the blurred, damaged and dirty image is cleaned away². This is a marvelous way to describe God's healing and restoration of the *image of God* in the world. In reality God's doing this for us as much as we do it for others.

Visual prayer exercises help us notice, as Lucy did, how God has changed for us. God initiating change in our relationship is well-described by St Teresa of Avila in her metaphor of the water supply (prayer) and the garden (the soul)³. Of course, the usefulness of metaphor and image goes back far beyond the 16th century to the origins of Judeo-Christian spiritual language. God's own use of symbols and image is liberal, colourful and rich - the richest of all is that we are God's image.

I first met Jesus when I was five. An adult family friend talked to me about Jesus telling me Jesus would come to live in my heart if I wanted him to. Would I like that? I said yes.

Ironically, I had no Christian input at all until I went to college. When my parents decided to send me to a Catholic girls' school, the little seed that lay in my heart began to sprout. Later, the Jesus 'who lived in my heart' was replaced by a fear and guilt-induced idol (thanks for nothing, End Times preachers!) and I became afraid of God.

God in his mercy broke down that false image and I discovered God as Love – I am loved because God is love. Nothing can shake that, least of all me.

I've met Jesus my Saviour, Jesus my Captor, God the wildlife Ranger committed to my survival - checking my vital statistics and dedicating his life to me and my community.

I know God as Mother and, then Jesus, who lives in my heart, asked if he could come in again. Yes!

And, week by week as my Visio Divina group meets and in spiritual direction sessions, I see how God presents to others – the sheltering tree, the inviting chair, the nourishing meal, the cataract of rushing water, the little boat, the weathered and laughing face, the one carrying the load, the gardener, the glowing fire, the noodle stand in the rainy dark, the watchful parent with young...and countless others.

The fact we use a *visual* term, 'image', for this topic implies something significant.

A key to accessing how God is experienced and seen is through Visio Divina, the practice of 'holy seeing'. When we use physical images and pictures as prayer tools, we begin to see our view of God and, as spiritual directors, we can use this to see how God is presenting to another.

God's own use of symbols and image is liberal, colourful and rich - the richest of all is that we are God's image.

Symbols and pictures transcend all the barriers mentioned earlier. Like dream-work, image-based prayer allows us to explore and discover what glimpse of God an image holds. A prayer collage or even an image that grabs us in a bus shelter can be a 'rhema' i.e. highlighted by God. In this sense, we haven't created the collage or and we didn't intend to notice the poster. We *received* them. They are a gift.

Now we must unwrap them with questions like: Where am I in the image? How does it fit with my life now? Where is God? Our God is Trinitarian, so a particular Person of the Godhead may be freshly revealed to us. What invitation is there for me from God? How does this picture make me feel?

As we notice how God has grown for us and glimpse the new face or attribute God presents to us – the upshot is – we grow too. Seeing who God wants to be for us, we understand more about ourselves. In the most wonderful way, God shows us who we really are.

For example, one of my images of God is of a Kenyan ranger in an elephant sanctuary.

The female elephant (17 year old Emily) and the ranger are close friends and the affection is obvious. He recently saved her life when she was shot by poachers seeking her valuable tusks. Every time she hears his vehicle she comes running from wherever she is to greet him. She remembers what he did for her and understands it in her own

¹ CS Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, HarperCollins, N.Y. 1994. Ch 10.

² Possibly Bonhoeffer

³ Teresa of Avila, *Collected Works, The Book of Her Life*
<http://carmelitesofeldridge.org/St.TeresaofAvilaandWater.htm>

way. He is trustworthy. She is a leader in her community – elephants have a matriarchal society.

I notice the associations and explore why this image caught my eye – why God chose it for me. I'm a leader in my family and community. He saved her, and he saved me.

The 'poacher' lost! The Ranger won! Her ivory is precious and sought-after.

A blessing and a curse, perhaps. It is grown out of her very being. What might that be for me? I savour the gift more and more because it reveals not only who God is, but how God sees me.

I'm most deeply affected by the devotion of the elephant and the ranger to one another: a mutuality of affection and commitment. This image inspired my prayer for months and still does. Prayer became an interior listening for the sound of the ranger's engine and running to him, to hear his voice and feel the touch of those kind hands again. I am more aware of how he has dedicated his life to me and my family and community but more importantly, specifically and *interiorly*, I perceive how love between God and I looks.

Our image of God may reflect particular seasons in our life. This may not be the same for everyone. But it makes sense that, in times of struggle or desolation, God will come to us in a different way than when we're joyful and in deep consolation. In visual prayer, seeing how 'God is with us' provides never-ending, ever surprising wonder.

I've worked as a spiritual director, leading a *visio/lectio divina* group called 'Picture', using visual exercises like prayer collage and group Inter-Active Drawing with people of all ages including children as young as seven. I've worked with people in places as diverse as post-earthquake Christchurch, refugees in north-eastern India, slum-dwellers in the Philippines and a weekly group of very different people in Auckland. I've seen so many images of God! I've also seen the interior lives – the very souls of those lovers of God. More importantly, I've seen my own.



For example, one of my images of God is of a Kenyan ranger in an elephant sanctuary.
© Fran Francis

Life seems so complicated

by Anna Johnstone in *The Psalm Walk*

Psalm 57:7 O God, my heart is quiet and confident. No wonder I can sing your praises!

Life seems so complicated sometimes too many things to do and I'm often unsure of how to do them

But right now the floodwaters have receded and things of deep beauty grow in the richness of their wake

A settled strength supports me creative energy encourages and my heart tastes delight

I sit in peace-washed silence eyes closed heart open resting

No urgent clamouring no fearful wondering

This satisfied babe leans on the breast of your love replete

SGM News

Remembering, Celebrating, Dreaming

Well, May has come and gone and with it the four marvellous regional celebration days in Auckland, Palmerston North, Christchurch and Dunedin. People from far and wide gathered, acquaintances were renewed and new ones made. Stories were told, laughter shared.

John Franklin, Anne Hadfield, Marg Schrader, Judith Anne O'Sullivan, Andrew Dunn and Sheila Pritchard painted word pictures of the beginnings and early years of SGM, of the people, places and events that are such an important part of the DNA of SGM. Sue Pickering, Barbara McMillan and I travelled to all the events representing Workgroup, and presenting updates on the Formation Programme and the overall work of SGM. There were group interactions, discussion and feedback on what spiritual formation and spiritual direction might become in order to meet the needs of our grandchildren, grandnieces and grand nephews. Each day closed with a lovely liturgy that Sue had crafted that gently, gratefully and gleefully brought the day's sharing to a close. In each centre a local convenor and team of helpers provided warm and welcoming hospitality that was deeply appreciated. Thank you to all who were involved in making the celebrations happen and to all those who attended and shared their experiences, hopes and dreams.

Having reported, what reflections are percolating in me?

SGM is about God, about people and about the far-flung places in which we live and minister.

- **How can we better resource people where they are and take SGM events and programmes to more centres around the country?**

Archimedes said 'Give me a lever and a place to stand and I will move the world.'

SGM's contemplative heart, ecumenical commitment, honouring of diversity and valuing of generosity and trust form our turangawaewae – the place where stand.

- **How do we continue to use the 'levers' ... Refresh, the Spiritual Directors Formation Programme and the retreats, quiet days, workshops in the Annual Calendar to best effect?**
- **What new levers might God have for us to use in the years ahead?**

In closing I want to acknowledge the many people who have contributed to the life and ministry of SGM but are no longer with us. In each of the celebration days many of these people were spoken of and remembered with gratitude. In particular we remember the recent deaths of Libby Hinton in Wellington, Rev John North in Christchurch and Ian McMillan in Oamaru and pray for family members and those close to them as they grieve.

Blessings, Andrew Pritchard, Convenor



Thanks to Jane Green

Living Contemplatively

Anxiety in Our Digital Age: Creating a Tranquil Spirituality

by Dr. Archibald Hart. First published in *Conversations* Volume 11.2: Fall/Winter 2013

The theme of fear and anxiety presents one of the greatest emotional challenges we face in modern times. Not surprisingly, recapturing the spiritual disciplines is critical. The ability to create and maintain a tranquil state of mind in our digitally driven world will be significant in preventing emotional disorders now at epidemic proportions.

As the ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates, (c. 469 B.C – 399 B.C.) said to his followers: 'As it's not proper to cure the eyes without the head; nor the head without the body; so neither is it proper to cure body without the soul.' Wise words for that time, but I can't think of any more timely for our day and age.

As a clinical psychologist, certified in psycho-pharmacology, I believe we need a wake-up call. Emotional disorders such as panic anxiety, post-traumatic fear, and depression tend to be treated with only one remedy: psychotropic medication. But now a lively debate is going on in the psychological world about whether psychotropic medications are as effective as they claim to be. This is one reason why clinical psychology is shifting its emphasis from a disease model to one that's holistic ...body, mind, and spirit.

We make a Socratic mistake when we ignore the role that lifestyle and behavior play in these disorders. Secondly, spiritual disciplines are increasingly being seen as a powerful resource, not just for healing, but more importantly, prevention. After all, the word 'heal' comes from the Old English word *haelen* that literally means 'to make whole.' The more we neglect the whole person the more serious will be the epidemic of emotional disorders.

The Growing Epidemic Of Anxiety Disorders

According to The Atlantic Journal, 'America is turning into a country of hand-wringers.'¹ Nearly one in five adults, that's 40 million Americans, now suffer from some form of anxiety disorder.² Panic Anxiety Disorder is the number one mental-health problem for women in the US. It's second in men; the first is substance abuse. I suspect the epidemic of substance abuse in men is nothing more than a form of self-medication.³

Panic anxiety's close cousin, depression, is the second most common class of disorder—an incidence of one in ten and growing. Nearly one-half of those diagnosed with depression are also diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.⁴ Obviously, medication plays a major and effective role...but how we treat less serious, thought debilitating, anxiety and depressive disorders is now receiving close scrutiny.⁵ And it is to this scrutiny, I want

to add the important role that spiritual practices can play in both preventing and healing most of our anxiety and depression disorders.

The obvious question that follows then is: 'What's causing this dramatic increase in anxiety and depression disorders?' Some might blame the economy. We've been submerged in a long period of economic recession. Many would say it's to be expected, anxiety is on the rise. The implication is when the economy fully recovers our anxiety epidemic will subside. But will it?⁶ General consensus is that our anxiety disorders will not go away when the economy improves. Yet if anything, they will continue to increase. And the reason for this is pretty obvious: the primary cause of modern anxiety disorders is stress. With the growth of digital technology now offering a round-the-clock captivity, stress levels are likely to continue to rise in the years to come⁷ and with them – a rise in the incidence of anxiety and depression disorders.

The Stress/Cortisol/Anxiety Connection

What triggers an anxiety disorder? It can be most helpful for someone suffering from an anxiety disorder to know something about its psychophysiology. Never in history have we been as busy as we are today. Busyness has become a way of life for most of us and multitasking is the norm. We can't get away from the glamorous digital world and re-engage nature's natural remedies. While some cope without melting down, all of us will sooner or later pay the price for our overstimulation with overwhelming fatigue, fear, depression and certain disorders like panic attacks. All because modern-day stress has overcome the limitations of how God created our brain's defence systems.

How does stress create this tranquillity disruption? The main culprit is the hormone cortisol, a cousin of adrenaline. In a balanced lifestyle, cortisol is our protector. It does everything it can to ensure a balanced life. It helps us remember dangerous threats from the past by storing memory in the brain's fear center (the amygdala.) This helps us avoid these threats in the future. But when pushed to the limits by prolonged stress, cortisol is designed to change its function and switch from being our protector to forcing us out of the stressful situation. For example, in calm times it stores our fat so it's there when we need it. But under stress cortisol releases energy stored in fat so we can better 'fight or flee'.

This is one reason stressed individuals put on weight—cortisol helps the body store energy. But when stress is prolonged or severe, cortisol blocks the hormone receptor for GABA (a neurotransmitter that plays a key role in 'calming' us by regulating the receptors for the brain's natural tranquilizers). Blocking GABA increases our anxiety and can trigger a bout of depression—all intended to force us out of the stressful situation.

The artificial tranquilizers we take to calm our anxieties can only restore control to a limited extent because cortisol is blocking our GABA receptor. This means the treatment

¹ The Atlantic, July 17, 2012, p. 39.

² <http://www.adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>

³ Archibald Hart, *The Anxiety Cure*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999).

⁴ <http://www.adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/depression>

⁵ <http://www.webmd.com/depression/features/are-antidepressants-effective>

⁶ Op. Cit.

⁷ I explore this further in my new book, *The Digital Invasion: How Technology is Shaping You and Your Relationships*, Baker Books, 2013.

of disorders like panic anxiety cannot depend solely on taking tranquilizers, although they can be helpful. Treatment must also include lowering your cortisol level, which means lowering stress levels is crucial for anyone who suffers panic attacks.

Tranquillity At Risk

Before I discuss what I believe to be an important stress reducing strategy, let me remind the reader that, aside from the damage prolonged stress can cause to your brain's natural tranquillity system, there are certain behaviors that can increase your risk of an anxiety disorder. Here are just a few that are often over-looked:

1. **Hurry sickness** - trying to do too much and never experiencing adequate 'down time'. Hurry sickness leads to adrenaline addiction and cortisol flooding.
2. **Multitasking**. The idea that the human brain is capable of doing a zillion things at the same time is a myth that has no validity.⁸ Thorough research shows it reduces efficiency.
3. **Too plugged in**. A new Android advertisement says: 'Turning you into an instrument of efficiency. Take your work with you EVERYWHERE.' The increased pace of life and loss of recovery and sleep time sets a perfect background for anxiety disorders.
4. **Digital addiction**. The power of the Internet and our digital gadgets to grow new addictions is alarming. Pornography, gambling, gaming and even social networking have all been identified as powerful addiction generators.
5. **Perpetual fatigue**. Also called 'sunset fatigue'. Many come home from work exhausted, irritable with spouse and children, even depressed. Nicholas Carr and many other researchers claim that our relentless digital world is rewiring our brains.⁹ I believe it is also rewiring the emotional states that affect our well-being.
6. **Perpetual restlessness**. There are many reports in the media that most of us can't even unplug on vacation. On a recent trip to Hawaii, I took a walk along the beach to find many sunbathers impulsively checking emails, texts or just searching their smart phones for some distraction. The 'variable reinforcement' principle operating here not only creates habits hard to break, but causes a dramatic rise in anxiety.

Creating a Tranquil Spirituality

I now come to the main thrust of this article, namely, to emphasize the important role that our spiritual disciplines can play in reducing stress and in healing less serious anxiety and depression disorders. I suspect some readers, like myself, come from a conservative theological background and might harbor some resistance to spiritual disciplines. When I first released my *Relaxation and Christian Meditation* CD many years ago, I received quite a bit of criticism. Despite the scientific evidence presented in support of the power

8 Christine Rosen, "The Myth of Multitasking", *New Atlantis*, Spring 2008, 106.

9 Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.).

of relaxation in countering the ravaging effects of stress, many feared I was advocating some form of Eastern religion. But relaxation, regularly practiced, is a powerful healing agent because it goes right to the root of the problem.

There's no doubt in my mind the need for such relaxation is built into God's creation of us. Scripture clearly admonishes us to 'be still', and this isn't only for our spiritual lives, but the benefit of our bodies as well. Close companions of relaxation are the spiritual disciplines. God has designed our bodies not only that these are spiritually beneficial; they're also powerful antidotes for stress.

In particular, spiritual disciplines create and maintain a healthy tranquillity system in the brain. When relaxation (which is primarily the lowering of adrenaline arousal in the body) is combined with contemplation (which is primarily a lowering of arousal of the mind so that you can focus on God), one has a powerful cure for both stress and anxiety. If we're to control our anxiety epidemic, people need to learn to turn down the volume of their lives and engage in those helpful disciplines that connect them with God.

Is Modern Worship a Stress Reliever?

However, much of what we label as 'spiritual' today isn't necessarily as conducive to a tranquil state of mind as we might think. Or, to put it bluntly, we really need to look more closely at the styles of worship that now prevail and ask: 'To what extent is modern-day worship helping us to balance out the high levels of stress in our lives?'

My intent isn't to criticize, but to encourage the church to introduce spiritual practices conducive to a tranquil state as well.

I'm old enough to recall when worship and personal 'quiet times' gave me a profound feeling of peace. I grew up in South Africa after the Second World War. I accepted Christ at age 16 and our little church had a small group of vibrant young people. Our favorite songs actually had meaningful lyrics and even if the sermon was sometimes dull, we always left feeling we'd met with God. Most importantly, I now realize, worship time was for all of us, a restorer of our peace.

Regrettably, many now question whether contemporary worship provides anything like a form of peace. Some ask: 'Does worship really have to be exciting?'¹⁰ Many churches think it has to be or people won't come. So we add stage lights, extra loud praise songs and videos to compete with the stimulation of the digital world. And even then, many have developed the habit (or is it addiction?) of fiddling with their smartphones during service to make sure that they're not missing something going on outside the church.

Now, please don't misunderstand me, an occasional boost of excitement can certainly keep me awake. But what concerns me, and many others, is that the modern, digitally dependent churches aren't providing the counterbalance of a tranquil state of worship.

¹⁰ Rev. Andrew Compton, "Does worship really have to be exciting?" *The Reformed Reader*, August 29, 2011.

And we certainly aren't asking whether the spiritual stimulations so common today are contributing to the growth of disorders like anxiety and depression by depleting the brain's natural tranquillity system. Or, to put it more bluntly, while the stimulation of contemporary worship does appeal to many, where are the Church-based opportunities that provide an antidote to our over-stress? Where can we go to restore our natural tranquilizers that are already over-taxed? If the church doesn't teach and provide spiritual practices to counter our over-stimulation, where else can we go for such relief?

Some might ask: 'How necessary is tranquillity of mind?' My answer is 'crucial.' I believe scripture advocates peacefulness. Scripture promises it. I don't think this means we have to stay in a state of high tranquillity every moment of every day or embrace Quaker styles of worship. Rather, I am advocating that the high stress we face in our work-a-world day demands some relief from our over-stimulation – and I know of no better place to find relief than in personal spiritual disciplines. We need to promote regular prayer time, meditation and plain old-fashioned stillness and quietness, and evaluate to what extent they ameliorate our anxiety states or rob us of God-given capacity for tranquillity.

Obviously, I'm not anticipating the elimination of all anxieties. In many respects, a certain level of anxiety is healthy and God-given. A normal cognitive and physiological response designed to prompt us to urgent action. But the more serious forms of anxiety disorders can be avoided if we involve our whole being. (Remember 'haelen'.)

There's a lot pastors and church leaders can do to reduce, or at least balance out, the over-stimulation of parishioners. Here are a few suggestions:

- Educate people in the importance of protecting their tranquillity system and how they can repair damage already done.
- Encourage spiritual practices and provide workshops and other opportunities for believers to develop these practices.¹¹
- Set up regular opportunities for reflection and contemplation in a group setting. This not builds social unity, but supports those who find it difficult to engage in these spiritual practices.
- Consider interposing silence and reflection and meditation with high stimulation music activity, so they're seen as part of the whole worship experience. Contemplative spiritual practices need to be demonstrated to parishioners in a practical way. Unless it's offered and people encouraged to practice, these disciplines may not be discovered.

¹¹ "Spirituality and Its Relationships With the Health and Illness of Appalachian People," *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, April 1, 2010, 21:175–182

Protecting Your Godspace

In closing, what can we do as individuals to build and maintain a tranquil state of mind that keeps both fear and anxiety under control? The final chapter of my book, *The Digital Invasion*, emphasizes the importance of protecting your 'Godspace'.¹² In our busy, overloaded lifestyle, it's the space we set aside for God that gets neglected. The experts keep reminding us that we need to 'untether' regularly, or, as *The Message* translates the words of Jesus (Mt 11:28 – 29): 'Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Getaway with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest.'

So here are a few ways you can protect your Godspace:

- Intentionally, select a time of the day that you can set as your Godspace—and protect it.
- Don't let Internet distractions dominate your life - keep a close watch to prevent them from robbing you of your Godspace. Timothy Keller calls them 'counterfeit Gods' and likens them to idols we worship in our modern world.¹³
- Make sure that your Godspace has lots of silence. Someone called it a 'Sabbath of the mouth', Studies show the average person today, surrounded by the cyber world, can only tolerate about fifteen seconds of silence. Monitor yourself by keeping a record of how long you can close your eyes, focus on God and sit still.
- Make sure your Godspace is about solitude. Whereas silence is a 'Sabbath of the mouth' solitude is a 'Sabbath of involvement.' Turn off your smartphone and let go of all distractions. I conclude with Jesus encouraging words, 'Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly' (*The Message*, Mt 11:30).

"Anxiety in our Digital Age: Creating a Tranquil Spirituality", by Archibald Hart. Fall 2012, vol 11.2. Reprinted with permission from *Conversations: A Forum for Authentic Transformation*.

¹² Catherine Hart Weber, "Flourish: Discover the daily joy of Abundant Living," (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2010).

¹³ Timothy Keller, "Counterfeit Gods," (New York: Dutton, 2009), xvi.

Refresh Book Reviews

Like Catching Water in a Net, Human Attempts to Describe the Divine

By Val Webb (Continuum NY 2007)

Reviewed by Trish McBride

Given that this issue of *Refresh* is devoted to Image of God, this is most appropriate book to review!

Val Webb, with great scholarship and clarity, as befits her background as a scientist, has gathered an extraordinary range of images for the Divine One from an extraordinary range of sources across millennia, cultures and faiths. She begins from the point, probably familiar to many *Refresh* readers, that all our attempts to describe God are inadequate, that our best efforts are, by definition, all metaphors and symbols, which while shining some light are forever incomplete. As the title so expressively indicates, the task is indeed like catching water in a net!

Webb makes no assumptions at all about what readers may or may not actually believe, simply gathers and classifies the rich collection of words and images. She has introductory chapters delineating the task and her often moving personal faith reasons for undertaking it. The next nine are devoted to exploring images of formlessness (breath, wind), those from the natural world, fire, water, family words, Spirit and other sets of images for the Holy One. What is striking here is how many metaphors, familiar to Christians from the Bible, are also in the understandings of Buddhists, Hindu, Jews, Muslims and people of indigenous religions.

I read all those chapters with delight – it is one of those books that both articulated my own thinking and expanded it. Chapter 13 is basically a history of the development of the texts of the various versions of the Bible, and could be some challenge to the thinking of those who see the Book as the solid, unchanging and inerrant foundation of their faith. There was historical information here that I was unaware of, and feel enlightened by.

Chapter 14, about Jesus, was the real challenge for me. On the first reading, there was an inner protest – this isn't the Jesus who has lovingly related to me over the years! Scriptural descriptions of him as 'anointed' (ie the Christ), 'messiah' and 'son of God' are explored, and verses cited where those terms are also commonly applied in the Hebrew Scriptures to kings like David and Solomon, and so his Divinity is questioned.

On the second reading of the chapter, I was able to appreciate the carefully set out history of the development of doctrine about Jesus – e.g. the grafting of Greek thought into John's Gospel naming Jesus as the Word around the end of the 1st century AD; the Trinitarian orthodoxy that most of us grew up with only being defined and established

in the 5th century; and various arguments over the meaning of atonement theology that have been regular events in church history. Many Christians have now discarded this latter altogether as a belief in a violent God appropriate to an older culture, but no longer credible or appropriate in the 21st century.

On my third reading of that chapter, and touching base again with the sub-title 'human attempts to describe the Divine', I understood Webb's methodology in this chapter is faithful to her purpose: a summary and history of what the writers of New Testament books, early Church Fathers and theologians have said about Jesus in their attempts to describe the Divine they recognised in and through him.

Then in the final chapter, What is Truth? I was again whole-heartedly in tune with the book's summary and conclusion. "All truth is evolving, correctible, and open to more truth as new factors constantly enter our changing experience, individually and globally..." We may sometimes be Spirit-challenged to dismantle our complete-looking theological jigsaw puzzles to incorporate a barrow-load of new pieces! And I find the image in the closing pages of the "Divine Lure" entrancing. It hints at invitation, at being beckoned into ever deeper understanding of the Who and How of Sacred Presence in our lives and in the cosmos.

The book received a Best Books award from USA Book News. It is an example of contextual theology – beginning from what we can see, hear, experience, and recognising there the Divine as Ground of our Being (Tillich). This contrasts with classical theology which has traditionally provided orthodox descriptions of the mysterious heavenly realities and processes that are required beliefs whether or not they are humanly comprehensible or congruent with human experience. I heartily recommend **Like Catching Water in a Net** to those who are ready to explore common understandings with other faiths, and possibly to venture outside their comfort zones in seeing what recent Scripture scholarship has to offer. This is an enriching read. And there's the old wisdom 'Take what fits and leave the rest'!

Well-come Grace: A poetic memoir of resilience through faith and in therapy

by Suzanne Tocher (Highland Books Ltd, UK 2013)

Reviewed by Graham Millar

In this book, Suzanne tells an insightful and moving story of her journey to wholeness. Written in a creative style, and easily read in one session, it draws appropriately on art and poetry from therapeutic journaling. Many babyboomers experienced the stress disorders of parents surviving war. Some may also have developed "Body Dysmorphic Disorder". Suzanne generously shares these life-threatening experiences and her intensive and very successful psychotherapy. This lasted intermittently for nearly

thirty years. The story has much sadness and distress, but keeps producing wonderful surprises. I found the telling honest, clear and engaging. It is rare for people to keep facing their pain, to discover the really deep origins of this, and to find the healing solutions.

For therapists, there are good insights and learnings. For those experiencing similar disorders, there is hope. For pastors, there is a role model. An essential part of the journey is the spiritual renewal which was sparked by a taxi-driver and facilitated by a conscientious pastor. Read this book with an open heart, savour the insights, and find your own grace.

Creative Honest Grunty Insightful The Jesus Walk

An inspirational eBook by Anna Johnstone

First published in New Zealand, March 2014, by Johnstone2 Photography

Available from <http://annajohnstone.com> along with Anna's four other books

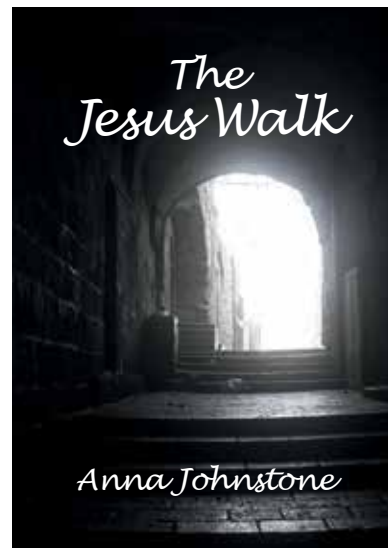
Reviewed by Diane Gilliam-Weeks

My predecessor, Andrew Dunn, told Anna, 'I sense this one may be your best yet...[it's] artistic – like a walk through a gallery of glorious images and creative words and phrases, refreshing, stimulating!' And I agree!

Travelling with my right hand Refresh woman, through her gut wrenching dark night, was gripping; and what a relief when Anna sees the light of Christ at the end of that tunnel. We also walk through Old Jerusalem in the company of the disciples.

The Foreword, by Joy Cowley, tells us The Jesus Walk is neither exegesis nor a study of the historical Jesus. 'It is all about us, and our journey through life with the Presence that accompanies us...the bridge between this little finite existence we might call 'Life School' and the great spiritual reality beyond our limited sensate system... With gorgeous photographs, each picture in itself, a doorway to prayer, Anna gives us a series of reflections that unwrap a life lived with His companionship...The Jesus Walk is guided by the Ancient Love that is ever new.'

A treasure for the contemplative walk with Christ.



The Last Word

Possibly my most interesting image of God came to me in a dream. I was sitting on a lakeside in Africa with a few locals, when suddenly I noticed a lioness swimming right toward me. Slowly, she climbed the beach toward us. I wondered if she would be dangerous – I certainly felt my adrenaline kick in. But instead of attacking, she walked around behind me and sat at my side looking calmly out at the lake. I knew in her form, the Holy Spirit come to give me courage. I was training for the ministry. Wide awake, I would imagine her lolling on the roof beams inside churches.

Of course, my favourite image of God is Jesus. And I love the paradox of our being made in the image of God echoed by the words of 1 John 3:2, 'Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.'

Together, the contributors to this edition have created a tapestry rich in shades of light and colour from which we can each expand our vision. I thank them all.

Blessings

Diane [dianegw@actrix.co.nz]

Summer 2015 Refresh theme 'Letting Go'

Deadline August 28, 2014

We're looking at two sides of how – in our contemplative experience – God helps us let go: one reminds me of a monkey with its hand caught in the biscuit tin – the other – is about letting go following catastrophic events like the Canterbury earthquakes or the death of a dream.

Writers please!

keep contributions to fewer than 2000 words

images must be over 2 megapixels to be usable

use single quotation marks

conversational in style using conjunctions if possible

reference all quotations as endnotes

try to use inclusive language wherever possible

Made in the Image of God

by Maggie Quinlan

Refrain

Imago Dei. Imago Dei.
Made in the image of God.
O God please help me
to be who you made me.
Destroy all the falseness in me.

Verse

A new child is delivered
unique in all creation.
Dependent for life and sustenance.
Beloved of God.
Open to new learning
the days grow to weeks.
The pilgrimage beginning.
Beloved to God.

Refrain

Verse

What happens to this new life?
Unique in all creation.
Nurtured well or poorly.
Beloved of God.
In a world of joy and cruelty,
where love is so important.
The path of life continues.
Beloved to God

Refrain

Verse

The image grows distorted.
Unique in all creation.
Losing that identity.
Beloved of God.
Knowledge is a mirage.
Worth is measured wrongly.
The way is so uneven.
Beloved to God.

Refrain

Verse

The adult years are driven.
Unique in all creation.
False gods and power and riches.
Beloved of God.
Achievements, stress, anxiety
raise questions on life's purpose.
The struggles and the heartache.
Beloved to God.

Refrain

Verse

Space and time are needed.
Unique in all creation.
To draw close to our maker.
Beloved of God.
Our parent wants to teach us
who we really are.
Created, shaped with care, and
Beloved to God.

Refrain



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Contributors

Gabrielle Daly-Fong is in Hamilton Catholic Diocese, now residing in Putaruru, 'Haven of The Owl'. She works in the fields of - spiritual direction, professional super-vision, Christian retreats, and personal well-being/waiora workshops e.g. The Enneagram, Christian mandala prayer, and Journaling prayer. Lately she has taken on the role of Pedagogical Leader at South Waikato Alternative Education in Tokoroa; please pray for her energy to be sustained in this special ministry. She is married to 'dear John', who is her P.A. and co-celebrant for funerals.

Margaret Dunn lives at Albany and loves creativity in the form of patchwork and quilting.

Andrew Dunn enjoys the bush at Albany Heights where he works in spiritual direction, supervision and retreat leading.

Pip Nicholls loves to read slowly, in fact prefers to do everything with a little 'slow' attached, so she enjoys poetry and cartoons for getting to the unsayable briefly and succinctly.

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.

Andrew Norton is inspired by nature, the ups and downs of life and a deep spirituality. Andrew has a rare gift of crafting words that feed the reader's mind and soul. He draws from a deep well of experiences as a leader, as well as his keen interests in tramping, photography and recent travel. From Auckland, Andrew combines roles as a senior minister of St Columba @ Botany with executive coaching and leading wilderness retreats. Andrew is married to Sue and they have four adult children.

Fran Francis lives in Beach Haven, Auckland (best sunsets in the country). She holds a Masters in Ministry, and has been a Vineyard pastor with her husband for 21 years and is involved in leader care for the Vineyard Movement. She enjoys creating and leading retreats, quiet days, practical workshops and bespoke spiritual refreshment events here and overseas. Fran and her colleague, Kris, lead regular workshops on using visual tools in prayer and devotion. You can find out more at www.solace.org.nz

Fuzz Kitto is an International Church Consultant and National Co-coordinator for STOP THE TRAFFIK Australia (campaign to stop human trafficking/ modern slavery). He travels the world collecting stories, creating stories and spreading rumours of hope.

Edwina Gateley's journey has led her to teach in Africa, found Volunteer Missionary Movement, sojourn in the Sahara Desert, spend nine months of prayer in a trailer in the woods, befriend and minister to street people and women in prostitution – and preaching the Good News: God Is With Us. She is a poet, theologian, artist, writer, lay minister, modern-day mystic and prophet, and a single mother.