God's Work of Art

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Contents

Preface

‘We are God’s work of art, created in Christ Jesus for the good works which God has already designated to make up our way of life.’ (Ephesians 2.10. New Jerusalem Bible)

The aim of this book is an examination of human living in the wake of the tempestuous twentieth century, which was darkened by actions of unparalleled violence. The explosion of knowledge in scientific research seemed to fuel the capacity to destroy life rather than to extend the benefits of civilization. Is the human being really God’s work of art or simply a monster born out of time?

The first six chapters describe aspects of the current poignant human situation. By love alone can this destructive tendency be reversed, and this is where the Church, whose work is considered in the next five chapters, should play a vital role.

When the life of the spirit takes pre-eminence, the inner development of the individual takes precedence. This aspect of human growth is described in chapters twelve to fifteen. These contain the basis of respect for all life which reaches its apogee in the human being and the care they should bequeath on the earth itself, on which we all depend.

The final three chapters point to the promise of the future when hope is guided by compassion and understanding is based on truth and wholehearted cooperation with the entire world community.

Acknowledgements

All Scripture references are taken from the Revised English Bible unless otherwise stated.

Chapter 1

A Confused World

'The Lord is waiting to show you his favour, and he yearns to have pity on you; for the Lord is a God of justice. Happy are all who wait for him!' (Isaiah 30.18.)

The twentieth century was arguably the most violent in the history of the human race. The Turkish genocide of its Armenian population was largely overlooked, but it gave Hitler the go-ahead for his own atrocities. Not only were there two vicious dictators, Hitler and Stalin, who together were responsible for killing at least sixteen million people and consigning much of European civilization to the flames, but their example showed the complete insignificance of human values in the face of ideologies governed by hatred and murder. The end of the Second World War in 1945 gave the West some respite, but Eastern Europe lay in the thrall of the destructive Communist system which showed its true savagery under Stalin and his successors. Religion was banned as socialist Marxism became the official creed.

The rest of the world did not fare particularly well either. While Communism flourished in China and extended its thrust to Tibet, a number of evil dictators took power in several Middle Eastern countries, and the vicious system of 'apartheid' separated the majority of black people in South Africa from an oppressive white minority who seemed to be permanently entrenched in control. The world revulsion of this evil led to the abandonment of racial discrimination in South Africa, but the subsequent leadership of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu has been succeeded by a far less impressive government, and violent crime and AIDS are ravaging the country.

The truth seems to be that the great majority of the recently emancipated black population was not in a situation of responsible education to assume the power that was thrust upon them after the precipitate termination of apartheid. If only the white population had acted generously they would have groomed

their black successors to assume government in graded steps, so that in the end competent black and white groups would have been able to function in amity for the good of South Africa.

A depressing scenario is being enacted in much of sub-Saharan Africa (dictatorial government with discrimination against minority groups), while the north has been involved in bitter hostility in the Middle Eastern conflict with the recently established state of Israel, itself made inevitable as a place of sanctuary for Jews who had survived the Holocaust in which six million of their kin had been slaughtered. But the dispossessed Palestinian population have been marginalized within Israel while the new state has constantly manoeuvred to increase its territory outwards to establish fresh Jewish settlements and establish control of Jerusalem, which is as holy to Muslim and Christian as to Jew.

America, apart from the Unites States and Canada, has been in a state of intermittent turmoil with periods of control by unscrupulous dictators (like Pinochet in Chile) or impotent governments.

More recently Serbia has been in the control of Slobodan Milosevic, who waged a war in Bosnia (1991–94) between Serbs and Muslims, which was attended by mass rape and sexual slavery as a weapon of terror by the Serbs. Many Muslims were massacred in a policy of 'ethnic cleansing' of its Albanian minority who are Muslims. The lowest point was the wanton slaughter of more than 5000 Muslim men and boys from Srebrenica, an enclave in Serbian Bosnia, in 1995. It was generally regarded as one of the most horrific episodes of the war.

At present there is fierce antagonism between Albanians and Slavs in Macedonia. Will the millennium see humankind continue to hurtle to mass destruction or will there be a change of mind, a metanoia, to peaceful, productive living?

This fortunately is only one side of the picture of the twentieth century. Its achievements in scientific knowledge have been colossal, especially in medical research, while social liberation has been broadened out of all recognition. This has been most apparent in the Western approach to homosexuality and civil rights, which embrace women as well as men. Only a few countries practise

capital punishment now, the United States being a sad exception. In Africa and Asia this liberation is much less apparent, though Israel has adopted the Western rejection of capital punishment and persecution of gay people. Widespread world prejudice is still rampant, but at least homosexuals are becoming more accepted as an integral part of the community.

Likewise there is a genuine concern for the poor and under-privileged both by the state and a host of charitable institutions. Prisons themselves, though still dark and severely degrading, are coping bravely with the rehabilitation of their inmates in a way hardly recognizable compared with that of their nineteenth century predecessors. The same applies to educational establishments and schools for the less favoured members of the community, while the concept of the welfare state has taken root especially in Britain, where free medical attention is available to those in financial need.

Therefore it would seem that out of the turmoil and desolation that has shattered many of the civilized attitudes of the past, there is arising a fresher, freer way of life that gives more scope for the individual and less stifling power to dominating political systems. But we should always be on the alert for personal apathy and corporate evil: 'Be on the alert! Wake up! Your enemy the devil, like a roaring lion, prowls around looking for someone to devour.'[1] The devil may well be an evil angel of enormous power, but it can act only when allowed entrance to the inattentive mind. An alert mind would soon send the devil away. This has been the lesson taught humanity by the odious dictators of the twentieth century.

The Lord was passing by: a great and strong wind came, rending mountains and shattering rocks before him, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a faint murmuring sound.[2] This was the way God revealed himself to Elijah. The 'still small voice' of conscience is the manifestation of God within us. 'Neither by force nor by strength, but by my spirit!' says the Lord of Hosts.[3]

Let us pray that we and our successors may have learnt to live properly in the fashion of Jesus Christ and those that followed him. The survival of the human race depends on this, lest we sleepwalk into calamity.

Chapter 2

What is Our True Place?

‘You, my friends, were called to be free; … serve one another in love; for the whole law is summed up in a single commandment: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”’ (Galatians 5.13–14.)

The period of the Enlightenment that heralded the eighteenth century was also called the Age of Reason. It was a period of immense mental and spiritual relief from the dominating power of dogmatic religion and the terrible strife that flowed interminably from it. There was unprecedented scientific advancement, while Western values and understanding pervaded the world. It was also the period of establishment of great empires especially British, French and German to rival the earlier Spanish and Portuguese colonisation of Latin America. There was unrest in many of these American communities who were destined to break free of their European affiliation, just as the United States soon disestablished itself from the British government; it is currently the strongest nation in the world.

All seemed to be flowing smoothly until the First Great War of 1914 to 1918. The enormous loss of life and general destruction raised a terrible query about civilization generally and the particular dominance of reason as its highest point. This uncertainty about the absolute validity of rationality as the guiding principle of life was emphasized by the authority assumed by evil dictators who seemed to dupe entire populations at the zenith of their power. These have all been deposed in the process of time, but the havoc their influence wreaked has been enormous. They could never have achieved this strength without the complicity of the great majority of their subjects. Indeed, if we are honest with ourselves, would we have acted any better under the circumstances?

The answer is so often ‘The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak’,[1] words spoken by Christ when he found the disciples asleep while he was undergoing spiritual agony at Gethsemane. They had

previously felt very sure of themselves, but when the armed crowd led by Judas Iscariot came to arrest him, they all deserted him and ran away.[2] The obvious difference between the disciples and the populations of various countries ruled by brutal dictators is that the former were overcome with fear whereas the latter were usually enthusiastic collaborators with murderous hatred of dissidents or minority groups.

Each of us is born into a specific environment with a unique personality. We all have our special gifts and our points of character weakness. It would not be inappropriate to compare each individual to a single piece in an immense jigsaw puzzle – of limited value on its own but vital for the integrity of the whole. The more we are true to our own being, the less likely we are to be seduced by foreign influences and overwhelmed by them. To be sure, our education depends on being exposed to various experiences, in the course of which we will meet many different types of people; communication lies at the heart of self-knowledge, for only when we are detached from our own awareness of ourself may fresh information come, and in this respect the breakdown of traditional social barriers is to be welcomed. If we are secure in our own identity we will be hospitable to other people and able to accept or reject their influence according to our own intuition. But above all we will be in charge of our own life. Not to be threatened is the basis of a happy relationship, and in its warmth we can expand to form bonds with other people also. This is indeed the basis of our education to confident adulthood.

Life seldom proceeds according to a pre-arranged plan. It is right that this should be so; if we become attached to a particular routine to the extent of relying on it and the people associated with it, we gradually become self-satisfied and increasingly insensitive to the needs of the rest of the world. Self is both the heart of a person and the potential means of their destruction. Without a firm sense of identity one is like an autumn leaf liable to be detached and blown away by any oncoming wind. But if self takes charge, it very soon dominates one's actions to the marginalization of any concern other than one's own convenience.

The self has only one ambition: to acquire increasing power, more than would be necessary for sensible defence against unforeseen misfortune. Power, as Lord Acton wrote, tends to corrupt and absolute

power corrupts absolutely.[3] Power also tends to cling on to its own, or as the proverb goes: birds of a feather flock together. Selfish people tend to support governments that try to destroy anything that threatens their own interests. Dictators have enlisted the support of the majority of the inhabitants of the country by claiming that unpopular groups were controlling the welfare of the people. The Jews, a traditionally homeless race of remarkably gifted people with a keen business sense, have often been the special *bête noire* of many Fascist, xenophobic rulers, who have persecuted them systematically. The twelve years of the persecution of the Jews when Nazism reigned in Germany (1933 to 1945) attempting to dominate the world, culminated in the Holocaust (1941–1945) aimed at killing all the Jews, is the most terrifying example of this anti-Semitic hatred, and it was supported by most Germans who lived at that time.

The rationale behind this appalling genocide was jealousy that was fanned by a widespread slander that the Jews had a secret plot to take over the world: their total elimination was therefore in the wider world interest. It was also currently believed that although Jews had strong brain power they were deficient in muscle, cowardly to the extent of trying to evade military service and staying behind to profit financially instead, while their Gentile peers died on the battlefield. The emergence of the state of Israel in 1948 with its powerful army and the destruction it was able to effect, served at least to lay this misconception to rest.

If one considers the human situation from the beginning of recorded history up to the present time, with special reference to the twentieth century, one seems sometimes justified in wringing one's hands in despair. True, there have been great souls of the stature of the Christ and the Buddha to say nothing of geniuses in the arts and sciences, but these shine out as small stars in a firmament of Stygian darkness. Still, we are confronted by the fact of our own existence, that we too are human and are here for a purpose.

'What is a frail mortal, that you should be mindful of him,

a human being, that you should take notice of him?

Yet you have made him little less than a god,

Crowning his head with glory and honour.'[4]

The psalm continues by seeing the human as God's special creation made to govern all animal life, the master of all created forms (see Chapter 18).

This is indeed the choice before every person, to be master of everything or to serve with compassion and loyalty to the truth. The first way may bring rapid results, but the end is disaster for the person and all those around them. Devoted service brings burdens in its train, even premature death, but the end is glorious for servant and those served alike. Once we understand this truth we are able to know our true place. In this frame of mind we can start anew each day, growing progressively into our own nature, which is unique, as is our way forward. Our time of action is the present moment, and by living it as perfectly as we can we are able to face the immediate future with confident faith. Even if unexpected events do shatter our plans, we will discover a purpose for these also in our life, if we carry on in firm resolve tempered by intelligent hope.

'Hope always springs eternal in the human breast;

Man never is, but always to be blest.

The soul, uneasy, and confined from home,

Rests and expatiates in a life to come.'[5]

In the face of the terrible violence of the present time there remains a persistent light in the future beckoning us onwards to a hope beyond rational expectation. This is in fact the force of life that animates the eagerness of the mind and warms the compassion of the heart. Its renewing impulse is much muted in states of depression, when hope is occluded by a dense pool of darkness and life seems a great delusion. This, if long-lasting, is a mental illness which should be treated by a suitable antidepressant medication. In its throes we should be as still as possible, stop all thought as far as we can, and enter into a state of quiet meditation that may proceed to a deep, unconditional opening of the soul to the source of all life which we call God. This is true prayer; it simply gives of itself to God without any thought of reward. The response may be shatteringly great both to the one who prays and to others also who are the unconscious recipients of the prayer. God does not need our direction so much as our love and dedication to those in need. This is at the heart of intercession.

Our true place is to be the servants of God and of our fellows in the present moment. If we can carry out this commission with a joyful heart, we may serve to lighten the often barely penetrable gloom of the firmament and even add our contribution to its tiny stars. The ever-present human temptation is self-absorption and exaltation. This should be contrasted with self-love, a regard for our own well-being and happiness, which is vital if we are to perform the work that lies before us; an attitude of self-deprecation guarantees our failure. When, on the other hand, we exalt ourselves, we soon break contact with our neighbours and are vulnerable to any current subversive influence, which may easily lead to our ruin. Discernment is seldom compatible with exaggerated views of our own worth and usefulness.

The ideal state is one of dedicated awareness of the present moment in which the self is laid aside and we give ourselves fully to the outside world. This is self-forgetfulness, which on a wide canvas is synonymous with unselfishness at all times. It is the fruit of joyful self-esteem that cherishes all people for their own sakes as one cherishes one's own being also.

It is good if our life has a definite agenda. It may, for instance, lie in the realm of scientific research, medical care, human rights, artistic creativity, political action or the running of a business enterprise. All these are of equal validity depending on our personal integrity and our concern for the community,

for each is necessary for the public welfare. Some may appear to be more worthy than others because of the possibly spectacular results they may attain, but this is a false assessment; indeed, comparisons are truly odious. What matters is the excellence of the work and the goodwill it fosters.

Not all of us are star performers, but the humility which this realization engenders may make us equally useful members of the community by bridging gaps in particular enterprises, and bringing gifted practitioners who have a limited understanding of other points of view closer together. Expertise is a great gift, but for its full flowering, sensitivity and experience are also necessary. It is here that the less exalted worker can often play an important individual role. Public relations tend to be more intricate than technical virtuosity.

Most people do not aspire to any great height of importance. They throng the streets as they proceed in their mundane activity of earning a living in accordance with their individual skills and trades. They keep their noses close to the grindstone, and the quality of their work determines the well-being of the whole community: of none is this more true than the parent. The work of the family tends to be taken for granted in the indifferent attitude to morality of the current social climate, where marriage breakdown figures seem to rise each year and one-parent families are increasing in number. Many parents are unmarried; they would argue that the care that they give to their children is the important factor; nevertheless the inherent instability of the relationship brings insecurity to them also.

Alas, marriage is no guarantee of security either when one considers the frequency of separation of the partners. It does, however, bring legal safeguards with it. Quite a few unfortunate children suffer parental abuse. The breakdown of traditional social barriers which was welcomed earlier in this chapter clearly has its dark side also. Infidelity and child abuse are no new phenomena, but their reported frequency seems often to make them the rule rather than the exception, particularly with regard to infidelity. Child abuse tends to be covered up, but the accounts one hears are quite horrifying. Paedophilia is disturbingly rife in some educational communities at the present time.

On the positive side there is much greater concern for disadvantaged children than in the time of Charles Dickens. The workhouse, a public institution where the destitute of a parish received board and lodging in return for work done, described in *Oliver Twist*, and the scandalous educational establishment (Dotheboys Hall) portrayed in *Nicholas Nickelby* are now things of a long-distant past.

Our true place on one level is where we stand now, but this is merely a staging post in our long journey home. 'Dear friends, we are now God's children; what we shall be has not yet been disclosed, but we know that when Christ appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.'[6] Our work at any time is to come to do what is required of us as God's work of art, bringing to the world around us the divine peace in which each creature may perform their own allotted task.

Chapter 3

Companions on the Way

'Forgive us the wrong we have done, as we have forgiven those who have wronged us. And do not put us to the test…' (Matthew 6.12–13.)

Being human entails a richness of consciousness that far outdistances that of even our ape relatives. This consciousness shows itself in the profundity of the thought process that may create masterpieces of art and science, but it attains its pinnacle in the realm of morality, the capacity to judge between what is right and what is wrong. There is deep in the soul of each of us a sensitivity to moral issues. It is present in even the little child but develops in the course of their life up to the greater maturity of the adult. Even the small child responds adversely to being treated unjustly.

But there is also a subversive trend in our character that is self-centred to the virtual exclusion of anyone outside our sphere of interest. To an extent this self-centred awareness is necessary for our personal survival, but if unchecked, it rapidly dominates us, making us greedy for power and destructive of all others who may stand in our way. 'I discover this principle then: that when I want to do right, only wrong is within my reach. In my inmost self I delight in the law of God, but I perceive in my outward actions a different law, fighting against the law that my mind approves, and making me a prisoner under the law of sin which controls my conduct.'[1] St. Paul goes on to equate the law of sin with the state of death, and God alone through Jesus Christ can rescue the individual from this state, (see also Chapter 10).

When we behave badly we are soon aware of the consequences. If we are morally sensitive we feel guilty, and our personal awareness is clouded with shame. We continue to feel uneasy until we put matters right, which means repenting of our actions to those whom we have hurt; never especially easy,

but when we have done the correct thing we can relax. The compensatory response should be forgiveness from the aggrieved party, for we all alike have sinned, and are deprived of the divine glory, as St. Paul put it in Romans. 3.23.

Shame and forgiveness are complementary attitudes, the former wounding, the latter healing. It is important that we experience shame, for until we acknowledge it without demur we cannot know forgiveness. Forgiveness, like shame, cannot be simulated. False forgiveness is in fact merely condescension, acting affably to someone who is seen to be inferior to oneself. Real forgiveness is animated by acceptance and fulfilled by love. It binds those who were previously separated by fear, anger or mistrust; until we acknowledge these negative emotions, we cannot express love. Only when we confront our inner darkness can we experience the healing light that illuminates everything, dark no less than radiant, for God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.[2] The darkness emanates from the human, and shame is our awareness of the sin within ourself. It is in fact an important indication of spiritual growth.

Not all shame has this exalted status. It may be merely the result of disgracing ourselves in the matter of loyalty or charity and then our insincerity being exposed; for example, that we failed through negligence to follow the party line, to assist a friend in need, or to keep a promise which has been forgotten. The element common to these examples is a thoughtless dismissal of commitments that we find troublesome but at the cost of revealing our hypocrisy. This is false shame comparable to the shallow forgiveness of condescension, for what really dominates our attitude is the opinion others have of us.

While we do not live for ourselves alone in a caring community, we are impelled to speak the truth with as much love as we can muster. The end of this episode may be a minor breakdown in relationships followed by peace and goodwill when integrity is restored. But just as likely is a widening gulf with dire consequences if the local culture is repellent to our sense of decency. The sterling example here is Dietrich Bonhoeffer's outright rejection of Nazism when it assumed power in 1933, to his increasing doubt of the integrity of the Lutheran Church of which he was a pastor. He was hanged

in 1945 for his complicity in a plot to overthrow Hitler, if necessary by killing him. The same query lay over the Roman Catholic Church's attitude towards Nazism despite the witness of its own heroes, of whom Franz Jägerstätter is the best known. No wonder Bonhoeffer spoke of 'religionless Christianity', whatever this may have meant in practice. Did the Church's aim to serve Christ become so attenuated as to concentrate only on its own survival? This is a question that will not resolve on its own until a future generation of heroic defenders of the faith emerges.

There comes a time in our life when we will be especially tested. In fact every moment is a test inasmuch as it prepares the way forward to the great test. It may precipitate a feeling of satisfaction if it is done well or guilt if the outcome is a failure. Yet neither of these responses is absolutely reliable. Our satisfaction may simply be the result of being on the winning side in a dramatic confrontation so that our own interests are protected and even advanced, whereas our guilt may follow the misjudgement of the mind and the choice of a way of apparent failure. The spirit of the Christian revelation was conceived in the failure consequent on Jesus' crucifixion; only on the third day did the disciples meet his resurrected form, which they did not recognize until he gave a sign of his identity, whereupon he disappeared from their view. It is ironical that the rise to power of Christianity in Rome three centuries later soon led to a yearning for domination, so that the population might be converted to the true faith and be led by the clergy.

We all undergo our own crucifixion at some time of our own life; only then can we be resurrected to a new person distinctly different from what we previously were in attitude and our relationship with others around us. The episode of crucifixion may entail some great loss like the death of one close to us or a disappointment of a cherished ambition. When we recover, the meaning of life is pitched at a higher level and our friends may notice the change in our demeanour. The fruit of right action is a liberating concern for all members of the community, so that no one is alien to us. While we retain our sense of identity, we have complete ease in fraternizing with many different types of people.

A power that attracts us continually is temptation; the addiction to drugs and bad habits are minor when compared with the thrust for social advancement and power that seldom are completely absent from the

human mind. As an ideal it is surely praiseworthy; life that does not progress falls into a quagmire of inactivity, the end of which is death. In this life there is no going back; we either get stuck on what appears to be security or else move ever onwards in the flow of the present moment. Ambition at least leads us away from stagnation.

Ambition becomes perverse when it is self-centred. We then are concerned only about our own advancement, often to the detriment of anybody else. It may lead to terrible excesses when a country acts unjustly to a minority group so that they may be dispossessed and their existence threatened by the state. Yet it is vital for our development to be faced by various temptations and to assess each according to its worth. We grow through the vale of temptation.

Jesus was tempted on three occasions by the devil:[3] to turn stones into bread to assuage his hunger after a forty days' fast, to throw himself from a parapet, and finally to assume world power under the devil's auspices. He rejected all three challenges and clung to God alone. Whether we believe the story as it stands, or see it as referring to the perennial temptations of greed, seeking popular applause, and coveting worldly power that most of us secretly desire, is immaterial. It is noteworthy that the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to confront the devil.

Inasmuch as God is the universal Creator, he is ultimately the Father of all things, good and bad alike. Satan, or the devil, may be an angel of enormous power, but he too is a creature of God and in no way an equal adversary. The fact of evil as a component of life is a mystery if we accept God as loving and omnipotent (Chapter 17). Actually it is doubtful whether 'the lower forms of life' have an innate sense of morality. Moral awareness is a distinctly human quality which is to some extent imbibed by domesticated animals like dogs, cats and horses. It could be that the purpose of evil in human life is to prove and strengthen our innate virtue through temptations analogous to those experienced in the wilderness by Jesus. There is certainly a difference between a good child who becomes a somewhat aloof, holier-than-thou adult and one who has suffered in the rough-and-tumble of worldly life, partaken of some of its temptations with rueful consequences and emerged fully integrated as a loving,

helpful person. Such an individual would be very unlikely to support a wicked despot even at the cost of their own life. Unfortunately few people rise to the stature of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The corrupting tendency of power has already been noted in chapter 2. Yet without power nothing could be achieved. Meister Eckhart went so far as to say that God needs us as much as we need him. We are potentially God's representatives on earth, but only when we rise to the height of Jesus Christ. This entails a crucifixion of the personality as already described: a transformed individual arises, analogous to Christ's Resurrection. Power without restraint rushes forward in uncontrollable zeal. Its aim is to achieve personal liberation, but behind this façade of freedom lies a more sinister agenda of national, racial or religious domination. The examples of Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini and Francisco Franco of Germany, Italy and Spain respectively are far too recent events to be forgotten, nor does the dictatorship of A. de O. Salazar cast a bright light on Portuguese freedom. Fortunately these baneful influences have all been more recently reversed, and a far greater degree of liberty is now in evidence.

Russian dictatorship following the Revolution in 1917 saw a more or less complete clampdown on all religious activity, Christian and non-Christian alike by the Bolshevik government under Lenin and subsequently Stalin. There was a widespread persecution of the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches in the newly conquered Western territories, including the Baltic States. Under Khrushchev there was a further wave of persecution (1959 – 64). Many churches were closed along with five of the eight seminaries and most of the monasteries, and there was widespread imprisonment of religious activists. While the closure of churches slowed after 1964, pressure remained severe until the accession of President Gorbachev in 1985. Under Mikhail Gorbachev the freeing of Baptist and Pentecostal leaders from prison was secured. Religious freedom was generally restored, but with its advent interdenominational hostility increased. The present state of religion is decidedly fluid.

This sorry tale proves the inevitability of the religious impulse; a striving for God is as natural as working for food or any other essential commodity. It also shows how closely connected religious bodies tend to be with power. Essential as power may be for doing anything, it soon goes to the head and tries to control other people. Power attains its apogee when it no longer strives to dominate but

instead rejoices in service, primarily to humanity but fully when all that lives is included in its embrace. The proper place of power is indicated in the office of Morning Prayer, in the Second Collect, for Peace, in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer: ‘O God, the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom….’

The attention of aware people is being forcibly arrested by the havoc wrought upon the environment by thoughtless, self-centred humans, as evidenced by dramatic floods in recent times. Will there be immediate international action to stem global warming, or will the more powerful nations stubbornly go their own way heedless of the common good? The present menace is not so much evil dictators as the abused forces of nature retaliating with relentless fury.

Yet the human has been created to preserve and augment the natural order. When people are left in peace to do their work for which God has called them, they not only employ the resources of nature beneficially but also beautify the scenery. The fact generally is that when people act on their own they are peaceful, kind and considerate; it is when they get together in a group with vicious intent that mayhem breaks loose. The twentieth century has witnessed this alarming tendency to the full.

Chapter 4

Out of Darkness?

'In love there is no room for fear; indeed perfect love banishes fear.' (1 John 4.18.)

We may carry within ourselves a focus of darkness, something so disagreeable that we would prefer our fellows not to know. It may be a disgusting habit which we are here to experience and hopefully conquer, or it may be a deleterious family relation of whom we are deeply ashamed. In the end it has to be revealed through circumstances beyond our control, and then we are free even if our 'friends' desert us in the fashion of the disciples running away from Jesus at the time of his arrest. What we need especially is a friend to support us, but such a person may be unavailable. It is indeed just this situation that filters out true friends from a host of acquaintances who are jolly enough to accompany us through the pleasant seasons of life, but who drop out unaccountably when things go wrong.

Is it right to harrow this inner hell alone or should we seek professional assistance? If the burden is clearly beyond our bearing we are bound to get help, but on other occasions we may be fortified with the courage to persevere alone. A great deal depends on our relationship with God. This is not merely the traditional God of theistic religion, a person 'up there' whom we can address in formal language at designated times of the day, but a direct presence closer to us than our own inner being. Thus St Augustine wrote,

> 'Too late came I to love thee, O thou Beauty both so ancient and so fresh, yea too late came I to love thee. And behold, thou wert within me, and I out of myself, where I made search for thee.'[1]

A more modern writer, Sören Kierkegaard, who lived in the nineteenth century, wrote in his *Journals*, 'The remarkable thing about the way in which people talk about God, or about their relation to God, is that it seems to escape them completely that God hears what they are saying.'

To be sure, these writers belong to the great, universal tradition of the mystics, but we also contain a mystical element in our own personality, one that accepts the reality of truths that are beyond the knowledge of the rational mind. Without this core of deeper understanding, life would become very superficial in times of plenty and almost intolerable when it is overwhelmed by adversity. Suicide is a logical conclusion to this phase in the life of an unbeliever. Faith alone 'gives substance to our hopes and convinces us of realities we do not see';[2] indeed the whole eleventh chapter of the *Letter to the Hebrews* is a celebration of the faith that sustained Israel through its tortuous, often tortured, history. Faith is not to be confused with credulity, which is an attitude of gullibility, whereas faith is one of complete trust or confidence, of firm belief without logical proof. It unites the intellect with the intuition, and is a gift of the Spirit.[3]

As we traverse the path of inner darkness, so much superficial débris clinging to ourself is shed. This includes illusions of self importance, of feeling superior to other people and of prejudices of various types. We are, as it were, stripped naked and forced to face the reality of our character. This is likely to be a forbidding experience, but it is the gateway to a finer appreciation of our neighbours, who paradoxically are similar to us and very different at the same time. The similarity lies in our common human nature, the difference in the uniqueness of each human personality. As we approach death this truth strikes home with increasing magnitude.

What is the self ? Is it the consciousness of ourself that we have at any one given moment, which is usually called the ego? This tends to fluctuate according to outer circumstances and dominate our thoughts and actions if we live for what we believe is our own advantage to the exclusion of any other consideration. Egotism is not unpleasant when we are young, when every day produces its own challenge and the promise of success, and the spirit of competition is strong. The reward of such success is material wealth and worldly esteem. The lives of many celebrities who feature in the media

are replete with such success stories, and the naïve viewer is very liable to be overcome by envy or silenced by a feeling of inadequacy in the face of so much greatness.

Worldly fame is an imperfect criterion of personal merit; the surface may be alluring enough but the substance may be weak to the point of rottenness. Social and legal scandals are not infrequent in the lives of those who have attained material eminence especially in their youth and middle years. Ambition may be necessary to move us onwards towards the mastery of a particular talent or discipline, but when it dominates the personality it becomes unbalanced and predatory upon those close to our interests. If left unchecked we might become dictatorial in our bearing. It is as well then, both for us and the world in general, that misfortune sooner or later strikes at the root of personal ambition; the particular enterprise fails, and the envy and enmity the ambitious individual has evoked falls heavily on their own head, much to the satisfaction of those who have suffered under them. This is the fruit of egotism, the domination of the personal self.

Fortunately, there is a more profound view of the self as the core of the personality, called the soul, the aspect which is sensitive to moral and aesthetic values. It may be regarded as the spiritual or immaterial part of the personality that defines the moral nature of a person and perfects their emotional and intellectual attributes that are related to the rational mind. Neither of these two attributes are completely benign until they are under the control of the soul. The metonym *heart* is often used as the innermost aspect, the depth, of the soul.

The way the ego self deals with our inner darkness is primarily by ignoring it even to the extent of denying it categorically; as the proverb goes, none so blind as those who will not see. If it does finally acknowledge the darkness, the ego will try frantically to eliminate it by blaming its existence on to its background or malign influences emanating from the environment, which in the present situation includes the whole world. The way of active opposition is bound to fail because it will immediately be sabotaged by the darkness. As the Buddha put it, hatred never ceases by hatred, hatred ceases only by love.

To know that we of ourselves can effect very little in our character is a mark of wisdom. If we could accomplish a change by a direct act of will, we would be on the way to becoming gods in our own right. A biblical example is the story of the people who journeyed in the east and settled upon a plain in the land of Shinar. Their ambition for self-exaltation reached such a magnitude that they built themselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens to make a name for themselves. The Lord came to see this. At once he confused their language so that they could not understand what they said to one another; the city was called Babel because there the Lord made a babble of the language of the whole world. So the Lord dispersed them from there all over the earth, and they left off building the city.[4]

If we could be gods in our own right we would become monsters like the terrifying array of twentieth-century dictators. The right way to confront our inner darkness is to acknowledge it with candour, relax and even smile at ourselves as we begin to face the pickle, or plight, we are now in. It certainly will not leave us of its own accord, nor can we count on any external agent to remove it. The way forward is by calm acceptance with love towards it. This love is not contrived with the aim of persuading the darkness to lift – such is obviously false and insincere. The love we need is genuine and cannot be summarily mustered by an act of will. The only source of genuine love is God. The way of God as love is immortally described in 1 John 3 and 4.7–12 and 16–19. The pinnacle of human love is 'Love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this, that someone should lay down his life for his friends.'[5] It is noteworthy that 1John 3 appears to direct our love primarily to our fellow Christians, but 1 John 3.7–13 is less exclusive. 1 John 3.10 however, states that anyone who fails to love his fellow-Christians or to do right is not a child of God. In 1 John 3.14–17 once more the identity between loving God and one's fellow Christian is emphasized.

Prayer is the essential response to God's eternal presence. The way is one of stillness. 'Let be then; learn that I am God.'[6] In the Authorized Version of the Bible, this is translated as 'Be still, and know that I am God.' We may certainly articulate our concern to God, though it is obvious that he knows everything about us, but spoken prayer focuses our attention on God far better than complete silence,

until such time as we are fully aware of the divine presence in our own being. At this stage God is not merely real to us but the centre of our life. It is crucially important that we understand God as the essence of love of all creatures, and not a strict, occasionally vindictive power. Christ is our way in to this universal love, and as we become immersed in God's love, so we grow to complete adulthood in our awareness of the world and all his creatures, especially ourself, in the present moment. In this process the dark focus within ourself that was projected on to the whole creation, loses its potency and withdraws from us into God's presence. God does not destroy, he simply redeems. This is the heart of forgiveness. How different it is from condescension!

The end of this struggle with the inner darkness is freedom to be oneself without fear or reproach. Then one can face the world with joy and flow out in unrestrained love to every creature. We become mirrors of God's love. Our prime desire is to bring happiness both in our community and in the wider context of the world. We come to understand that happiness, if it is real and enduring, has to be universal. No one can be truly happy while even one person is in pain. Indeed, animal suffering should affect us as intensely as does our own. This is what it means to be truly free.

Freedom is the antithesis of inner darkness. It is far more than being unrestricted, of living as we please and doing what we choose. It is an experience of lightness, of being wafted to the being of God who comes to us as light without any darkness at all.[7] Freedom opens the person to the divine light which is within the soul as its 'centre' or Spirit, where we know God. From the individual Spirit the Godhead (the Holy Trinity) issues forth to fill the universe, from which it purposefully retracts again into each individual soul. It is in fact not possible to describe the inconceivable except in terms of metaphor.

This Spirit, at once individual and universal, is the guide from within who leads us with one accord to what we are to be, 'for in him we live and move, and have our existence.'[8] This is an intimation of life eternal, at rest and ceaselessly active, quiet and emanating constant activity, full of joy while suffering the pain of every individual. Pain itself is often a mystery. It may be the consequence of the individual's own intransigence, but there are instances when this explanation is quite inadequate, like the child born deformed, the victim of a traffic accident or the young person who succumbs to cancer.

On a one-life perspective we simply do not earn our just deserts. The six million victims of the Holocaust to say nothing of those who were murdered by the other dictators who ravaged the twentieth century, and people who lose their lives in natural disasters like floods, fires and earthquakes are terrible reminders not only of human malice but the apparent unconcern of the forces that control the physical world. Where is God in all this?

This ultimate question has been asked at least as far back as the Book of Job, where he was given no explanation of the cause of his suffering at all. He was chastened by God's account of his own insuperable power, and withdrew in humble apology.

'I know that you can do all things and that no purpose is beyond you. You ask: Who is this obscuring counsel yet lacking knowledge? But I have spoken of things which I have not understood, things too wonderful for me to know.'[9]

Job apologizes to God, repenting of his indignation. And so the quest goes on. God has endowed the human with a mind that will never be satisfied until it knows the truth. To withdraw from the quest may be advisable in the short term, but it is not ultimately satisfactory. We return to the quest in Chapter 18.

Jesus said, 'if you stand by my teaching, you are truly my disciples; you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'[10] To know the truth there has to be mental integrity, and this emanates most perfectly from a person of spiritual enlightenment and moral honesty. This is the real justification of religion, and its merit may be appraised as it fulfils these criteria. The Church, using this term to embrace all valid religious traditions, has been an instrument of darkness as well as light, of imprisonment as well as freedom.

Chapter 5

Education for Life and Death

‘All things come from you [O Lord] and of your own do we give you.’ (*Common Worship*, *Services and Prayers for the Church of England*)

Education for Life

‘All the world’s a stage,

And all the men and women merely players.

They have their exits and their entrances,

And a man in his time plays many parts,

His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,

Mewling and puking in the nurses arms.

Then the whining schoolboy with his satchel

And shining morning face, creeping like snail

Unwilling to school. And then the lover,

Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad

Made to his mistress’ eyebrow. Then a soldier,

Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,

Jealous in honour, sudden, and quick in quarrel,

Seeking the bubble reputation

Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,

In fair round belly with good capon lined,

With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,

Full of wise saws and modern instances;

And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts

Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,

With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,

His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide

For his shrunk shank, and his big, manly voice,

Turning again toward childish treble, pipes

And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,

That ends this strange eventful history,

Is second childishness and mere oblivion,

Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans everything.'[1]

.In this famous observation of Jacques, Shakespeare itemizes the various stages of human development in an average, yet particular, man. Considered as such, all worldly activity moves towards senility with death at its end, both as a conclusion and a purpose.

The infant is barely aware of his or her environment, whereas the schoolchild's attention is usually limited to their immediate surroundings, particularly their contemporaries and a few adults, namely their parents and teachers. Meanwhile they are being educated in the skills that will be necessary as they attain adulthood and have to look after themself.

The young adult is educated by life itself in sexual encounters, sporting activities and the work of training for a chosen trade or profession. The important lesson is not so much aiming at a specific goal by which they may earn their living as meeting various people whereby their personality is broadened and their sympathy for their fellows increased. 'All real living is meeting' as expounded by the Jewish mystic Martin Buber in his spiritual classic *I and Thou*.

An important fruit of ageing is a growing disillusion of the world's wisdom. This observation applies especially to the intelligent person who has lived through the various panaceas that have been propounded to solve the problems of the world, whether social, political or religious. This theme has been explored magnificently throughout the biblical book *Ecclesiastes*, where the writer considers the futility of wisdom over folly, for the same fate overtakes them both. The wise person is remembered no longer than the fool, because in the days to come both will have been forgotten.[2] Nevertheless, at the end of the book comes the admonition: 'fear God and obey his commandments; this sums up the duty of mankind. For God will bring everything we do to judgement, every secret, whether good or bad.'[3]

At the closing period of life, especially if the person has attained retirement and is a pensioner, their spouse may die and offspring have moved off into their own concerns. The ensuing loneliness may be one of great spiritual barrenness. But if they persevere in faith they will attain an openness to the One who is always with them, but tends to be overlooked in the earlier times when their attention was fully

occupied with worldly activities. The individual has come apparently from nothing and is preparing to depart to an uncharted destination.

Education for Death

Death is a great gift of God. The finitude of mortal life – and here one thinks especially of the human with their incomparable mental and spiritual capacity – is a blessing for living forms still to be born. A cessation of human death, for instance, would soon lead to overpopulation. The young would be crowded out of useful work, and the plight of the elderly, retired members of the community would be pitiful. Such a situation is clearly impossible, for the overcrowding would be checked by warfare and the emergence of new diseases, of which AIDS is the current example.

Mortal life is a preparation for death. It is better to die after a useful, productive life than one which has been selfish and dishonest. The age and circumstances of death are secondary matters. While it is obvious that longevity provides more time for growth than does an early death, and a gradual demise leaves a greater opportunity to assess one's entire life than does a sudden termination, what matters more than these two considerations is the character of the individual. It may be well formed even in youth; for example, the six-year-old boy dying in hospital who turned to his mother and said, 'Thank you mum for loving and looking after me', or else a disaster in those of advanced years. There are geniuses in the realm of the arts who bequeathed great treasure to humanity in the course of a lamentably short life. The examples of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) and Franz Schubert (1797–1828) in music, of Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) in painting, and John Keats (1795–1821) in literature are sterling examples. It is what we do with our lives at the present moment that matters; the past is our unique as well as the world's great teacher, and the future that lies ahead of us all awaits its own disclosure. If we live creatively in the present we will be prepared for what is to come, for our faculties will be primed to cope with all eventualities.

Life on earth is a gradual education of our character from the selfish innocence of the small child to the calculating intelligence of the adult. This intelligence is of itself essential if we are to live creatively and usefully in the world. Those with learning difficulties are a responsibility on their family and the wider community also if their retardation is severe. They serve to educate their fellows in the way of patience and compassion. Our great teacher is suffering in its various forms such as ill health, failure in our work, disappointment and the antipathy of our peers. All serve to diminish us in our own estimation, and if we are sensitive, we have no difficulty in empathizing with many kinds of people including those in distress and pain.

The end of life's education is humility. This is a conscious awareness of one's own weakness and dependence on God for strength and creativity. In the Song of Mary, the *Magnificat*, the humble are described as lowly.[4] Humility is a recognition of our weakness but not of our insignificance, for no created being is unimportant in the Creator's vision. Humiliation is not simply a process of growing in humility; it brings with it a blow to a person's dignity and self-respect. We may need to acquire a lessening of conceit by the lesson of misfortune consequent upon our bad behaviour, but our self-respect should not be impugned (called into question), for on it depends our ability to act constructively.

Our education for constructive living entails a realistic assessment of our peculiar strengths no less than our manifest weaknesses. Playing down our obvious assets is closer to false modesty than genuine humility; while we proclaim our lowliness, we secretly covet the strengths of those around us and are privately quite gratified when they fail in their work. This is not a pleasant attribute because of its hypocrisy as well as its masked egotism. We remain discontent and unhappy, and are left behind in life's cavalcade, a frustrating situation for a person who is trying to assert themselves in the world community or even the more modest association of their peers. The proof of their success is financial reward, political advancement and social esteem. In the short term these three objectives may entice us beguilingly, but as we grow older their shallowness becomes increasingly apparent as younger

aspirants steal our thunder and make their own particular show. We may be tempted to compete with our rivals, but soon run out of steam and fall by the wayside torn and exhausted.

This is our moment of truth. We are aiming to take over the world at the price of our own well-being. Yet in the words of 1 Corinthians 13.3, 'I may give all I possess to the needy, I may give my body to be burnt, but if I have no love, I gain nothing by it.' Our inner motivation is mercilessly laid bare in the course of our life. Material benefits are not to be spurned, since they are necessary for our survival and that of our dependants. The test is between personal security and communal self-sacrifice. There are occasions when sacrifice is mandatory as in the case of Dietrich Bonhoeffer opposing Nazism and Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, who preached out strongly in favour of the oppressed, and condemned the injustices and corruption all too evident in an El Salvador dominated by a handful of wealthy families who rigged elections and organized military coups at will.[5] He was shot in the evening of 24 March 1980 while offering Mass in the small chapel of the Divine Providence Hospital where he lived, only a day after he had made a strong appeal to the ranks of the military and police forces to listen to their consciences and stop obeying immoral commands from their officers to torture and kill fellow Salvadorians. The people canonized Romero immediately, though Rome has still to add its official verdict.

The ageing process is not without its benefits. By causing us to slow down it gives us the opportunity to recollect our past life with calm detachment. The aversions for certain people that punctuated our earlier years tend to be evened out. We are able to see their finer points more clearly but without any condescension. There is a wider concern for people generally and less concentration on personal likes and dislikes. We become aware of other people's kindness to us that we would previously have taken for granted. It is a fact that the young are considerably more attractive than the elderly, whose span of life is necessarily limited. If the person has not matured in wisdom they will continue to make demands on others with peremptory urgency. On the other hand, if they are more ingenious, they may attain their ends by subtle wheedling. But the truly wise person will behave with courteous respect to those who assist them so that an atmosphere of friendship prevails. The keynote of a joyful old age is humility. It

should always have had priority in our lives, but when young we do tend to magnify our own achievements. The ageing process with its tendency to cut us down to size through physical weakness and infirmity makes us more aware of God's presence as the sustaining power of our life. Silence is the key of wisdom; it is the combination of attention and respect as we listen to the opinions of other people. Then we may be inspired at a certain stage to make a truly positive contribution.

Our final lesson comes when we are dying. The process of death begins when we are leaving our mortal frame. Is there anything in store for us, or is it true, as one atheist has put it, 'When you are dead, you are dead for a long time'? A significant afterlife is not portrayed in the Old Testament. The most that is promised is Sheol, the Hebrew underworld of the dead. The Apocryphal books are more positive. The third chapter of *The Wisdom of Solomon* is a glowing promise of immortality for the souls of the just; their lives on earth and their departure may have seemed a defeat, but they are at peace, in contrast with the wicked who will meet with the punishment they deserve. The seventh chapter of *2 Maccabees* describes the death by martyrdom of seven young Jews under the Syrian tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes and their belief in being raised up to a life everlastingly made new (verse 9). Prayer for the dead is commended in 2 Maccabees 12. 44–45, indicating a belief of resurrection even for those who had offended against the law.[6]

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a high point of the Christian revelation and is emphasized by St Paul in 1 Corinthians 15. Since Jesus rose from the dead, so shall we also. For forty days, from Easter Day to Ascension Day, he showed himself in a uniquely spiritualized physical body. He then rose to the Father from whom he also went forth as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. We are clearly dealing with a mystery, a divinely revealed religious truth which is beyond human reason. In the case of natural human survival the physical body disintegrates but the soul may live on in another milieu of which we have little, but not zero, knowledge.

There is no scientific proof that the mind exists separate from the brain, that there is survival of the personality after the death of the body. The data of psychical research are inconclusive. The phenomenon of near-death experience (NDE) is well known and accepted in parapsychological circles.

The basis is a sudden change of consciousness, with profound peace and the feeling of going through a dark tunnel at the end of which there is light of glorious intensity which is identified with God or Christ according to the person's religious convictions. Frequently the person is able to view their body from a vantage point on the ceiling of the room where they are lying. This is called an out-of-body experience (OBE), and can also occur independently of imminent death.

In this new ambience there is a close awareness of deceased friends, but at a certain point the person is summoned to return to earth. It would seem that they were not ready for the transition from life to death. The bliss they had experienced was to be followed by a normal state of consciousness, but there remained a more positive outlook on life, a greater acknowledgement of spiritual values and, above all, no fear of death in the future. These experiences are subjective and not available for repetition in a scientific study, but those close to the individual are aware of the change. 'You will recognize them by their fruit.'[7]

It seems right that these gifts of illumination are not too widely scattered, for then they might be cheapened by crass humans. Recipients of sporadic NDEs are in no way exceptional in their spirituality; they seem simply to be ordinary people who have received a wonderful gift that has changed the tenor of their lives. Such experiences suggest the analogy of a chrysalis being transformed into a butterfly may be apt.

Education for life after death is considered in detail in Chapter 18.

Chapter 6

Knowledge and Illusion

'You received without cost; give without charge' (Matthew 10.8.)

Knowledge of the world we inhabit is a function of the rational mind. It is clear and well defined and is above all subject to confirmation. What we believe may be faulty, but it can be checked, modified and even reversed by subsequent observation using the methods of science and technology. The view of the world inherited from Isaac Newton has been greatly modified by Albert Einstein and the methods of quantum mechanics, so that astrophysics is now a science of great importance.

By contrast the realm of psychic experience is ill-defined, not at present provable by scientific methods, and capable of illusion by projecting false images in the minds of suggestible people. It can easily be used by enthusiasts who claim 'occult' gifts and speak convincingly of 'esoteric' matters intelligible only to a select, initiated clientele. It is apparent that misinformation can be transmitted which in the hands of undiscerning practitioners can emerge as fraudulent mediumship or channelling from impressive sources in the world beyond death. These issue grave teachings to an audience of devoted followers about matters of transcendental quality. Most channelling is not dishonest or fraudulent, but its content is open to question. Is the communicator truly an advanced soul from a celestial abode, or does the teaching simply emanate from the speaker's own mind? The same doubt applies even more strongly to the messages spoken by mediums. Are they genuine or have they been subtly elicited from the sitter by their responses to the medium's probing suggestions? Extrasensory perception (ESP) by telepathy or clairvoyance, if such gifts can be genuinely elicited apart from their occasional occurrence in the lives of quite a few people, are another source of information that can be derived from the sitter's memory rather than a deceased friend's communication.

Though knowledge may have an intellectual basis or a psychic root, there is also a higher type of enlightenment that originates spontaneously from the intuition. It is clear and emphatic, and comes from a deep source of authority from within the person. While it too might be an outflowing of a deeply set prejudice brought to the surface of consciousness directly when unguarded, it usually brings peace and unsuspected discernment in its train. It may be the basis of a revolutionary discovery in the fields of scientific research, or an historical reassessment of great music or art that had remained overlooked for many years, even centuries. The glorious rediscovery of the music of Johan Sebastian Bach written in the first part of the eighteenth century, though known to composers of the stature of Mozart and Beethoven, became a joyful reality to the general public only in the nineteenth century through the dedicated efforts of Carl Zelter and his young colleague Felix Mendelssohn. They were overwhelmed by the genius and spirituality of Bach's music, though written in the baroque style of an earlier period as compared with the more easily assimilable classical style of 1750 to 1800 (typified by Haydn and Mozart) and the more expansive music of the romantic period that flourished in the nineteenth century.

The most exalted knowledge is of spiritual origin. It speaks of a morality that is native to the human soul, that may well be inculcated by a religious tradition but is affirmed rather than initiated by it. This natural morality is a quality that categorically separates the human being from other animals. If it is completely absent the person becomes a dangerous criminal devoid of a conscience, and is diagnosed as a psychopath. Psychopathy with its abnormal and frequently violent social behaviour is an invidious mental disorder at present untreatable, and most of its victims are safely confined in institutions where they can be supervised.

The zenith of spiritual knowledge is the encounter with God. As noted in chapter 4, the Deity can be known only through love. 'We love because he loved us first.'[1] 'God is love; he who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him.'[2] Therefore the essential requirements for accepting and then bestowing love on others are receptivity and humility. Simplicity is more open to God's love than high intelligence, which is liable to magnify the individual in their own esteem. On the other hand, if a

loving person is also intelligent, the amount of benefit they can bestow is significantly greater. Intelligent love is not afraid to speak the truth to an erring colleague, for it transcends both a fear of indignant rejection and the need to be always acceptable to everybody. The fruit of intelligent love is equanimity, mental composure with an evenness of temper in times of good fortune and misfortune alike (Chapter 13). Such an individual is very close to a knowledge of God, 'who causes the sun to rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the innocent and wicked.'[3]

Illusion differs from knowledge in being false or mistaken. It may arise through faulty perception, mental aberration or a psychological inability to confront the truth directly. This truth may concern the prevailing situation or just as often one's own inadequacy. It can be hard to face this fact, but in its assimilation lies our growth as morally responsible people. Weakness courageously accepted is the stepping stone on the path towards self-control, the end of which is greater, more loving service to the community as a whole as well as our friends and colleagues. If weakness lies unconfronted, it soon conjures up a host of excuses that are magnified into grievances. These in due course will manifest themselves as points of jealousy against individuals, social classes or religious and racial groups. The end of this destructive climax may well be paranoid delusions of persecution by hostile forces like those fostered by noxious regimes of the type seen too often in the twentieth century. It is in order that we all have inadequacies in our character, for they help us to empathize with many different varieties of people, but we should be aware of our own defects without shame and with a sense of humour. In this awareness lies our salvation, for by its acknowledgement lies wisdom, a flowering of humility, and a capacity to work disinterestedly for the community apart from our own particular circle.

The ultimate knowledge is that of a transcendent, personal source of love and power which is called God in the theistic religions, notably Judaism, Christianity and Islam and later on Sikhism. In Hinduism homage is paid to three Gods, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, but in this most mystical of all the world's religions the unity of the three is acknowledged by the more enlightened worshipper. In Buddhism the elimination of the self and earthly clinging and desire is seen as the highest good, in which there is perfect bliss (nirvana) and a release from the effects of karma, a person's actions in

previous states of existence viewed as deciding his or her fate in future existences. Buddhism is non-theistic rather than atheistic, in other words it professes agnosticism about a single divine principle but does not categorically reject it.

The highest knowledge is divine and its manifestation is love, the greatest demonstration of which is being available to die for a friend.[4] On the other hand, the most pathetic illusion is self-glorification, boasting about one's own abilities and social connections. Its sadness lies in its capacity to isolate the individual from the general run of humanity; its futility is proved by its transience; it is here today and gone tomorrow. The final departure from the present existence is physical death.

Is there anything of the personality that survives? We have noted the indeterminate quality of the data of psychical research and even the far more evocative nature of the near death experience. Suggestive as this may be, it is essentially private and subjective. The most compelling reason for accepting a future life after physical death is the moral one. The manifest inequalities in an individual life, that one is a long, dreary saga of misfortune whereas another may be roses all the way, does call for some explanation, or else some consolation in a life beyond death. The mind is not to be denied.

'Make no mistake about this: God is not to be fooled; everyone reaps what he sows. If he sows in the field of his unspiritual nature, he will reap from it a harvest of corruption; but if he sows in the field of the Spirit, he will reap from it a harvest of eternal life.'[5] But do all unfortunate people owe their bad luck to a past misdemeanour, and is good luck invariably the result of previous virtue? On a single-life basis this is proved untrue as a matter of common experience. One has only to consider the victims of recent genocides. Among their number were declared saints as well as sinners; the majority were probably quite ordinary people, neither better nor worse than those who survived. The survivors emerged as more enlightened people no doubt, but were they simply more devoted to protecting their own interests? One hopes that some at least had learnt that 'we belong to one another as parts of one body.'[6]

If one accepts the possibility of reincarnation, it could be that the soul learns much truth about itself in a post-mortem existence, and is then born again in a fresh human body. Such indeed is the belief of Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists. There appears to be little memory of such a past life in the great majority of people, and enthusiasts tend to have been historically significant personalities in past lives. In fact we do not know details, and for a sound reason. We are here to live in an urgent present not a glamorous past. But it is well within the bounds of possibility that we progress in moral behaviour and loving concern for people and animals through an intuition about the fitness of decency that is inborn and not necessarily part of our inheritance or the background of the family who nurtured us when we were very young. An hypothesis can easily develop into an enthusiastic illusion if it is accepted with ardour lacking adequate supporting evidence. Thus may a prejudice be born.

When one is confronted by a negative feeling about a person whom one has recently met, it is wise to acknowledge it and then await events patiently. Quite often the initial intuition is subsequently confirmed, but sometimes a closer contact reveals qualities that are admirable even when the total impression was disappointing. Life on earth is a series of meetings with people of different spiritual sensitivities, and we learn from those whom we find disagreeable as well as from our natural friends and allies. Whatever evokes a strongly hostile response in us, no matter how morally justified it may be, tells us of our own vulnerability. The effect of this knowledge should make us more ready to protect the weak and defenceless members of the community. In this way the spiritual awareness of a Bonhoeffer or a Romero is born and developed. The tolerant condoning of repeated offences is unfriendly, helping neither the transgressor nor their victim. On the other hand, moralistic judgmentalism is to be avoided (Chapter18).

Knowledge commences from observed facts of life that have been explained by reliable teachers. So our rational existence expands. Illusions arise from faulty observation, and if unchallenged may proceed to bizarre notions and grotesque behaviour. However, not all unusual notions are mentally disturbed. Some form the basis of new kinds of art, while the mystic's vision of reality as transcendent unity, as glorious an oxymoron as any, is the ultimate basis of civilized, fraternal life. Until all so-

called religion understands and practises this truth, it will remain a stumbling block rather than a facilitator of human solidarity. 'You will recognize them by their fruit.'[7] To be able to understand a higher unity in all manifestations of rational behaviour and ways of living is a divine gift.

Chapter 7

The Necessity of Worship

Ask what God is? his name is Love; he is the good, the perfection, the peace, the joy, the glory, and the blessing of every life. Ask what Christ is? He is the universal remedy of all evil broken forth in nature and creature. He is the destruction of misery, sin, darkness, death and hell. (William Law, [1686–1761] *The Spirit of Prayer*)

The fine Epiphany hymn of J.S.B. Monsell says a great deal about the spirit of worship. Its first and last stanzas are:

> O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!
>
> Bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
>
> With gold of obedience, and incense of lowliness,
>
> Kneel and adore him, the Lord is his name.

Worship is homage or reverence paid to a deity, especially in a formal service. Do we really need a deity? Surely we contain all that we need within ourselves. Many people in the Western world are professed atheists. The terrible events of the twentieth century must cast doubts on the existence of such a transcendent spirit of goodness and power, 'maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen,' quoting from the Nicene Creed. Where was God in all this horror? The answer quite frankly is that the run of contemporary educated people get on quite well without recourse to an external power. If misfortune strikes, only the unconfident ones will kneel before an invisible source of intransigent power who is believed to favour those who pay him homage, rather in the style of a human ruler but very much more magnificent and mysterious. This attitude of obeisance is not a good thing: it tends to

foster superstition, which is credulity regarding the supernatural culminating in an irrational fear of the unknown or mysterious. It also humiliates the dignity of our own mind with its ability to discern moral issues independently.

When St Paul stood before the Council of the Areopagus he began: 'Men of Athens, I see that in everything that concerns religion you are uncommonly scrupulous. As I was going around looking at the objects of your worship, I noticed among other things the inscription "To an unknown God." What you worship but do not know – this is what I now proclaim.'[1] In the Authorized Version of the Bible the word 'superstitious' is used instead of 'scrupulous.' It is evident that the theological arguments about the existence of God cannot do much more than make him a convenient hypothesis. A good, loving God in the face of so much evil in the world? The maker of an imperfect world subject to natural disasters like earthquakes, floods and droughts as well as the striking of the earth by an asteroid from outer space causing widespread destruction? The sudden extinction of the dinosaurs some sixty-five million years ago may have been caused by such a collision. We remember the words of *The Cloud of Unknowing*: 'By love may he be gotten and holden, but by thought never.'

There is something deep in human nature that yearns for perfection in relationships that is distinct from intellectual knowledge, amazingly advanced as this now is. It increases in the field of physics and cosmology (astrophysics) year by year. Singularities, for instance, are points at which a function takes an infinite value, especially in space-time, when matter is infinitely dense as at the centre of a black hole. This is a region of space having a gravitational field so intense that no matter and radiation can escape. All these fascinate the popular imagination. What will be the latest discovery? The atom bomb that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 derived its power from the release of energy by nuclear fission. Within 55 years it has been superseded by nuclear devices of such potential that they could cause havoc of scarcely imaginable extent.

In the realm of biology cloning is an important issue. This entails the production of a group of cells asexually from an embryo, which might possibly restore function to the organs of people with various degenerative diseases of the body. But is it ethical to derive cells from a living human being no matter

how undeveloped it may be? Controversy blazes among religious groups who oppose cloning categorically. And if it is permissible, up to what age would the embryo be eligible for destruction?

When one considers these enormous powers that have been bestowed on the human, one returns to the story of hubris and its sequel (chapter 4). The city these arrogant people built was subsequently called Babel, because there the Lord made a babble of the language of the whole world.[2] This is a parable of the fate of human pride and its inevitable downfall. Is not a similar fate in store for us as we become increasingly sure of our own knowledge of the world, when we dismiss moral issues? How does one recognize a moral issue? The great books of the world's religious traditions contain teaching about right and wrong, about what is beneficial to all that lives as opposed to purely self-centred attitudes and actions. But attitudes remain in the mind until they are translated into human activity by the soul. This responds to the suffering of people by flowing out in sympathy to them.

It is in the realm of the soul that spiritual awareness is encountered. Such religious teachings as the Ten Commandments[3] and the Sermon on the Mount[4] are obeyed by a soul-obedient individual, one who proceeds in accordance with feelings that are then executed by the rational mind. In this milieu we are able to know God as the infinite source of creation and the essence of love, 'in him we live and move, and have our existence.'[5] On the other hand, noble attitudes remain mere ideals until they are translated by rational worldly acts of goodness. In the light of this, we can begin to understand the nature of worship and its vital importance. Only when we are able to enter the mind of Christ, the love of God, can we perform the work we are meant to achieve in the present moment. It becomes our duty and our joy. We work no longer under mere moral compunction but through self-effacing happiness with joyful abandon.

When we worship we effect a deep relationship with God. It is good when we are alone with his presence, but it is magnified by the company of other worshippers also. Then the atmosphere assumes a greater radiance than that of a solitary encounter, 'for where two or three meet together in my name, I am there among them.'[6] A congregation of believers increases the strength of the worship by the feeling of fellowship it fosters. Likewise, whilst the validity of the Eucharist is dependent entirely on

the authority of the celebrant, its power is greatly enhanced by the joy of a deeply committed group who receive the elements of bread and wine.

We should come to God in silence and awareness. God came to the boy Samuel as an unknown voice calling his name, while he prepared to sleep in the temple of the Lord where the Ark of God was stationed. Before the lamp of God had gone out, the Lord called him. Samuel mistook this as a call from Eli, the priest whom he served. Eli told him he was mistaken and should lie down again. After the third summons Eli understood that it was the Lord calling the boy, and told Samuel to say in future, 'Speak, lord; your servant is listening.' God told Samuel that he had prepared the downfall of Eli and his family because he knew of his sons' blasphemies and did not restrain them.[7]

On the surface this would appear to be an odd example of worship, but it shows Samuel's reverence to God who was before then only a name to him. Yet he obeyed Eli's instruction and knew God directly. He was subsequently to become a famous prophet, one that played a crucially important role in the lives of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David, whose exploits are recounted in the first book of Samuel. The actions described are of primitive severity, yet mild when compared with those of the various dictators of the twentieth century. Times may change but human nature does not appear to improve when it is confronted by the temptation to dominate a country and summarily destroy those whom it hates.

When we worship together in commitment to the Most High, our souls are open not only to God but also to those around us, and the spirit of love circulates among us all. Worship is prayer with superadded thanksgiving in times of prosperity, and mourning after a tragedy has occurred. The word itself is derived from the old-English root meaning worth-ship. We give thanks for God's limitless goodness whether in songs of praise or in silent adoration. This finds its apogee in many great oratorios, of which Handel's *Messiah* is the most loved.

The Psalms contain many gems of worship:

'The Lord is my shepherd; I lack for nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures,

He leads me to water where I may rest;

he revives my spirit;

for his name's sake he guides me in the right paths.

Even if I were to walk through a valley of deepest darkness

I should fear no harm, for you are with me;

Your shepherd's staff and crook afford me comfort.' [8]

A more triumphant note is sometimes struck:

'Ascribe to the Lord, you angelic powers,

ascribe to the Lord glory and might.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name;

In holy attire worship the Lord.' [9]

Personal joy is expressed with exultation on occasions:

'I shall bless the Lord at all times;

His praise will be ever on my lips.

In the Lord I shall glory;

The humble will hear and be glad.

Glorify the Lord with me;

Let us exalt his name together.

I sought the Lord's help; he answered me

And set me free from all my fears.'[10]

Sometimes the communal aspect is stressed:

'God is our refuge and our stronghold,

a timely help in trouble;

so we are not afraid though the earth shakes

and the mountains move in the depths of the sea,

when its waters seethe in tumult

and the mountains quake before his majesty.'[11]

Praise is often dominant:

'Praise the Lord.

It is good to give thanks to the Lord,

For his love endures for ever.

Who can tell of the Lord's mighty acts

And make all his praises heard?

Happy are they who act justly,

Who do what is right at all times!'[12]

Exultation is the theme on occasions:

'High is the Lord above all nations,

high his glory above the heavens.

There is none like the Lord our God

In heaven or on earth,

Who sets his throne so high

But deigns to look down so low;

Who lifts the weak out of the dust

And raises the poor from the rubbish heap,

Giving them a place among princes,

Among the princes of his people;

Who makes the woman in a childless house

a happy mother of children.'[13]

And sometimes a darker note is struck:

'By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept

as we remembered Zion.

On the willow trees there

we hung up our lyres,

for there those who had carried us captive

asked us to sing them a song,

our captors called on us to be joyful:

'Sing us one of the songs of Zion.'

How could we sing the Lord's song

In a foreign land?

If I forget you, Jerusalem,

may my right hand wither away;

let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth

if I do not remember you,

if I do not set Jerusalem

above my chief joy.'[14]

Worship is indeed present in both triumphant festivities and solemn memorials of defeat and deportation. The fall of Jerusalem, the blinding of the wicked King Zedekiah who rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and the execution of his sons is graphically described in 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52. The captain of the king's bodyguard, Nebuzaradan, came to Jerusalem to set fire to the entire city. The notable citizens were killed and the rest of the population deported to Babylon. Only the poorest class of people remained.

In fact they survived extremely well in Babylon, and were released from their seventy years' exile by Cyrus, the Persian conqueror of Babylon. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah recount the return of the exiles to Judah and Jerusalem, the reconstitution of the community, the rebuilding of 'God's house,' the restoration of the city's wall and the establishing of the religious tradition once more in the old city. Isaiah 40 to 66 is a great sigh of relief and a paean of praise to God for deliverance to Judah where the temple was to be rebuilt and a new community established.

Chapter 8

On Coming to God

'Waiting is caring, and caring is hoping.' (Rollo May, contemporary American psychoanalyst. *Love and Will*)

The first half of the twentieth century saw a greatly increased interest in spiritualism. From the Fox sisters in America in the 1880s to meeting halls and Chapels all over the United Kingdom in the 1920s and '30s, people were wishing to know the state of their deceased loved ones. The Church of England was so concerned that its Archbishops, Cosmo Gordon Lang and William Temple, appointed a committee of the great and the good to investigate the claims of spiritualism. Although the report was submitted in 1939, it was embargoed for publication for forty, rather than the more usual thirty, years. The committee split during its investigations, but the reason for the long embargo was not due to the split but to the contents of the majority report, which includes the following observations…

'It is necessary to keep clearly in mind that none of the fundamental Christian obligations or values is in any way changed by our acceptance of the possibility of communication with discarnate spirits.'

'There is no reason why we should not accept gladly the assurance that we are still in closest contact with those who have been dear to us in this life, who are going forward, as we seek to do ourselves, in the understanding and fulfilment of the purpose of God.'

'But if Spiritualism does, in fact, make so strong an appeal to some, it is at least in part because the Church has not proclaimed and practised its faith with sufficient conviction.'

'There is frequently little real fellowship even between the living, and the full and intimate reality of the Communion of Saints is often a dead letter.'

'The belief in Angelic guardians or guides has been very general in Christianity.'

Such comments from highly respected senior members of the Church of England are worth bringing back into today's thinking on our journey towards God. Further details are to be found in *The Christian Parapsychologist* vol 3 no 2, March 1979. The failure of so much of spiritualist teachings rests in their failing to focus on God rather than spirits of whatever kind.

In a celebrated observation St Augustine of Hippo began his *Confessions*: 'Thou hast made us for thyself, and the heart of man is restless until it finds its rest in thee.'[1] He also said, as we have already mentioned in chapter 4, that we often fail to notice God because we are so much involved in outer activities that we remain oblivious to the inner reality of God.

It is a truth that God cannot be summarily invoked as if he were an attentive servant on call for help. Such an attitude is little short of irreverence, the implication being that we are wiser than the deity. On the other hand, a heartfelt conversation with the immanent God so movingly encountered by St. Augustine is the basis of petitionary and intercessory prayer. We do not need to plea to God to hear our prayer. We need rather to be receptive to his presence in alert silence. If we wait in trust we will be infused by the Holy Spirit, and experience renewal and hope in a previously dismal situation. It is possible that the angelic hierarchy, God's ministers and messengers, are extensively involved in the work. Of the necessity of ceaseless prayer no person with spiritual perception would disagree. In fact there comes a time in one's life when one is constantly aware of the divine presence in the background no matter what work one is at present doing, even earnest conversation or mental calculation. However, this degree of awareness of God at all times is the reward of a life of service to others without desiring anything other than their release from the situation that causes them pain or servitude.

Some people seem to have an innate knowledge of God, so much so that they can speak to him effortlessly when they are in difficulty. This would appear to be a natural faculty since their background is often not especially religious; indeed, their siblings may show no tendency in this direction. These happy mystics are not common; suffering is more likely to be the stimulus. The essential requirement for the divine encounter is an open mind, one not occupied with self-centred concerns. This is more likely to follow an experience of desolation when one suddenly recognizes one's isolation from human companionship, that one is very much on one's own. 'Seek the Lord while he is present, call to him while he is close at hand.'[2] In fact he is always at hand, and the act of seeking is an indication that one is well on the way to finding him. Not infrequently it is our own struggle that gets in the way of the divine encounter. The harder one tries the less successful one is liable to be. This is the reverse of the human search for understanding: 'if at first you don't succeed, try, try again.'[3]

The explanation of this apparent paradox lies in the attitude of the seeker. Human success comes through intellectual perseverance and is achieved by personal effort. Divine knowledge comes by grace. Jesus said, 'Unless you turn round and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. Whoever humbles himself and becomes like this child will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'[4] On the other hand, the Buddha spent a considerable time practising various austerities to no apparent avail in his search for Enlightenment. When almost in despair he sat under a tree (called the Bo tree), and the Four Noble Truths were revealed to him: All life is suffering which is the result of desire. The remedy lies in detachment from personal desire, and is achieved by a way of life called the Eightfold Noble Path, (Chapter 12).

Grace, though an unearned gift of God, still has to be acknowledged and used for the common good. It would be scarcely recognized by a thoughtless person like the child in Jesus' illustration. Paradise would inevitably be lost before life's shadow brought it into full light once more, and this time unforgettably. Therefore there is truth in Hickson's cheerful, lively advice also. The human struggle is crowned by God's inherent love. If only the breathtaking advances in scientific knowledge could be

used for the world's benefit rather than personal or national aggrandizement, we would not be far from the kingdom of Heaven.

Coming to God does not require self-abandonment so much as self-dedication. In the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats[5] Jesus said that anything a person does for one of his brothers here, however insignificant, they do for him. They have his Father's blessing and are to come to take possession of the kingdom that has been ready for them since the world was made. A curse falls on those who neglected the needs of their brothers: the hungry and thirsty, the stranger, the naked and the prisoner. Eternal punishment awaits them, but the righteous will enter eternal life. One hopes that a place has been provisionally reserved even for the unrighteous, since God is love as we noted in chapter 7, but the sinner (in essence a person who devotes their life entirely to self-interest) will need to repent before they can approach the kingdom let alone enter into it. This exclusion is not to be seen as God's rejection so much as the sinner's incapacity to adapt to a very different milieu where self is joyfully given to the entire community. In the manner of spiritual paradox, by renouncing one's very life one attains a knowledge of eternal life, which is inclusive of all creation.

The hallmark of coming to God is joy,[6] a spontaneous acceptance of the person one is and the circumstances accompanying one's life, those that limit one's activities as well as those that afford one special gratification. Our limitations provide us with the right environment in which to develop new abilities as well as to actualize qualities that had previously lain dormant within us. Thus a flippant, selfish individual of considerable wealth may be awakened to the needs of a disadvantaged group by the apparently fortuitous encounter with an incapacitated member in desperate need of assistance. Not only would their heart be moved with deep concern but their interest might also be stimulated. In this frame of mind they might develop a keen interest in a particular group, such as the blind, the deaf, orphaned children or refugees, and sponsor them or even found a charitable trust for their welfare or research into their problem if it were a physical defect. Joy is distinct from happiness, which may stem from a merry disposition or a concatenation of fortunate events, inasmuch as joy raises the

consciousness to divine regions beyond mere self-concern to the love of all the world. Its subject is God even if the individual does not believe in him intellectually.

Joyfulness is a feeling of sheer exultation, but not all exultation is of divine origin. It may also stem from a feeling of personal triumph which can in its darkest form readily arise when a despised person is discomfited. Its lack of charity can be disfiguringly grotesque. The worst examples are the merciless persecution of racial or religious minorities by hate-filled dictators, the most hideous one of the last century being the Nazi persecution of the Jews. The glee that accompanied the transportation of these doomed people to the gas chambers could easily be confused with religious joy. But there was hatred and self-satisfaction at its root and discrimination with rejection of other people and their savage destruction at its end. This delight can easily mimic the true article, for it often has a basis of religion or morality, in many instances of such intensity to appear to justify the hostility directed against the proscribed group. The tendency to persecute lies latent in human nature, but the truly virtuous person can transcend it quite readily by love when circumstances tend to evoke prejudice. It is sad that many instances of such exultant hatred are based on a distorted image of God.

'Narrow is the gate and constricted the road that leads to life, and those that find them are few.'[7] This is because our thoughts are not concentrated. One is reminded of Jesus' beautiful meeting with the sisters Martha and Mary, 'While they were on their way Jesus came to a village where a woman named Martha made him welcome. She had a sister, Mary, who seated herself at the Lord's feet and stayed there listening to his words. Now Martha was distracted by her many tasks, so she came to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to get on with the work by myself ? Tell her to come and give me a hand." But the Lord answered, "Martha, Martha, you are fretting and fussing about so many things; only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen what is best; it shall not be taken away from her."' [8] Until one is rightly disposed to the divine presence within, one's daily activities are bound to be hasty, confused and emotionally disturbed. Sören Kierkegaard expressed this finely in the title of one of his works; *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*.[9] No doubt after Jesus had departed, Mary's help fully compensated for her earlier silence.

It is in a simple gesture like Mary's silent abandonment of worldly activity to hear Jesus that we too come to God. He is always there, but we are far too preoccupied with our immediate business to pay attention to the source of all business. He manifests himself in the excellence of the finished product. Perfection lies in God's welcome guidance in our lives, not in our self-centred striving to prove our own mastery. The inspiration that gives rise to great works of art or dramatic discoveries in scientific understanding comes from a divine source. The human mind is essential for earthing these God-given insights, and making them available to specialists capable of appreciating their importance and teaching the general public about them. It is thus that the soul and mind work towards the noble end of general enlightenment; the soul is the initiator, the mind is the fulfiller. All enlightenment has a divine source, thus the Buddha's was a gift of God in his transpersonal mode as compared with the decidedly personal God of the theistic religions.

The mystic is endowed with the ability to synthesize these two modes intuitively, for both are true to describe a spirit which is essentially beyond definition.

The less we understand, the more dogmatic we tend to become, because we need a sense of assurance to keep us balanced in our identity. It is little wonder that ardent believers are frequently fierce persecutors. The need to believe obsessively in God lessens the more intimately we know him, for then spoken assertions (as form the basis of Christian Creeds) are fulfilled in our inner life illuminated by divine grace. This statement is not to be interpreted as a cavalier attitude to creedal formulae, but simply putting them in their rightful place in the liturgy (the form of worship of the Church). As a communal response they form an impressive witness of solidarity especially in dark periods of personal or national trial, but there is always the possibility that they may lapse into complacent repetitions of triumphal belief in the absence of a deeper heartfelt faith. This emanates from personal suffering, when the mind is bewildered and the person is comforted by a form of words of great strength.

It is often the case that profound silence is closer to God than eloquent words or the unintelligible language that is spoken 'in tongues' by enthusiastic worshippers in the Charismatic Renewal movement. Being fundamentally private utterances they afford strength to the speaker rather than

illumination for the whole congregation, unless someone is able to interpret the message to them. The matter is dealt with splendidly in 1 Corinthians 14 by St Paul who, while being an excellent exponent of the gift of tongues (glossolalia) himself, saw it as a personal utterance that may easily proceed to an extravagance that replaces wise information by emotional enthusiasm. It enhances the status of the speaker without enlightening the whole company of worshippers. This is done far more effectively by the higher spiritual gift of prophecy. In 1 Corinthians 12.8–10 Paul enumerates the gifts of the Spirit: first come the gift of wise speech followed by the power to put the deepest knowledge into words. Right at the end come the gift of tongues of various kinds and the ability to interpret them.

In the face of so much articulated prayer it can be a relief to enter the wordless worship of some Eastern religions. Thus the Hindu mystic in company with the German Christian mystic Meister Eckhart would tend to say, 'He who speaks does not know; he who knows does not speak.' This is substantiated by Lao Tze (or Laoze) in the Chinese tradition of Taoism, which teaches that the Tao (the way of the transpersonal God) that can be named is not the everlasting Tao. It affirms much of the Buddhist approach to spiritual reality.

Yet a friend found, to his great interest, that he spoke quite unexpectedly in tongues of ecstasy which he believed he had long left behind in his pursuit of Buddhist spirituality. This has not weakened his affection for Buddhism, but has reminded him that God can speak to us in more than one voice. The criterion of authenticity remains the same; you know them by their fruit.[10] It is of interest that he spoke in tongues when he was confronted with a difficult situation.

It is nevertheless gratifying that the practice of meditation is flourishing in Christian circles nowadays. The Catholic pioneers have sat at the feet of Hindu masters before embarking on their own work; the names of Swami Abhishiktananda (a Benedictine monk Henri le Saux) and Bede Griffiths spring immediately to mind, and the Anglican monk Herbert Slade made valiant attempts with the Anchorhold Community in Kent. It has unfortunately at present not survived its founder's death.

The Eastern Orthodox Church has its own form of meditative prayer known as the Jesus prayer; 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me a sinner.' It is enunciated from the area of the heart and is known as the Prayer of the Heart. In all the above examples a mantra – a word, phrase or sound repeated to aid concentration in meditation – is used. As the inner silence deepens, so the word or sound drops away.

The true mystic can attain inner silence at once without recourse to any mantra. The situation is comparable to a couple deeply in love. They can be silent together in quiet contentment. If they are listening to fine music or gazing on beautiful scenery, this, far from acting as a mantra, is brought into their presence and heightens their mutual regard. At the same time the music or scenery reveal the divinity of God, the Universal Creator.

It is nevertheless wise to ponder on the advice of another great Chinese spiritual teacher, Kongfuze (Confucius). 'We should strengthen ourselves against these failings: neglect of godliness; study without understanding; failure to act up to what we believe to be right; inability to change bad habits.' These are some of the fruit of sound religion, but their basis is inspired spirituality. The relationship between religion and spirituality will be touched on in chapter 9.

Chapter 9

Coming Together in Worship

‘Abide in me: love one another. The first brings about the second.’ (William Temple, [1881–1944] Archbishop of Canterbury 1942–4. *Readings in St. John’s Gospel*)

We have defined worship as prayer with a predominant attitude of praise and thanksgiving to God even when the present circumstances may be sad as in Psalm 137. Such a prayer can be articulated quite adequately when a person is alone, but it increases immeasurably in magnitude and strength when the number of worshippers is large and their devotion is ardent. They constitute a worshipping community called the Church in the Christian tradition. It is a source of great spiritual strength, for as John Donne put it so memorably in his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, ‘No man is an Island, entire of itself. Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind; And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.’

From this insight we can understand the essential function of the Church in the world: it brings together various people of different temperaments and characters (which in conjunction constitute their individual personalities) to worship the One beyond description or definition whom we call God. While the knowledge of God is basically individual, the strength of devotion is greatly increased in an atmosphere of dedicated mass fervour to the One above all names and description, who is nearer the soul (in its centre or Spirit) of each person and more radiantly than in the panoply of magnificent ceremonial. In this example we see both the glory of communal worship and its tendency to decline towards an impressive display in which the officiants assume personal magnificence to an extent overshadowing the source of all majesty revered as God, the Most High.

Religion commences with the inspiration of the prophet, but the subsequent leaders tend to fashion the revelation according to their own interpretation. Having the feet of clay common to all humans, they tend to direct the way according to their own preferences which may all too easily proceed to prejudice, party loyalty, animosity and subsequent fierce disputation with those who challenge their point of view. The corrupting influence of power is at times disturbingly apparent in religious groups. The fundamental criterion is the impetus that drives the priest or minister. Is it a latent (or not so concealed) lust for power and preferment, or a genuine desire to serve the community which exceeds the members of the congregation, who should be introduced to this work of greater compassion and apt response by the pastor?

The power of worship, whether individual or communal, is augmented by its prescribed order of performing the rites inherent in the particular religious tradition. The practice of ritual strengthens the solidarity of the congregation. It affirms the strength of their commitment to the common faith and the firm bonds between its members. But even silent prayer is a ritual, whether a repeated petition for oneself and those close to one, or for a much wider group for whom one intercedes as an aspect of one's concern day by day. Indeed, rapt communal silence before the nameless presence of the transpersonal source of Enlightenment of such a religion as Buddhism is also a form of liturgy, as is the quietness of a Quaker meeting interspersed with inspirational utterances by the attenders.

The more usual form of liturgy consists of articulated prayers and brief periods of congregational silence, hymns, the recitation of a Creed, which is a brief, formal summary of Christian belief and a sermon or address. This is generally based on the text of scripture selected for that particular day and delivered as a way of spiritual instruction or exhortation. In the Protestant tradition the sermon is the peak of the liturgy; it throws the spotlight on the preacher and illustrates their eloquence, especially if the flow of language is direct, unprepared and inspirational. In fact, there is always a source of inspiration, which is the life's experience of the speaker. If they speak from the heart their message touches the worshipper in a very different way to that of the practiced, assured eloquence of the exhibitionist. This person may cultivate approval in a religious setting, whereas the inspirational

preacher has left their ego behind and is a dedicated mouthpiece of God. The proof of this is their concern for and love of those whom they are addressing.

The central focus of the liturgy, especially in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, is the Eucharist, also called the Mass or the Holy Communion. It consists of a solemn commemoration of the Last Supper, when Jesus took the bread and the wine thus:

'During supper Jesus took bread, and having said the blessing he broke it and gave it to the disciples with the words: "Take this and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, and having offered thanks to God he gave it to them with the words: "Drink from it all of you. For this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, never again shall I drink from this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of my Father."' This account is that of Matt. 26.26–9. Parallel versions occur in Mark 14.22–5 and Luke 22.17–19.

In the Roman Catholic tradition it is held that the Eucharistic elements are wholly converted into the body and blood of Christ, only the appearance of bread and wine remaining. This is called *transubstantiation* (or the *Real Presence* of Christ). The Protestant churches deny this change: the Eucharist is essentially a memorial sacrament in which Christ's presence is affirmed. A sacrament is defined as 'an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.' The Eucharist is called the Blessed (or Holy) Sacrament.

Illuminated understanding, far from dismissing the Catholic position as an illusion, would rather tend to see the Eucharist as the form of divine activity which potentially blesses all meals, the secular no less than the explicitly religious, because love is present. Where love emanates, God's being illuminates human endeavour. Then all effort would be spiritually based. Such a view would proceed to an ecumenical, almost a universal, position, that all works performed in service and imbued with love are manifestations of the living Christ irrespective of the belief or the lack of it of the benefactor. 'Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do the will of my heavenly Father.'[1] The passage goes on to warn us that acts demonstrating charismatic

gifts like prophecy, deliverance and miracle working do not automatically guarantee a believer acceptance by the Father if their attitude is self-congratulatory. Such people may usurp the position of God, often quite unconsciously.

In the parable of the Sheep and the Goats the king says "Truly I tell you; anything you did for one of my brothers here, however insignificant, you did for me."[2] Likewise a meal prepared and consumed with devotion and shared in love with a stranger bears a Eucharistic blessing, for Christ, the provider of all good things, is the host as well as the server.

A corollary to this understanding follows: if one acts in the loving, self-giving way of Christ, all one's work has a Eucharistic flavour and it is very likely to be crowned with a glorious self-transcending radiance. This is very possibly the basis of startling miracles that are part and parcel of the lives of many accredited saints. All saintly life is Eucharistic irrespective of the belief system of the individual.

The religious label we bear is usually part of our inheritance. Many accept it as an aspect of their life and live happily within its bounds. Others lose their native faith when they attain adulthood and profess an agnosticism which may proceed to an assertive atheism. This is often initiated and fired by the intrusive certitude of many dogmatic believers; nothing stimulates hostility so fiercely as the intolerance of those who know that they and their co-religionists alone possess the whole truth of salvation, which is in fact an arrogant and very dubious claim for any human being to make.

To undergo a period of agnosticism during which one critically examines the basis of the faith one has inherited is quite often a step in the direction of an ultimately more illuminating spirituality. The honest person is unlikely to take a religion lock, stock, and barrel. The intelligent young person, enlightened by various personal encounters as well as the astounding advances in astrophysics, psychology and medical knowledge, is challenged in having any belief in a power beyond chance on the one hand and self-assertive, human domination and control on the other. The twentieth century has revealed only too clearly the destination of mental supremacy, a world devoid of moral imperatives and spiritual

guidelines. We considered the results of this spiritual vacuum in chapter 1, when evil dictators seduced millions of their followers who then committed deeds of terrible savagery.

The enlightened spiritual seeker at last comes to the conclusion that knowledge of the outer world, inspiring as this is, cannot provide the solution to our deeper personal problems. It is what emanates from within the soul that will lead us beyond the thraldom of egotism to the liberty of communal service, which is a linchpin of spiritual advancement. We remember the message of the ancient Delphic oracle, 'Know thyself.'

Sigmund Freud and many of his successors explored the deeper reaches of the mind by charting its unconscious content, but, with the notable exception of Carl Jung, they were dogmatic rationalists. They limited their investigations to the relatively easily accessible ranges of experience involving sexuality, feelings of power or inferiority and the first systematic analysis of dreams, which Freud himself called the royal road to the unconscious.

Psychoanalysis, helpful as it has been in clearing up individual cases of emotional turmoil, is often dominated by the special approach of the therapist, who is liable to be wedded to their own particular theory. None of these, evocative as some may be, has scientific status, for each person's experience is unique even if a series of cases may appear to bear a common stamp. So much analytic work gives the impartial investigator an impression of stabbing in the dark. Is the end an inspired hit that bears light or merely a strong expression of idiosyncratic views, quite a few of which are widely accepted by enthusiasts hooked on to the New Age movement? The personal prejudices of the analyst play their part also in their formulation of a dogmatic assessment of an unusual case.

We learn by experience alone. Competent, unbiased teaching helps to elucidate experience and lift it up to the world's assessment as a part of our contribution to common knowledge. This is an important function of the Church, whose teacher is God the Holy Spirit, when its proponents transcend the comfortable illusion of always being right and enter with informed rigour into the burgeoning fields of cosmology, anthropology and transpersonal psychology. The dire consequences of the Roman Catholic

Church's silencing of Galileo (1546 – 1642), the father of astrophysics in the transitional seventeenth century, are an indelible reminder of the destructive propensity for power that may be wielded by a religious authority in the name of God. The result of imprisoning truth is a belittling of God, the source of all truth.

The Church played an important part in the education of the medieval world, but its role diminished with the advent of the Renaissance of the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, when new discoveries about the world gave people opportunity to think and investigate for themselves independently of clerical authority. The process continued in the sixteenth century with the Reformation, a movement for the reform of abuses in the Roman Church that ended in the establishment of the Reformed and Protestant Churches. At present the practice of church-going has decreased markedly since the political power of even overwhelmingly Catholic countries like Brazil and Mexico has been eased from clerical influence. Indeed, Mexico has only recently withdrawn from a long phase of declared anticlericalism.

Periods of ruthless atheism have not lasted long. It was very short-lived during the time of the French Revolution, and even during the Communist domination of Eastern Europe in the latter part of the twentieth century it did not outlast the century's end.

In Albania, a predominantly Muslim country, a repressive regime forbade any religious observance; even making the sign of the cross in public led to severe punishment, and the Muslim population were likewise subjected to harsh penalization. Now that a more broad-minded government is in charge all restriction on religious activity has been lifted. Many members of the Christian minority, equally split between Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic, have returned to their churches. It is evident that a yearning for God is as natural a human quality as are the appetites for food, sexual gratification and material prosperity.

In these various considerations we may sum up the function of the Church. It is ideally a community of worshippers of God, the mysterious presence beyond all names and definitions in whom the heart glows and the person becomes truly alive. The hallmark of the knowledge of God is an overwhelming

love that transcends even devotion to humans and encompasses all life. It is not merely an ardent emotional response but has a spiritual depth that can confront evil actions no less categorically than accepting the weakness of human character, and can sacrifice itself in the pursuit of truth.

There is no sentimentality in love for it is guided by the reasoning faculty as well as the emotions. It is certainly capable of willing self-sacrifice, but does not demur from unmasking evil and crushing it, evil being defined as an attitude that defiles human life and destroys it outright. The same principle should apply to animals and to vegetable life, but in humans it attains its absolute necessity. To speak the truth in love is not a pleasant matter, but it is a more authentic mark of caring than turning a blind eye to evil actions on the pretext of tolerance. This, if honestly confronted, is often not so much a kindness as a condescending way of excusing an acknowledged morally defective person on the grounds that they could not be expected to know better because of their social background or disordered mental state. There may also be an element of cowardice in such tolerance. Tolerance is further considered in Chapter 15.

The history of communal worship in all three principal monotheistic faiths bears comparison to the three typical phases of human life. First comes childhood when we are guided by our parents and teachers. In obedience we go to Church (or synagogue or mosque) regularly, repeat the formularies of the liturgy by rote, and enjoy or dislike the procedure according to the attitude of our mentors and our relationship with our fellow worshippers.

As we attain adolescence so we outgrow the authority of our elders, and go our own way whether automatically or as part of our own age group. This way of independence may land us in unpleasant situations, but these too are part of our experience and we learn how to extricate ourselves from them. During this phase we tend to view religious observances critically, little concerned with religious dogma which, if expressed categorically, can easily irritate our sense of the fitness of things. A typical example is the teaching that only one interpretation of the faith is right and following it will alone lead the believer to heaven. All other ways are doomed to everlasting hell, visualized as a place of unending

torment. The injustice of this verdict can hardly fail to offend the sensitivity of any intelligent, warm-hearted person to the point of doubting the existence of a loving God.

The final phase is adulthood. In its early period it usually continues with arrogant agnosticism. The things of the visible, intelligible world are all we need to create a life philosophy. The intangible is largely also the imaginary. But there may come a time when the question of values impinges on the field of materialistic complacency, and the suppressed elements of religious faith reassert themselves.

One example is the 'born-again Christian' who at last, after leading a life of sin (often equated with religious indifference), now finally sees the true light and devotes their life to propagating it, sometimes with a fanatical intensity. This light is God, who in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel is identified with Jesus Christ.[3] This admirable devotion may proceed to an overwhelming obsession to convert others to the truth according to the believer's own conviction. If the believer is refuted, they tend to see the doubter as an enemy to be shunned. In an earlier age when the Church had great political power, the so-called heretic was in danger of being executed, a fate that was in store for Galileo at the hands of the Inquisitition had he not promptly recanted.

In reality it is admirable that one should return to faith, whether ancestral or of a different obedience, after a period of atheism. It reveals a humility that accepts a reality which transcends human reason, vital as this is for guiding one through the muddy, sinuous reaches of superstition on the one hand and dogmatic enthusiasm on the other. It is in the latter region that the born-again person is liable to founder. They may form part of the group, already mentioned, who so alienate others in their vicinity that these embrace an aggressive agnosticism. These are religious fundamentalists whose faith is compounded with the fear of God's punishment and guilt for past religious laxity. Such people do the cause of religion and the love of God a bad service.

Religion may be defined as the belief in a controlling superhuman power, especially in a personal God (or gods) entitled to obedience and worship. In itself religion is morally neutral; it may lead to public service and the heroic self-sacrifice of a saint.

Unfortunately there is another side to religion which is repugnant in its self-centred savagery. Frightening examples in Christian history were the Crusades. These were several medieval, military expeditions made by Europeans to recover the Holy Land from the Muslims, in which atrocities were committed against the native Muslim and Jewish population, and on one particularly notorious occasion against Eastern Orthodox Christians living in Constantinople after the sack of the Holy Land.

Another terrible example of Christian brutality was the Inquisition, an ecclesiastical tribunal for the suppression of heresy in Roman Catholic countries. Its worst excesses were encountered in Spain, where it operated through torture and execution. The lethal teeth of this monster were deflected by the Reformation and severely blunted by the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, whose philosophy emphasized the primacy of reason and individualism rather than tradition.

A third extremely unpleasant example of Christian intolerance was the persecution of the newly founded French Protestant (Calvinist) Church by extreme members of the Catholic League. The protestant minority, called Huguenots, had grown into some strength and were seen as a danger to the State, and in the ensuing religious wars the most terrible event was the Massacre of St Bartholomew's Day on the night of 23 – 24 August 1572 and the two following days in which, it appears at the instigation of Catherine de Medici, between five and ten thousand Huguenots, including their noble leader Gaspard de Coligny, were put to death in Paris and other large French cities.

Huguenots were subsequently granted extensive freedom of worship and other rights in the Edict of Nantes (1598), but they continued to be regarded as a disruptive element in an increasingly absolute State. Under Louis the Fourteenth their freedom continued to be curtailed until the Edict of Nantes was revoked in 1685, and many were forced to accept Catholicism.

Some two or three thousand went into exile in the Netherlands, Switzerland, England, Prussia and America, but most remained in France. They were by and large a hardworking, industrious group, and it has been said that the hand which revoked the Edict of Nantes sparked off the French Revolution a century later.

It must be said that the Protestant and Reformed (Calvinist as distinct from Lutheran) Churches have not been innocent of brutality either. The Puritan extermination of much of the Catholic population of Ireland by Oliver Cromwell in the seventeenth century is an outstanding example. Another is the vicious persecution of members of the Society of Friends, the Quakers, by many of their fellow Christians during and after the lifetime of their founder, George Fox (1624–91). He learnt and preached that God is within us as the Inner Light.

In fact Protestant intolerance towards Catholic communities has often sprung up in north European countries. The basis of much of this hostility has been centred on fear based on previous Catholic persecution together with the comfortable illusion that the doctrine underpinning the dissenter's position embraces the entire truth, and the Catholics are in serious error particularly with regard to the Eucharist.

It is evident that powerful, intolerant religion can lead to mass dissent that is liable to explode in verbal abuse and physical violence, the end of which may be open warfare. A most significant example was the Thirty Years War of the early seventeenth century (1618–48), when Catholic Austro-German forces under the command of Wallenstein and Tilly fought a series of wars against Protestants in Bohemia and Germany. Each side had evident victories and equally often severe defeats. The established position of the Protestants in parts of Germany was challenged, but the overall situation did not change as more and more soldiers were killed. Most of Germany, apart from Bavaria, remained Protestant.

Moderately good relations have grown between Catholics and Protestants up to the present day. This deepening understanding and tolerance has also arisen from the realization that something more life-giving than controversy will need to emerge from the Christian religion if it is to survive the challenge of scientific knowledge and the sheer common decency that is by no means rare in people who have no religious affiliation at all. Indeed, strict fundamentalistic religion can easily stray from the joyful praises of the heavenly host when they saw the infant Jesus: 'Glory to God in highest heaven, and on earth peace to all in whom he delights.'[4] Such religion is by contrast one of intolerance, hard-heartedness and subtle superstition.

Fortunately there is another way of being born, whether once or twice, into a deeper, more loving knowledge of God. It is illuminated by the wonder of a child so that every day provides a fresh source of delight. The things of common life are revelations of benediction as if their full beauty had not been properly appreciated until then. This is the essence of spirituality, the awareness of the holiness of matter and the sacred quality of life. They mirror the nature of the Creator in the same way as Jesus Christ is the incarnate image of the Father and is justly called the Son of God. But all of us, even the most evil, bear an impression of our universal Creator. What we show in part, often a tragically tiny part, Jesus himself showed completely.

Religion is a path to attaining the knowledge of God. It is the message that inspired great souls like Jesus, Gautama, Mohammed and Lao-Tze. When the world's religions regain their original purity and perform their essential work of universal salvation, they will have attained spiritual stature. The end of spirituality is the deification of the world: it becomes the divine edifice for God's eternal self-revelation. At present the fulfilment of this wonderful vision is thwarted by human sinfulness (selfishness), which reached its all-time low in the various dictatorial regimes of the twentieth century.

The future of religion depends entirely on the spirituality of the worshipper. It must no longer be motivated by the selfish aim of sectarian domination. The notion that any one religion possesses the whole truth has to be outgrown. As has been stated quite frequently in these pages, dogmatic claims are judged by their fruit. It may be one of spiritual growth which is good, but again it may be sour with prejudice and hatred.

Now that the world is described as a global village, we cannot easily isolate ourselves from other religious traditions, nor should we want to if we believe that God is love. Christians have much to learn from their Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian neighbours. This does not imply

that all these religions are of equal value. Indeed, syncretism is the wrong approach to spiritual understanding; this is attempting to reconcile different religions into a unified system of belief. All religions have their own elements of spiritual radiance and also their troughs of vicious cruelty. As the saying goes, the grass on the other side is always greener.

Some of us have to make the movement to another major religious tradition as part of our life's odyssey. After the inevitable joy at having finally arrived home, we come to see the points of fallibility in our newly-embraced faith also. Its exponents are all in the end only human beings. Some like Jesus and Gautama are of divine stature, but those who have maintained the tradition often have had feet of clay. They are very similar in fact to ourselves.

It is nevertheless far better for a child to be brought up in a major religious tradition than to have no spiritual guidelines at all. The legal system of civilized society is defined by the last five of the Ten Commandments.[5] Even if the self-assured, young person fights a determined battle against their inherited faith and emerges a triumphant unbeliever, they will have picked up nuggets of spirituality on the way, which may reveal their true value many years later. Enlightened religious education should be broad enough to accommodate agnosticism without attempting to quash it at one fell swoop. 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamed of in your philosophy.'[6]

Worship is a lovable as well as a loving activity: it brings us all together in the name of God who can be known in the warmth of love. The more we forget ourselves in service to our fellows, the more we know the love of God.

Chapter 10

The Nature of Ministry in the Church

'They suffer with their Lord below;
they reign with Him above;
their profit and their joy,
to know the mystery of His love.' (Thomas Kelly, [1769–1854] *Hymns on Various Passages of Scripture*)

Priesthood: A Way of Life

Not all are called to be botanists, accountants or nursery nurses, but we are thankful for those who perform these tasks well. A world in which everyone was a refuse worker or a brain surgeon would be a dire and desperately unbalanced environment. All the various roles that exist can contribute to the good of society. The Church has a place in society, though there are differing views held as to what its role and function is. Societies that allow the Church to conduct its business openly are, at least tacitly, acknowledging that the desire to worship is part of what being human entails.

Priests, clergy and ministers are conductors of public religious rites and mediators between a god and its worshippers. Society acknowledges the usefulness of rites of passage, and the priest may be of great service in assisting folk to adjust to moments of great change – hatch, match and dispatch – by leading them through rituals designed at a very deep level to guide them over periods of enormous change; birth, marriage and death spring to mind.

Churches also act as hospitals for the emotionally distraught. This is not to say that all who have anything to do with places of worship are emotionally or mentally ill, only that it is a point of observation that many people who are experiencing strong feelings of various kinds seek refuge or aid in churches, mosques and synagogues. Times have changed, and the clergy are now the people to go to

if you cannot think of any other professional group who may be of better help – or if you think the problem is spiritual.

Humans are created, a little lower than the angels, to be transmitters of divine love. Our lives are to echo, mirror, reflect in our frail being something of the truly human being Jesus. We are called to take a leaf out of his book; and clergy are called to study the words on the leaf very carefully. These days it is fashionable to believe in whatever kind of God suits oneself at the moment. Whilst this may bring a degree of comfort, real or illusory, it is unlikely to promote a disciplined self-sacrifice. Cheery New Age beliefs open our minds and hearts to greater revelations of human potential, and cannot but tend to encourage Gnostic, solipsistic pride.

The existence of clergy raises the question of the possible existence of a god and the question of our purpose in this life. Priests, nuns and monks, by their very being, may point to God and evoke human response. It is commonly held that the suitability and effectiveness of a priest lies in their moral conduct. Whilst this is so, it cannot be the full picture, for there is something indelible bestowed upon a person not only in baptism but also in ordination. There is a note of spiritual authority which is evident, for example, in the ministry of deliverance in the course of which highly malignant forces may be encountered.

The discipline, study, training and practice of a priest are in such areas as biblical studies, Church history, liturgy, sermon-writing, pastoral psychology, doctrinal studies and ethics, and can take as long as fifteen years to complete. During this time a disciplined prayer life is cultivated and the way of worship is learnt both from books and personal experience. The time scale encourages movement beyond enthusiasm to dedication regardless of mood, developing a selflessness, a generosity of heart and spirit, a growing transparency to God, to absolute love.

Priests are given time and space to practise more fully what all humans are called to do: develop a thankful, trusting dependency on their Creator. Clergy and people alike are called to grow through the practice of prayer and sacrifice into greater transparency, into being a less obstructive channel through

which the divine presence, love, may flow. The priest emulates Christ – the true high priest, re-presenting in their own being something of the nature of Jesus, the anointed one.

The followers of the Old Covenant that God made with Moses were enabled to make sacrifices of a 'sinless' victim for the expiation (meaning 'to make reparation for or complete atonement for') of their own sins. The victim, an animal or bird, was the representative of, not a substitute for, the sinner. The sacrifice was not of the nature of a substitute, in the stead of us, given to a punishment of death to propitiate (meaning ' to render favourable, to appease') an angry deity but a restorative act (as in 'restorative justice'). This is the role that Christ undertook as described in chapters 4 to 10 of the *Letter to Hebrews*.

In the conduct of public worship – of whatever liturgical style – the priest is seeking to evoke by their ritualized conduct and being, a deep response to the divine from within the members of the congregation. The cleric seeks to live their life holding on to God, as it were, with one hand and humanity in its varied localized forms with the other hand. In so doing they take up the stance of the one who conveys absolutely God's love to humankind and our broken versions of love to God: Jesus upon the cross. The priest in practising worship, prayer and sacrifice (offering of oneself) grows in transparency, becoming like a little child again. [1] Arms outstretched, clergy become more like Jesus; the 'through human', through whom God's love and human sorrow flow into one another; the 'true human', showing us what it means to be fully human, and at the same time the 'surrounded on all sides human' to whom nothing is strange, nothing foreign.

This transparency shows the real path to growth in love, in holiness, in wholeness. Clergy practise an openness before God of a sacrificial quality: living out the art of renunciation, of letting go all that is not of God, that in the space created divine love may enter and flourish, purging one from guilt and fear, strengthening one in commitment to love and to serve.

The presence of the holy person raises the quality of the spiritual atmosphere. The rain man in African culture restores rain to an area of drought not by magical incantation but by embodying in their own

real presence harmony and cooperation. When this spreads psychically into the community, harmony, cooperation and rain return. By right conduct, and expressed thankfulness to God, the right way forward comes more clearly to be seen.

Today's pace of life in the work place is fast and furious. There is so much urgency and drive to achieve economic goals, that the proverbial Martian looking in upon humanity may well be forgiven for seeing this planet as a schizoid environment. The tugs and tensions upon each of us militate against the one thing that has ever only been necessary: purity of heart. As Kierkegaard entitled one of his works, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*.[2]

The one thing it is essential for the human to will is that the eternal will – the divine will – be done in their lives; again, easy to say and difficult to live by. The conflicting desires in our heart and mind weaken our ability to live by heavenly love. Our attention is drawn hither and thither with no warning, and distractions bring on inattentiveness, mistakes and varying degrees of harm.

The practice of listing tasks, choosing priorities and not being deflected all aid a concentration of one's energies and efforts, but something far deeper and even more healing is needed. As Lorenzo Scupoli wrote,

'When there lies before you some work, which accords with the will of God, or is good in itself, do not immediately incline your will towards it and do not desire it, without previously raising your mind to God, so as to be clear whether it is the direct will of God that you should desire and perform such actions and whether they would be acceptable to God. And when you compose your thoughts in such a way that the inclination of your will is determined by God's will itself, then wish it and do it, but only because God wishes it, only for the sake of pleasing Him and for His glory alone.

In the same way, when you wish to draw back from something not in keeping with God's will, or not good, do not immediately turn away from it, but first fix the eye of your mind on the will of God and make sure that it is God's direct will that you should turn away from it for the sake of pleasing Him.

For the self-flattery of our nature is very subtle and few can discern it. Secretly it pursues only its own ends, though meanwhile its outward conduct is such, that it seems to us we have but the single aim of pleasing God, though in actual fact this is not so.

Thus it often happens that in actual fact we want or do not want something for our own sake, for our own gratification, and yet think that we want it solely to please God. The one exclusive means to avoid such self-deception is purity of heart, which consists in rejecting the old Adam and clothing ourselves in the new man. This is the aim and purpose of the whole unseen warfare.

If you wish to learn the art of doing this, then listen.'[3]

In other words spiritual practice is about continuously choosing, by setting one's will, to think, say and do only those things that are pleasing not to self, but to God. With this intent it matters little whether we find the tasks pleasing to ourselves. That it is what the Lord asks of us now is sufficient. The fact that left to our own devices we are not able to fulfil such a high calling is nothing new. It is spelled out in the seventh chapter of St Paul's *Letter to the Romans*.

Recollection and prayerful deliberation also take time. The practice of separating emotions/ feelings/ passions from our thoughts is a life-long inner struggle. The descent of the mind into the heart of divine love is a further step. If we believe we know the answers what have we but pride? 'Woe betide those who are wise in their own sight and prudent in their own esteem.'[4]

Our knowledge of God may reach a peak of enlightenment when we are worshipping in a church surrounded by a community of like intent. The climax will necessarily diminish when we all come down-to-earth once more and become enmeshed in the things of the world: personal relations, trade, making our way to prosperity in a milieu that esteems material success as the *summum bonum* of the fulfilled life and money as its assessment of achievement. People are used primarily as pawns on a chessboard of competitive existence with the names of the illustrious as the password to social

acceptance.

One has only to read the obituary notices of people who mattered much in their time and then made the inevitable transition that we call death to see the futility of so much of active life. When we are young and each day seems full of promise of new experiences to be enjoyed, life is sweet and breathless. For the great majority of us there is a much deeper experience of personal attraction which finds its fulfilment in deep friendships which usually come to their apogee in betrothal and marriage with the ultimate birth of a family that projects our future hopes and expectations. Our children are the blossoms of our lives which come to maturity in delicious fruit as our own foliage withers with the onset of the ever-approaching winter of ageing.

The place of meeting of religion and spirituality is the soul, that aspect of the personality where issues of morality, sacrifice and divinity are confronted and assessed. According to the soul's sensitivity the person grows in loving service to those around them. The essential feature of this growth is the displacement of the ego from its customary seat of authority, of being the master of all it surveys, to a place of concern for others in the vicinity. If religion can be so easily caught up in a power struggle aimed at converting people to the one universal truth, then spirituality can also founder in a lush garden of good thoughts and intentions if it is not also animated by positive support for the weak and disadvantaged of the community. We should all be inspired by the love of people and concern for the creatures around us; only so may we hear the angels singing joyful praise: 'Glory to God in highest heaven, and on earth peace to all in whom he delights.'[5]

The care of the soul is the fundamental work of the priest or pastor. He or she affords strength and comfort to those who are afflicted in body and mind by their ministry of prayer, attention and shared pain; for who in the service of Christ can stay far from anybody undergoing the tortures of physical or emotional anguish? This does not necessitate a dramatic response of sympathy so much as the capacity to be still, to listen intently, and to flow out effortlessly to the severely distressed individual. In fact it is the Holy Spirit who is illuminating the listener and emanating from him or her to the one who is in need.

The gift of being open to God is the very heart of effective ministry; it is independent of denominational attachment. It is immediately blocked by any tendency to self-exaltation, for if God comes into an undisguised confrontation with the ego, the divine inspiration is shut off, since God has no intention of competing with the claims of the person. Who would have identified the selfless gift of humility with God? But in fact it is the divine love that enables us to grow up to full adult stature. Such a view presupposes the survival of the mind and soul after the inevitable death of the physical vehicle.

What we cannot fathom at present, we will be able to understand when we have matured in the training school of suffering that is such a vital component of life. 'Whoever gains his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake will gain it.'[6] This promise follows Jesus' instructions to the twelve commissioned disciples: 'No one is worthy of me who cares more for father or mother than for me; no one is worthy of me who cares more for son or daughter; no one is worthy of me who does not take up his cross and follow me.'[7] This is the naked truth of the intensity of genuine Christian ministry.

Unfortunately the jagged edge of Christian history has too often placed enthusiastic proselytism before loving kindness and service to the unconverted. The brutal expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by the Catholic Church in its Inquisitorial horror (initiated by Torquemada under Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile) is an especially notorious example. Tomás Torquemada (1420–98) was the first Inquisitor General of the Spanish Inquisition. His great power was concentrated against the only nominally Christianized Jews (the 'conversos'), and was also influential in the decision made in 1492 to expel the Jews from Spain. It comes as no surprise to learn that Torquemada's ancestors were apparently of Jewish origin, converts to Christianity.

As the priest follows in the way of the Lord that leads to the Cross, so they will bring down with them the presence of Christ. In that presence the soul of the sufferer is renewed and the impenetrable darkness is lifted up to God, who is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.[8] The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never mastered it.[9] The care of the soul brings with it enlightenment and loving warmth. The one who was previously a nameless stranger is now made the guest of honour

at a grand banquet, the unknown person becomes the centre of a rejoicing community. The focal point may be in the midst of the local church, where the congregation is especially aware of God's presence. This is revealed by the love the worshippers express to their group and also the welcome given to the newcomer among them.

Many people come to church, at least in the current state of society, as a place of communal fellowship in a world so intent on achieving its own satisfaction that it has no time or place to greet the stranger in its midst. To be in a situation where one can begin to unburden oneself of one's dismal loneliness in the fellowship of a group of friendly, broadly unjudgemental worshippers is potentially a gesture of their acceptance. If the group is fixed in its attitude to various aspects of sexual behaviour or to religious doctrine to the extent of excluding anybody with different views from their own company, their breadth of fellowship is correspondingly diminished. It is the underprivileged who lend the greatest support to the stranger, for they too may have experienced some of the guest's feeling of isolation.

Jesus said, 'Come to me, all who are weary and whose load is heavy; I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble-hearted, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to wear, my load is light.'[10] Though Jesus' yoke consists of the sins of the whole world, he bears it selflessly; his love redeems all that was previously deposited on the rubbish-heap of human rejection and gives it new birth as it emerges radiantly into the light. And so his yoke is a blessing on to whomsoever it may fall.

The soul is cared for by being loved by those around it. The Christian minister or priest should be an ensign (a standard bearer) of God's presence, reminding the doubters and those who are animated by scorn and derision that a higher power than human reason prevails in a world tragically torn by strife and ill will. This world is very different from the glory of God and peace of all who experience his favour on earth (celebrated by the angels at the birth of Jesus).

The essence of the soul's growth is its deepening knowledge of God. The knowledge that is the truth

that sets us free[11] is the awareness of his love. 'By love may he be gotten and holden, but by thought never' – we have already quoted this observation from the *Cloud of Unknowing* in chapter 6. The soul is cared for by being acknowledged as a precious creature by those whom it meets in the daily round of life. The soul is the centre of our personality. In the first of Jesus' two Commandments, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and soul, and mind and strength';[12] the *heart* is the emanation of enthusiasm and commitment which is a feature of the soul, as in the phrase 'Put your heart into it!' where the spiritual discernment and practice of the individual issues forth as goodwill to the world. 'Where your treasure is, there will be your heart be also.'[13]

The work of acknowledging the soul is the essential function of the worshipping community. Each soul is unique to the person, but it begins to show its true mettle when it is greeted in love by another soul. The priest (or pastor or minister according to one's religious tradition) has a great opportunity to welcome a soul into God's presence. This is not achieved by intellectual discussion aimed at strengthening the religious faith of the person, still less by endeavouring to bring them to the 'true faith' by a mixture of argument and threat (that dire consequences may follow a failure to follow the prescribed to route to God). In this type of approach the person is not treated with respect but simply as one who must be brought to the light according to the priest's convictions and discernment. In fact there is only one light that illuminates the entire universe, both physical and spiritual, and that is the Spirit of God who animates good and evil. God causes the sun to rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the innocent and the wicked.[14] If God is introduced to the soul there must be love in the meeting; unless love is resplendent, the priest is not conversant with God no matter what they may believe about him.

We meet in depth at the level of the soul, and the hallmark of this contact is an inner glow. Depending on this response will our future relationship flourish. We may meet many people in the course of our life. Some we may like well enough to maintain intermittent contact, but most of these individuals remain mere acquaintances. It is only a few who become true friends, people with whom one can share one's deepest concerns and look for encouragement and support, and in turn offer our own solace when

they are in pain.

The priest ought to be a friend at least to members of their congregation and ideally to anybody in distress. This is quite as important a function as conducting the liturgy and celebrating the Eucharist. Inasmuch as the priest is Christ's representative on earth at least in their own parish, they should bring something of his presence to those whom they encounter day by day. To have a shoulder on to which a sufferer can weep is a great privilege. Only a person who has suffered long will attain the kindness and patience[15] to offer a sympathetic shoulder. Friendship is an essential quality of effective ministry. A simple discussion of a personal problem with a wise, loving priest can help to clear up misunderstandings and bring people together again.

Confession is an excellent means of catharsis, the freeing of repressed emotion by association with the cause and its consequent release. Such confession may be sacramental and obligatory in the Catholic tradition, but it can be equally effective in a living room when conducted by the priest in a non-religious setting. In such a background the clerical function touches on the work of counselling and psychotherapy. Quite a few ministers of the Church are also trained counsellors, and the combined faculty can be an asset provided it does not encroach upon the clerical duties of the priest, which should be seen as primary. If more specialised therapy seems necessary, it is much wiser to refer the person to a professional counsellor or psychotherapist. It is far better to do something really well than to be a jack of all trades and master of none.

The priest can be a means of support in times of personal stress and uncertainty. They are not only friends in need but also spiritual guides. Practices of superstition are not uncommon even among committed Christians, so unfirmly grounded is their faith. When circumstances turn out unfavourably they may have recourse to oracles of various kinds like entranced mediums, the Ouijá board (which has letters or signs at its rim to which a planchette, movable pointer or upturned glass supposedly points in answer to questions from attenders at a séance) and astrological predictions in the daily newspapers. The overriding objection to all such practices is not so much their questionability as their tendency to focus the individual's attention fixedly on their ego to the neglect of their service to their neighbour.

This applies also, but to a much milder extent, to such common habits as touching wood to avert bad luck, or throwing salt over one's shoulder if some has been accidentally spilt on the table.

Superstitious practices can also have a Christian background, as in regarding Friday as an unlucky time because Jesus was crucified then. Likewise thirteen has had a malign reputation because it included Jesus and the twelve disciples at the Last Supper.[16] It is probably fair to say that all people have a superstitious streak in their nature, but the priest should be so grounded in their faith as to be convinced of God's supreme authority in all conceivable circumstances. Superstition is erased by the divine presence. God whose nature is love embraces our weaknesses as magnanimously as he fuels our strengths.

The young person may be sure of themself, that they have the answers to life's problems well taped, and that they are potentially, if not actually, the master of all they encounter. Life's experience disabuses them of this comfortable illusion, and teaches the advantage of a mouth well shut except when essential information needs to be conveyed.

Discreet silence is the hallmark of a well-rounded life, and the healing energy it generates is a blessing for many who are in distress of body or mind. Deep silence touches the divine element of the soul. The effective priest should be a receptive listener; only then can they give appropriate advice, for God will be close to them in their humility. Where there is love it flows out effortlessly to all in the vicinity.

The ideal priest was the Curé d'Ars, St Jean-Baptiste Marie Vianney (1786 – 1859). He was born at Dardilly, near Lyons, and intended for the priesthood from an early age. His education and training was interrupted by his conscription for the army, from which he deserted, and again considerably lengthened by his inability to learn Latin. After ordination at last in 1815, he was for three years assistant priest at Écully, and then appointed in February 1818 parish priest at Ars. In this remote village he achieved almost world-wide fame. First from the neighbouring parishes, then from all France, finally from other countries too, came men and women, of all sorts and conditions, to seek his

counsel. By 1850 the number of his visitors was estimated at 20,000 a year, and during his last few years he was forced to spend sixteen to eighteen hours a day in the confessional. He was beatified in 1905, canonized in 1925, and in 1929 created the patron saint of parish priests.

In such a life we see much more than the work of a saintly priest. He is the archetype of the ideal Christian, one who lives constantly at the precincts of the soul and brings seekers and penitents close to the presence of God. This is the function of the Church, and all the worshippers ought to play their individual roles in ascending to the heights of spiritual endeavour. They do this by giving themselves readily to the stranger in their midst who is in mental pain and emotional distress. The height and nobility of this work has been celebrated by the self-sacrifice of St Jean-Baptiste Marie Vianney, the Curé d'Ars.

Chapter 11

The Fruit of the Knowledge of God

'Sin is necessary but all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well.' (Julian of Norwich, [c.1342–after 1416] *Revelations of Divine Love*)

The experience of God brings with it joy and a love of universal extent. It is, however, the rule rather than the exception for this state of spiritual exaltation to become dulled by the events of daily life, sometimes emphasized by the negative attitudes of one's companions if one is a member of a religious community. Some of the community are traversing their own path of spiritual travail, and their desolation may quite easily be communicated by their physical presence as well as a more silent telepathic rapport. It is very easy to believe that the divine experience was merely an illusion conjured up by a too suggestible mind and then demolished by the facts of common life. There may also be a feeling of guilt that one has let the pearl of great price, of very special value,[1] slip through one's fingers as a result of negligence or sheer apathy.

The result of this apparent loss of a divine gift is often a mood of severe depression called 'the dark night of the soul' in mystical literature. It is especially associated with the writings of St John of the Cross. It is not a regression to past attitudes of distressing doubt and agnosticism, so much as a progress, an advance, into the spiritual darkness of the world as a beacon of hope, encouragement and guidance in an atmosphere thick with selfishness, false values related to the sins of pride and jealousy, and a hatred of minority groups in the community. It is a minor version of Christ's crucifixion that must inevitably precede the glorious resurrection, primarily of the mystic and then of the group more generally.

To have the experience of God means that one is a chosen vehicle. To be chosen in this way is assuredly a great privilege, but this brings service with its attendant pain and suffering, not the customary rewards that worldly service promises. These bring happiness to the person who has undertaken to carry out the orders of their employer. Service in the name of God brings as its reward only more service; there is no inevitable worldly recognition. It too, however, brings the servant happiness and that to the degree of sheer joy. To have been able to rescue even one victim from the ravages of sin, which is the rejection of the moral law, is a far greater privilege than receiving any material benefit. The material world, essential as it is for our personal growth, is transitory; the moral world illuminated by God's Spirit is eternal.

It must be said that not all attitudes that pass as moral are of spiritual excellence. Some are simply expressions of the prejudice of a community at a particular period of its history. The realm of sexual behaviour provides thought-provoking examples. Homosexuality, for instance, was regarded with general indifference in Britain until the case of Oscar Wilde, when it aroused fierce antagonism and became a penal offence if practised between men. The female form, lesbianism, was never subject to legal punishment.

This harsh attitude towards male homosexuality was slackened in the 1960s, when it was no longer subject to prosecution. At present in some especially emancipated groups sodomy is quite in order. As in many human conditions the attitude often veers violently from one extreme to the other. The moral, biblical condemnation of homosexual practices[2] is draconian, but the current tendency, at least in 'advanced' Western society, to dismiss them as an unexceptional variation of the norm is also unsatisfactory.

The truth seems to be that most homosexual people are born with their abnormality. Provided they live in goodwill and public decency they should be left in peace. What people do in private is entirely their own business. Those who have a penchant for criticism often have their own genital problems. Gross sexual indecency is clearly to be condemned. Paedophilia, sexual desire acted out on children, is a penal offence. It bears no relation to the gender of the victim (see Chapter 15).

As one knows God more profoundly, so one can relax into one's own being more positively and unapologetically. One can appreciate individuals one has met for their own particular gifts in a spirit of rejoicing rather than with envy or subtle belittlement, as if to prove that they, for all their glitter, are not quite up to our standard. Just as God loves all his creatures, good and bad alike,[3] so one rejoices in the very differences in attitude one encounters in even a small group of people. One seeks less to convert others and more to understand them for one's own enlightenment. First we should understand our own deeper motives before we may judge those of other people. Passing indiscriminate judgement on others is a pleasant means of averting one's gaze from the darkness within oneself.

As we come to know God, so the darkness lightens and we are able to love them as fellow travellers on the road of immortality.[4] Criticism, unless delivered for the loving correction of a fellow being's perverse actions with genuine concern for their enlightenment, can easily be wounding and defeat its own purpose. Discreet silence may be a wiser course at least in the short term. There may be occasions when we are obliged to speak our mind directly, but if this is done with restraint, the atmosphere often clears rapidly and harmony is soon restored.

Tact of this magnitude is a veritable gift of the Spirit, integral in St Paul's list to that of wise speech, the first to be enumerated.[5] Eloquent silence speaks much more loudly than the gross language that is frequently expressed by angry, frustrated people. They get it off their chest, but bystanders then feel the full blast of their venom.

As one knows God better, so one's trust in one's own judgement and actions becomes more confident. This self-assurance is not brash and ill-considered such as is encountered from time to time in those intent on making their presence felt in their local environment. On the contrary, it is quiet, undemonstrative, but very firm. It has no need to assert itself because its source is divine. No one knows the outcome of any plan beforehand, but there is an inner certitude that at the heart of the matter everything is in control and all will be well. This is not an attitude of wishful thinking. It comes from God's presence deep in the Spirit of the soul.

The opposite of self-assurance is superstition (chapter 10). This is a credulity regarding the supernatural. It shows itself as an irrational fear of the unknown or mysterious, and may be the occasion of misdirected reverence, which sometimes forms the basis of strange opinions, practices or religions. It is never far from human nature, insecure as this is, but it is especially prominent in times of stress or transition. If we were truly secure in the knowledge of God, superstition would be encompassed by confidence so that our attention would be concentrated on the present moment to the exclusion of other considerations. Then fear of the unknown would be replaced by outflowing, joyful anticipation.

Attitudes of exclusiveness would soften into an appreciation of all people in their own uniqueness, for we all have a special contribution to give to the community. There are admittedly some members who have antisocial tendencies, but if we are great of heart we can learn to understand and tolerate these aberrations, and love the individual for their sake alone. This breadth of spiritual vision in no way contradicts the necessity of speaking the truth in love mentioned in chapter 9; on the other hand, it underlines its necessity in the work of elevating the sinner to their apportioned place in the kingdom of God.

We cannot live a lie, for apart from the social harm that may be done, it undermines our integrity and desecrates the work we were especially born to accomplish. We begin to grasp the importance, not only for our own life but for life in general, of the recognition of the divine presence in the world. 'It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'[6] The terror is not of punishment but of the great work ahead of us as we proceed in the way that the great souls of humanity like Jesus and Gautama are showing us eternally. Their twentieth-century representatives, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Oscar Romero and Mahatma Gandhi accompany us on the way.

The fruit, or harvest, of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control.[7] These are an aspect of the knowledge of God too – after all, the Spirit is the third person of the Christian Godhead – but the fullness of God (which is the Divine nature in its

totality) embraces the Father, who is the Creator, and the Son, who is the incarnation of the Father, as well as the Spirit, who is the creative power that effects the action of the universe.

In the Father we find not only supreme power but also a caring protectiveness of a parent (some mystics like Julian of Norwich speak of God as 'our Mother' also). In the Son the Godhead assumes human form so as to partake fully of our nature with its temptation to sin and its capacity to suffer to the full. Only in this way can we have an intimate knowledge of God in order to fulfil our true destiny to become children of God also. In Jesus Christ we see the incarnation of God , so that he is our witness of God among us and our means of deification, growing into the nature of God as the Christ showed perfectly in his own life. He did this, paradoxically, when he revealed his humanity in terrible doubt as he hung crucified and apparently bereft of all consolation. He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"[8] This is a quotation from Psalm 22.1.

God's perfection in Jesus Christ is the way to and assurance of human deification. We grow into our predestined perfection by following him not so much by belief as by the action of our lives. St Athanasius put the matter succinctly when he said in *Against Heresies*: 'He was made what we are that He might make us what He is Himself.' In this context he was opposing the subversive teaching of Arius, that there was no especially divine element in Jesus Christ, that he was merely a very remarkable man.

This is something of greater importance than a mere professional exchange of opinions between two ancient theologians. It is a view of human destiny. Are we to remain forever as we are now, an indifferent lot guided by special prophets who are subsequently venerated and whose teaching is disregarded at the same time, or are we to progress from our self-centred way of life to aspire to the divinity revealed to the world in and by Jesus Christ? In view of the terrible events of the last century this question is as one between death and life. Before we become too disheartened let us remember that the darkest hour comes before the dawn. Humanity has left the stage of childhood forever. In its present state of adolescence it whips around distractedly, seeking the true path when confronted by

various conflicting ideologies. Many of these have a political background, but there is a growing interest in esoteric matters also. These are meant only for the 'initiate', but who is the initiator?

There can be only one initiator, God. His true disciples are the great souls who have blessed the world. Their teachings have brought us all closer to the truth despite the self-centred attitudes and actions of some of their disciples. There is nothing 'occult' in the Divine presence. There are indeed individuals with unusual psychic gifts; these too come from God as do intellectual brilliance and remarkable physical prowess in the field of sport. Psychic gifts seem especially awe-inspiring because of their non-rational quality. The healing gifts of Jesus and his power in the ministry of deliverance (exorcism) were all of psychic nature, but he invested them with spiritual authority. 'I cannot act by myself; I judge as I am bidden, and my sentence is just, because I seek to do not my own will, but the will of him who sent me.'[9] Psychic ability is especially liable to inflate the ego, making the individual feel exalted. This may proceed to a god-like status of an initiate who may then proceed to direct their followers. If their movement becomes popular, a cult may arise. This is a system of devotion to a particular person or object, as opposed to a sect, which is a body of people subscribing to a religious doctrine but deviating from the orthodox tradition and consequently regarded as heretical.

To encounter the fruit of the knowledge of God one requires the wisdom of the serpent and the harmlessness of the dove. The first protects one against the threat of malpractice by enthusiasts who claim a special short cut to divine knowledge by following a guaranteed course of action; the second is the path of the humble aspirant who is aware of their personal inadequacy and proceeds by the way of prayer. This, as already pointed out, does not appease God, but simply makes us increasingly receptive to his undemanding love. If we can let go of our lack of confidence and fall in trust into the presence of God, we will be delivered from 'the behaviour that belongs to the unspiritual nature: fornication, indecency and debauchery; idolatry and sorcery; quarrels, a contentious temper, envy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, party intrigues, and jealousies; drinking bouts, orgies and the like. No one who behaves like that will ever inherit the kingdom of God.'[10] All these perversities are in direct conflict with the fruit, or harvest, of the Spirit spelled out earlier in this chapter.

The fruit of the knowledge of God is a human life that enriches the world with this glorious harvest, this magnificent outpouring. The only real reward for a noble action is freeing a fellow being from affliction. We will be aware most clearly of this reward when we have moved beyond the transitory state called death, in which the physical body, our working frame for our time on earth, is cast off. Then the immortal element of our personality, which we call the soul, will be revealed in iridescent radiance, and we will be prepared for new adventures in a life beyond our conception.

A special human joy is creativity, the possession of an outstanding gift that illuminates the life of the privileged person and also the lives of those who are enriched by it. Creativity may be of physical nature as is seen in the distinguished sportsperson, or a scintillating mental aptitude in such fields as scientific research and educational endeavour. Any skill that promotes enjoyment of life and understanding of the human condition has great creative potentiality.

The highest range of creativity is nevertheless aesthetic, for here it touches the soul directly. Plato saw the concept of God embraced in the qualities of beauty, truth and goodness (or love), and the grandeur of great art, whether in music, painting and sculpture, or literature, effects this soul response immediately. It lightens the darkness of so much sordid human behaviour with a ray of celestial hope. It not only makes living worthwhile but also illuminates the present uncertainty with a glow of future promise that makes all pain and suffering in the interim period mere obstacles to be surmounted on our journey to perfection.

All views about the nature of the afterlife are necessarily tentative; those who are quite sure of what lies ahead of us all might be nursing an illusion. Therefore our place of action is where we are now, and the tools of growth the present circumstances. There is nothing high or low; they all work to send us on the path of service whose end is the knowledge of God.

Chapter 12

The See-Saw of Life

'Let your good sense be obvious to everybody. The Lord is near.' (Philippians 4.5. New Jerusalem Bible)

A see-saw is a device consisting of a long beam balanced on a central support for children to sit on at each end and move up and down by pushing the ground with their feet. On a wider consideration it is a contest in which the advantage repeatedly changes from one side to the other. Life has not a few characteristics of a see-saw: for a time it is in the ascendant and all our hopes materialize and our schemes are fulfilled, and then suddenly events take a turn for the worse and the see-saw action reverses to the point of inactivity, and a state of apathy sets in.

This is not a good and healthy state of affairs, because the bored, uninspired person lapses into a condition of indifference and turns an increasingly blind eye to the ills of the world. The lack of interest may attain a level where there is a subtle descent into the valley of moral squalor that adjoins the pit of criminal activity.

'In works of labour, or of skill,

I would be busy too;

For Satan finds some mischief still

For idle hands to do.'[1]

In the same hymn there is the observation:

'One sickly sheep infects the flock,

And poisons all the rest.'[2]

Indeed, when the see-saw plank of life is lowered, all sorts of unpleasant people climb on to it and can have a devastating effect on the common good.

The movement of a see-saw is not intrinsic to itself; it needs to be acted upon from outside. In this respect human life is animated from the soul's power, but the extent of this is dependent on the universal beneficence of the Creator and the willing cooperation of the individual. Our life is never complete until it is directed by God, but there is a much more insistent power nearer home, the ego, which is the part of the mind that reacts to reality and has a sense of individuality. Without it we are impotent to do our individual duties.

The ego tends to get an undiscriminatingly bad press from the earnest moralist who sees it as a mechanism of undisguised self-expression in which the views of other people are relegated to second place. By this definition the ego is a pure mechanism of solipsism, the view that the self is all that exists or can be known: this self is essentially the director of the imperious ego and is one's personal guide that manifests itself on occasions of stress and disputation. But without the ego's strong power, provided it is not arrogant, we would soon founder in a sea of impotence, so that the work we have been scheduled to carry out would fade sadly like pretty flowers in fine vases in our sitting room, so attractive but so short-lived. They are here today, dispensed with profligate abundance, but gone tomorrow with drooping stems and loosely-hanging florets. In other words, the ego may not exult in the finer virtues of neighbourliness and self-giving, but it does possess the staying power to keep the see-saw of life moving. Jesus' second commandment, "You must love your neighbour as yourself" [3] is a reminder not only of one's charity to others but also of the primary necessity of caring for one's ego that it may be equipped to serve the community well.

When the time of plenty is upon us we expand in satisfaction, for the stimulus is continuous and we behave as if we were the master of everything around us. This is very much the attitude of the happy child, secure in the loving care of those around them but completely oblivious to the needs

of the world outside their immediate experience. Of course, not all childhood is blessed in this manner as we describe in chapter 15 with regard to paedophilia, but on the whole our early years are replete with sensual thrills in which we use and are used by active contemporaries or adults infused with sexual or material well-being. Not so very long ago this very subject would have been the object of the strictest taboo; it flourished underground in an obtrusively sanctimonious society that exploited the inexperienced young and the impoverished or physically handicapped older groups for sexual gratification and material usage for its own ends.

The sexual revolution of recent times is something of a two-edged sword. While it is difficult to enthuse over the widespread sexual promiscuity that is currently taken for granted especially in the entertainment industry of the Western nations, if one is scrupulously honest about a matter that has been rigorously swept under the carpet until very recent times, this state of affairs is really as old as the hills. It is evident that the lust (or passionate desire) for sexual satisfaction, power, battle or any other outgoing activity that releases the mind from introspective thoughts tending to depression or obsessive pessimism that might all to easily terminate in suicide, cannot be summarily dismissed as naked evil to be categorically proscribed.

While few responsible onlookers applaud the almost ritual dismissal of moral attitudes in sexual behaviour in the present scene with its hazard of sexually transmitted (venereal) diseases of which AIDS remains the most menacing, the conventional alternative of almost draconian control of sexual activity among fundamentalist religious groups (especially Christian and Muslim) casts a most menacing shadow of repression on the normally ebullient human spirit, compared with which promiscuity is light relief. It is noteworthy that the European homosexual community formed a comparatively small proportion of martyrs during the period of the Nazi Holocaust when six million Jews were systematically slaughtered. Sexual diversity did not thrive either during the Communist regimes that dominated in Eastern Europe during the major part of the twentieth century.

The sexual scene of recent times has shown a violent see-saw action decidedly out of balance, with the spirited upward thrust of permissiveness fully dominating over the repressive way of conventional religion. The trouble with conventional religion is that it evokes hostility sometimes to the intensity of hatred amongst its adherents against anything of which it disapproves. Such religion is usually described as orthodox, which means holding the correct opinion. As such it is intrinsically faultless, but we should bear in mind that opinion tends to change as we know more about the outer world which we share with other people and animals and the inner world of the soul and the mind, often collectively called the psyche. Truth does not change its integrity, but it is liable to expand as its scope extends with the addition of newly-acquired knowledge.

Another see-saw that attends human life is the balance between faith and reason. Faith has an emotional component which swings between superstition and spiritual awareness. This acknowledges a divine quality inherent in life that is in ultimate control of all situations no matter how desperate they may appear. Faith is closely connected with hope, believing that 'all things work together for good for those that love God.'[4] The gaping void that stretches between material reality and spiritual aspiration can only be bridged by faith illuminated by hope. But is this faith based on reality or is it merely illusory – sometimes derisively called wishful thinking?

Reason is mentally based. It has little emotional perception. Its presence is strikingly direct as it guides our thoughts to a clearly defined end. Above all its observations can be repeated by other people; repeatability is the essence of all scientific research. Reason knows that the processes of thought and emotion are physically based in the brain. But is this the sum total of life, ending with the inevitable death of the body? Psychical research has not provided a convincing answer because it is limited to rational models of thought. These methods have impressive results to their credit in such fascinating fields as astrophysics and research into chaos which apparently underlies smoothly running, orderly systems of movement throughout the various processes of life. Still, the

inspired collaboration of mathematics, physics and fertile informed imagination cannot transcend the limits of rational thinking.

Is there any mode of existence of an entirely different order to this? The now well-recorded near-death experience described in Chapter 5 moves evocatively into the field of life continuing after bodily death, thereby potentially adding knowledge to the resurrection faith of Christians, [5] but its occurrence is too sporadic to fulfil the stringent element of repeatability demanded by scientific research. The same criticism applies much more strongly to claims of a memory of a past life, for these are purely personal in scope even if they may on occasion be confirmed by other people. The subject has been exhaustively investigated by Dr Ian Stevenson whose most important book on reincarnation is *Children Who Remember Previous Lives: a Question of Reincarnation*.[6]

Until the Renaissance faith was in the ascendant over reason. Religious orthodoxy reigned; indeed the Church founded and patronized the great medieval universities including their limited scientific knowledge. After the Renaissance (the period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries) the birth of modern scientific understanding was established; the names of Galileo and Isaac Newton are especially prominent in the field of astrophysics in the seventeenth century, and the Royal Society (of London) was founded in 1662 to promote scientific discussion. To be a Fellow of the Royal Society (FRS) is the greatest honour that can be bestowed on a scientist.

As reason rose to predominance so the role of faith was increasingly laid aside, a state of affairs encouraged by the hostile attitude of much religious orthodoxy, especially in its fundamentalist approach to the inerrancy of Scripture and the literal acceptance of the Christian creeds. This was the trend of the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century which persisted until the early twentieth century (Chapter 9). At present the authority of the scientific approach is accepted without demur by the Western world which by and large dismisses religious faith with its unpleasant history of intolerance and persecution.

The see-saw action of human life with its upward thrust of arrogant rationality is in the end no more adequate than that of religious dogmatism. Only when the love of God is known does sectarian religion expand to spirituality, and both reason and faith combine towards the spiritualization of the world as seen in the life of Christ who turned water into wine.[7] This is the true vocation of the human being, the transmutation of the natural elements of life into something glorious.

Some stern, puritanical types of Christians have frowned on this miracle; being total abstainers from alcoholic beverages themselves, they cannot tolerate the ingestion of even such a mild form of alcohol as wine by anyone else. To be sure the addiction to strong alcoholic spirits is a serious social as well as a personal menace and is to be deprecated in no uncertain terms, but the communal use of wine and beer may add to the conviviality of an occasion. This is another example of the human see-saw in action: an excess of alcohol results in reckless inebriety whereas strictly imposed abstention can be an ominous token of dictatorial repression unless one is an alcoholic, whose intake must be ended as soon as possible.

A notorious case occurred in the United States during the Prohibition (1920 – 33) when the manufacture and sale of alcohol was prohibited by law. The abstinence was overtly obeyed, but the habit was soon driven underground where it flourished like the proverbial green bay tree. Moreover from this unsavoury root there emerged an interlocking criminal network whose immediate purpose was the illicit distribution of alcohol. But some groups arose who had a decidedly more sinister aim than this. It is no surprise that the Prohibition was ultimately abandoned as a frank disaster.

Are we patriots or nationalists? A patriot serves their native land, and in their own time quite often the country that has had the generosity to welcome them after fleeing from tyranny as a refugee from the vile regime that has supplanted the caring society of their youth. This service is

illuminated by passionate devotion to the country of present domicile. The emotion is expressed in the *Last Poem* of Sir Cecil Arthur Springer-Rice (1858 – 1918):

> I vow to thee, my country – all earthly things above –
>
> Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love.

Remembering the oft-quoted John 15.13, 'There is no greater love than this, that someone should lay down their life for their friends,' we are able to put patriotism in its right context. A patriot works for the integrity of their country, not merely its power in the councils of the world. Justice is at least as integral to patriotism as prestige. The true patriot honours the history, achievements and people of other countries apart from their own, and would strive to protect them from aggression by their neighbours.

The nationalist differs from the patriot in their exaggerated or aggressive devotion to their country, an attitude called chauvinism. The nationalist loves their country to the detriment of neighbouring territories and states, and is not infrequently hostile to foreign communities that are part of its population. In a belligerent mood they will easily yield to the temptation to invade neighbouring areas, allegedly for their own good but in fact as a shameless exercise of power and greed. The history of the twentieth century is replete with examples; the worst by far was the treacherous invasion of numerous territorial boundaries by Nazi Germany which spread like a destructive cancer wherever it took control.

But what about the earlier colonization of America, Africa and Asia by European powers? By far the most important was the worldwide establishment of the British Empire. Here we see a combination of nationalism and patriotism. The vast areas that were conquered were subsequently colonized by Britons with their honestly felt (if not invariably executed) homage to the concept of fair play. On the whole the record of British imperialism was good; it brought education and

medical care to vast populations who had been previously led by a combination of native prejudice and powerful superstition. If it took rapaciously from its colonies it also gave generously. The old cliché, the white man's burden, was a useful means of countering the criticism of the predatory appetite of the colonists who invaded the African continent. Not so long before the blacks were used as the white man's slaves.

A far less agreeable example of colonization was the Spanish subjugation of much of the American Indian aboriginal population: the Incas of Peru and the Mayas of Central America. The conquistadors (conquerors) of Peru and Mexico betrayed and destroyed these people monstrously. They were by no means uncivilized, but they did practise human sacrifice to their gods.

The hope for the future lies in a world federal union in which the various countries form a unity but remain independent in internal affairs. The glimmerings of this state of national union are at last appearing in such collective initiatives as UNO (United Nations Organization) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization). Even the more circumscribed NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) moves in the direction of national union. The closer federal union approaches, the more intimately the spirit of patriotism will expand to embrace one whole world, and love will prevail ever more strongly among people so that each one may fulfil their destiny in the universal community.

Which is primary, love or justice? This is the ultimate see-saw of human life. Indeed, can real love (not soothing sentimentality or sexual desire) exist in a milieu where injustice prevails? Love can usefully be defined in terms of John 15.13, the capacity to sacrifice one's life for a friend. Many young men made the supreme sacrifice in two world wars of the twentieth century for the defence of their country; in the second world war the Allied powers fought against an evil with an intention

that far outdistanced mere patriotism in its zeal. It is on this note that justice holds the stage; it is the exercise of authority in the maintenance of right.

Justice has a strong moral quality. Love can apparently transcend judgements of good and bad in an emergency, and offer its all to the present situation. It makes no stipulations and can face anything.[8] But the aim of love is the growth of the individual into a responsible agent, not to remain a moral weakling at the mercy of any passing whim. Therefore love works most effectively in a framework of justice. Love without accompanying justice ends in moral turmoil, whereas justice without love turns human life into an increasingly cold, hard prison. The same is true when applied to domesticated animals.

Therefore on this see-saw there should be perfect balance – the one is not better than the other. In the good life the one supports the other, for neither is complete on its own.

This is the way of human life. Too much of one good can overshadow to the extent of eclipsing its complement, thus intense love can, at least temporarily, turn its back on the requirements of common justice, idealistic pacifism can refuse to face the reality of indescribably evil forms of government like Nazism and Fascism, and loving tolerance can turn a blind eye to destructive sexual aberration that smashes the lives of its victims.

The correct way of life follows the golden mean, which is the principle of moderation as opposed to excess. The golden mean is honoured by the Buddhist Eight-fold Path, the Noble Middle Way, which comprises right view, right aim, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right mindfulness and right contemplation. This way is noble because the enlightened human being is in charge of their own attitudes, being inspired but never dominated by the Source of all life whom we call God. His nature is always to have mercy, but like a loving parent he soon, sometimes with

considerable acerbity if we are obsessively stubborn, puts us on the right path. But we have the final say: if we choose the way to hell we shall certainly end up there, but this is not the final act of the drama (Chapter 18).

The see-saw of life is seldom stagnant because it is the essential mechanism of growth, reaching its highest point in the evolution of the human being.

Chapter 13

The Gift of Equanimity

'In calm detachment lies your safety, your strength in quiet trust.' (Isaiah 30.15.)

Equanimity may be defined as mental composure, an evenness of temper especially in misfortune. It is a very great spiritual gift, for it is the consequence of the divine presence irradiating a soul that has been confused by intellectual argument and emotional turmoil. This inner disturbance may follow passionate theological debate in the course of which each proponent is fixed on their own exposition of Divine truth, and aims vigorously, even frantically, at converting the audience to their own point of view. If they were emotionally balanced they would endeavour to practise courteous silence and listen intensely to other points of view so that a well-disposed consensus of opinion would emerge. This is an admirable indication of the goodwill that flows from emotionally balanced people who are working for the common benefit. They themselves mature into self-actualizing adults whose aim is the intellectual and spiritual advancement of the whole group.

In fact no human discovery is final. In the realm of astrophysics the findings of Isaac Newton (1642-1727) have been considerably modified by Albert Einstein early in the twentieth century with the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics that followed. Now we know that a balanced chaos underlines physical laws. Its full implications have still to be elucidated. It seems that no final solution of worldly problems is likely to be forthcoming. In the realm of public health the emergence of a new viral disease, AIDS, has caused a worldwide havoc, and the appearance of antibiotic-resistant strains of the tubercle bacillus has been attended by a recrudescence of

pulmonary tuberculosis in Britain.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. In respect of the human this is because the superficial appearance may alter memorably but the inner character remains unchanged. How easy it is to delude ourself by an attitude of courteous goodwill while deep down we are enveloped in a cloud of jealousy and resentment! Suffering in its various forms cuts us down to size and brings us to our basic character. If we are courageous enough to seek to lift ourselves out of this morass of destructive thinking, if necessary with the help of a spiritually sensitive psychotherapist, we will transcend the inner turmoil that disfigures our life, and traverse the joyful path of self-actualization. If we proceed on the way, we will experience the peace of equanimity.

This is not a state of a complacent bliss; on the contrary we are deeply concerned with the maladjustment of others around us. But we do not seek to improve their condition by words of sympathy, even less so by purposefully demonstrating more constructive ways of living. Thoroughly commendable though these may be, they stem from a source of self-proclaimed authority which may easily slip into an attitude of superiority and latent pride. If help of this magnitude is required, the type of psychotherapist already defined is more useful. The assistance the unqualified, self-actualized individual may best give is friendly silence and advice when requested. In fact this may be the finest help that one person can give another, because the source of assistance is experienced friendship rather than a psychological relationship, which involves the inevitable distance of a professional agent.

Friendly silence is the basis of prayer. When we are closely aware of God's presence we include consciously all about whom we are concerned, often many more than we could remember by name at any particular time. This is because we belong to one another as parts of one body as Scripture says in Ephesians 4.25. Jesus teaches that where two or three meet together in his name, he is there among them.[1] This statement is preceded by the promise that if two of them agree on earth about

any request they have to make, the request will be granted by his heavenly Father.[2] It follows that an attitude of equanimity is both the key to effective prayer and the consequence of that prayer. All prayer is Eucharistic as discussed in Chapter 9, because once we have renounced the dominance of our ego, the resurrected Christ is with us.

Equanimity produces such a feeling of quiet confidence that by letting ourselves be, we can really enjoy our life and give it quite generously to those around us. Our happiness attains its peak when we are part of a community of people vibrant with creative activity. This activity seeks to care for those in distress, to educate the young in the appreciation and performance of the arts, and to work for the material and spiritual growth of the entire community. It may have a directive capacity, but it does not take control of other people's lives and activities. On the other hand, it appreciates a sensible diversity of views and activities, learning with pleasure from many diverse sources.

It is catholic in a connotation that far exceeds the customary denominational limitation, for it is sufficiently composed to be able to withstand all pressure to conform to ways of thinking at variance with its own true nature, but with a quiet assurance of its own correctness. It is catholic in the ancient meaning of the word which is *universal*. It is inclusive in its range and makes a full assessment according to the intuitive abilities of the soul. To be able to enter each new experience of life with a mind unclouded by prejudice (a preconceived opinion) is a glorious revelation of oneself, for the spirit of freedom remains constantly in attendance. In our own confidence and goodwill we may play an unconscious part in liberating those whom we meet in the everyday course of life.

Equanimity is the fruit of experience much of which may have been personally unpleasant. When the ego has received a great blow, there may be little personal strength left to cope with life. An overwhelming hiatus replaces the glow of satisfaction that had previously been its delight. Nothing from outside will replenish the self-centred ego, but if the person is to grow into the full

knowledge of themselves there has to be a development of the inner consciousness which we identify with the soul.

When the soul is growing in experience there is a change in the personality which is of a different order to that which follows propitious events in an individual's life. As was previously noted, this kind of change is followed in due course by a reversion to the old way of self-centredness, but great suffering tends to shake our assurance so radically that an altered view of ourself and of the wider world arises. Only then may we register a compelling mental composure in many situations that would previously have evoked a negative response like fear, anger, even revulsion and hatred. The more self-collected we are, the less clamant is our desire for earthly possessions and the more urgent the awareness of our neighbour's need. It is thus that virtue is its own reward; loving service opens oneself to all the world's pain, while simply lifting this up to God's presence brings one into solidarity with all creatures, especially the human of which one is a part. This is the way of intercessory prayer; it raises the one in need directly into God's presence.

Equanimity is greater than simple calmness when one is in danger. People vary considerably in this respect; some have a braver personality than others, while all groups may have a cowardly member whose main concern is saving their own skin even at the price of a colleague's life. In fact we all have a cowardly streak, but equanimity tends to lessen its intensity. In the early part of our life fear is necessary for self-protection lest we hurt ourself by reckless behaviour. The end of taking care of oneself is being available to protect the interests of the greater community when they are imperilled: 'there is no greater love than this, that someone should lay down their life for their friends.'[3]

Some apparently cowardly people suffered such severe abuse in their early childhood that their self-confidence was dealt a shattering blow. If they have courage and faith they may conquer this cruel psychological disability and become exceptionally generous both in time and substance to

others who are in need. Their own suffering served to ignite their compassion to an intensity inaccessible to their peers who had enjoyed a happy childhood (see chapter 15). We seldom value our assets until they have been removed from us. We then may learn to cultivate the little that still remains in our possession.

St Paul paints a solemn picture of the true disciple. 'As God's ministers, we try to recommend ourselves in all circumstances by our steadfast endurance: in affliction, hardship, and distress; flogged, imprisoned, mobbed; overworked, sleepless, starving. We recommend ourselves by innocent behaviour and grasp of truth, by patience and kindliness, by gifts of the Holy Spirit, by unaffected love, by declaring the truth, by the power of God. We wield the weapons of righteousness in right hand and left. Honour and dishonour, praise and blame, are alike our lot: we are the impostors who speak the truth, unknown men whom all men know; dying we still live on; disciplined by suffering, we are not done to death; in our sorrows we have always cause for joy; poor ourselves, we bring wealth to many; penniless, we own the world.'[4]

Paul is giving an excellent description of equanimity in this passage even if there are other occasions when his composure yields to his pressing desire to convert all his Jewish contemporaries to his newly found faith. Equanimity is not a quality that one immediately associates with the great apostle to the Gentiles. His intensity of action and response first to the hated earliest Christians[5] and later to the Jews who resisted conversion to Christianity[6] not only show his tendency to be right, at least in his own eyes, but also his partisan use of the Bible to uphold a theological position contrary to his original understanding.

This is, in fact, the defect inherent in all sacred texts, and makes them prey to the unbalanced fanatic and entrenched fundamentalist. Spiritual discernment is vital in the full appreciation of a faith that may extend the bounds of its understanding to further fields of speculation. Such faith is

a product of experience in the school of life where many attractive illusions are shed after the decisive encounter with reality.

One should always be open to new theories and opinions but equally alert to any tendency to lay down the law. This may extend rapidly to the persecution of a troublesome minority. When Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire it soon became dictatorial and destructive. The experience of two millennia of political and national strife has shown that religion should stick to its own realm, the leading of people to worship God, and not get involved in secular issues except when there is blatant injustice and cruelty. The corrupting tendency of power reaches its apogee when it brings God into the orbit of its concerns.

Equanimity is concentrated on the affairs of the present rather than the harking back to the past or imagining the possible events that may affect the future. It is the consequence of 'self-abandonment to the divine providence', the title of a spiritual classic by the Jesuit preacher Jean Pierre de Caussade (1675-1751), written in the early eighteenth century for a community of French nuns. This self-abandonment is experienced in the 'sacrament of the present moment.' Indeed, if we concentrated our attention to what was happening to us now, we would be divested of the negative emotional responses that so dog our daily life. Memories and fears would not be simply eliminated, for they form part of our life's tapestry. But they would be viewed in loving detachment, another eloquent oxymoron like the one cited near the end of Chapter 6.

This is the way to take charge of unpleasant memories and fears. They have played their part in making us the people we are, and in line with Jesus' teaching we are to love them. In the Sermon on the Mount we read, 'Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who causes the sun to rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the innocent and the wicked.'[7] In fact we learn more from our failures than our successes if for no other reason that they anchor our attention to the present moment, whereas success is liable

to let us float on a delectable cloud of fame and fortune that releases our attention from its present reality.

Every life is a personal story. We have a series of hazards to negotiate. It may well start with the genes we inherit from our parents and our family background, but the real test is what we make of these in the building of our personality. If we are using our gifts properly we bring a blessing on to everyone we encounter in the day's work. We remember the passage from Isaiah 61.1-2 that Jesus quoted in his address in the synagogue at Nazareth, ''The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me; he has sent me to announce good news to the poor, to proclaim release for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind; to let the broken victims go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'[8]

This is the measure of our work if it is done with awareness of God's presence and love for all whom we meet in the course of our daily activity. It can be achieved only if our mind is empty of self and full of attention to God and the needs of others around us – the needs of all life, but primarily that of the human being. The spiritual intention is fulfilled only when we are in a mental state of equanimity. Then we are at peace with ourself as we are also with the wider world even if it is on fire with discord and hatred.

Life on earth is God's supreme gift to us, for it allows us to actualize our humanity in an atmosphere of natural beauty and creative possibility. Yet all around us there are instances of chaos, brutality and hatred which indicate how little progress the human has made in living together in an ordered, caring community. Scientific progress has been so phenomenal that there is no limit at least in our own small planet, and who knows what the future may bring in the realm of space travel! Yet all this penetration into unknown territories of speculation is simply a means of escape from the disorder that confronts us in a world so dominated by the attraction of power that it has forgotten how to live joyfully.

We need desperately to regain the spirit of equanimity that infuses the fulfilled individual. The important things in life lie within oneself and are not to be appropriated from outside. The way to divine knowledge[9] is the means of that fulfilment. It comes when we are inwardly at peace with ourselves and with the world.

'Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often am I to forgive my brother if he goes on wronging me? As many as seven times?" Jesus replied, "I do not say seven times but seventy times seven."'[10] The steps that may need to be taken on the road to forgiveness are first a naked emotional exposure to the cause of the anger with no holds barred. In due course one will be able to confront the matter directly with little emotional response, and after that phase one will be gratified to discover that one's thoughts have completely transcended the matter that caused so much pain in the first case. In the patient attainment of this state of forgiveness one will know a lasting equanimity.

Chapter 14

The Way of Imagination

'Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit.' (The Collect for Purity from the Order of Holy Communion in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*)

Imagination is a mental faculty by which images and concepts not present in the senses are formed. These mental impressions may be the basis of discoveries in the field of science. Of greater depth are precious insights into the glory of human life far beyond material concerns. The peak of imagination occurs when the awareness of the ego drops away and the soul is carried to an unexplored yet strangely familiar place of amorphous understanding; though as yet rudimentary and unformed, its essence is the word of universal life. No living source is foreign to our deepest intuition, which is the means of communication with our unconscious. It is by way of the intuition that faith arises; it is awareness of truth of a different order from belief, which is an activity of the mind and has an affinity with reason.

In practice both faith and belief are necessary, inasmuch as faith is inwardly felt and not easily articulated except by the emotions it arouses, whereas belief grounds ineffable faith in logical concepts that can be readily communicated. The creedal affirmations of religion are a firm basis of deeply felt belief. Mystical religion like that of the Quakers does not require the recitation of a creed, because it recognizes the primacy of the Inner Light of God in the soul of all whose life is illuminated by following the precious way to perfection that Jesus commends in the Sermon on the Mount.[1]

Since faith is ineffable, its witness is manifested by works of different kinds; in one individual it may initiate a concern for the care of the physically disabled, the mentally disturbed or animals in distress, whereas another may immerse themselves in direct political action on behalf of the poor,

the socially disadvantaged and asylum seekers from oppressive regimes. The beginning of the third millennium still awaits evidence of collective support for the underdog, for most people remain comfortably self-centred and are loath to share their well-being with the stranger in their midst. All this is poignantly pathetic when one reflects on the common destiny in store for all humankind.

Faith may also arouse the source of activity that lies deep in the soul and manifests itself in artistic creativity. This is an individual capacity to bring to life new ideas with an imaginative faculty for the production of designs, sounds and ideas in respect of painting, music and writing. These would seem to bear little relation to the skills of such mundane endeavour as scientific and technical research. Unlike the rational skill displayed in a worldly profession like teaching or scientific expertise, the imaginative faculty has no promised material reward, but it transforms the life of the practitioner and also the people who bear its impress. 'All I know is this: I was blind and now I can see.'[2]

Imagination is the subtlest form of communication. It is a form of extrasensory perception in that information is transferred independently from one person to another. It can, if acquisitively used by practitioners of the occult, bring to full consciousness painful psychic material stored in the client's unconscious. In the hands of spiritually inclined workers much good may be effected, for the release of unconscious material is contingent on the moral integrity of the practitioner. Jesus, for example, could see into the minds of people with no difficulty at all.[3] A litmus test of this integrity is the person's attitude to money. Spiritual work ought to bear no charge. Its reward is the freeing of someone bound to the toils of evil (personified as Satan), so that they may relax and rejoice in the warmth of God's love.

It could be justifiably argued that the spiritual practitioner (as opposed to the spiritualist medium who has no difficulty with money) should not charge for their services; this is indeed the right way

provided they have an alternative source of income, but it is the rule that those who give themselves selflessly to their fellows seldom lack for substance. They furthermore are morally relieved of the plaguing doubts as to whether their ministry has really been effective. In fact it is invariably successful when their ego has been calmly laid aside and they have dedicated themselves to God's service. It is important to leave the client free; common- sense advice is acceptable enough but it must not be overlaid with religious dogma. We are never so noxious as when we know the absolute truth and set about converting vulnerable people to our convictions. A sense of humour, a most precious gift of God, dispels the intensity of our faith and opens us up to the fallibility of all rigidly held moral attitudes. Some of Jesus' parables underline this truth.[4] The episodes of the woman of low virtue anointing his feet with myrrh[5] and the woman caught committing adultery brought before the people in the temple[6] display this sense of proportion quite wonderfully.

What stimulates a great composer, artist or writer? Of the three the composer is the most atmospheric since music has no well-defined parameters in the outside world comparable with the visible structures in art or the attitudes prevalent in the world that form the basis of much writing. Music is an emotional response to great issues in the world as well as in the composer's life, and as such is frequently historical and biographical. Music can attain sublime heights not only in a specifically religious setting, such as the oratorio and the Mass, but also when inspiring themes, such as noble sacrifice, glorious victory and personal suffering and death are celebrated or lamented. The splendid music may lead us back to an historical event of which we have been previously ignorant. Music can celebrate the joyous times of life too as in Beethoven's sixth symphony in F, the *Pastoral*, which leads the listener with fixed, joyful attention to the various sounds of nature in the country. It is hard to imagine how the composer of this masterpiece could write down the notes of the music he could not hear.

The stimulus of all acts of creation is the Holy Spirit who inspires the genius. From this divine source issues the power that enables the gifted individual to perform their special work. We all have a specific task in our lifetime, and the Holy Spirit shows us the way and gives us the strength to fulfil our vocation. When we are working according to schedule we experience a freedom that rejoices our heart so that we glorify God and thank him for his bounty. This state of benediction manifests itself in increased strength of body and mind; we are much more agile in our movements and alert and cooperative in our awareness and attitudes to people generally and to various issues in particular. Caring love flows from us to all who are in need.

Imagination bears a poor press among some people who identify it wrongly with confused sensibility. Thus it happens that a person's bodily pain is conveniently dismissed as purely imaginary. Imaginary pain may exist in hysterical people, but hysteria, a functional disturbance of the nervous system associated with wild, uncontrollable emotion or excitement, is a long distance from the mentally balanced person who complains of unaccountable pain. It is real enough to the victim even if lightly treated by detached observers. It may point to a hidden emotional pain such as a loss of relationship and can remain undiagnosed indefinitely. Imagination is not likely to be stirred up by an active will.

Imagination is not confined to geniuses in the realm of the arts and sciences. It is very much part of common life. An outstanding example is empathy, the ability to identify oneself mentally with, and so fully comprehend, a person in distress. To be sure this is the special province of the psychotherapist, but it should fall within the capacity of any caring individual. It is a commonplace observation that one should not judge an errant person until one has put oneself in their place. One knows something of that place, albeit in all probability to a lesser degree and in different circumstances, through one's own experience, but the ability to bring the two into apposition is a gift of imagination. Thus the aware person says, 'There, but for the grace of God ,

go I.' The antithesis of this ability to comprehend the weakness of other people is an hypocrisy which is sharply denounced by Christ in respect of the scribes and Pharisees.[7]

This supercilious attitude is typical of those who use religious orthodoxy as a shield to protect themself from unwelcome insights as to their own ambivalence in matters sexual, political or social. 'Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You build up the tombs of the prophets and embellish the monuments of the saints, and you say, "If we had been living in the time of our forefathers, we should never have taken part with them in the murder of the prophets. So you acknowledge that you are the sons of those who killed the prophets. Go on then, finish off what your fathers began! Snakes! Viper's brood! How can you escape being condemned to hell?"'[8] This severe indictment is the culmination of vehement condemnation of perverted imagination, when the proponent acts quite obliviously to any social imperative other than their own selfish satisfaction.

It is evident that there are two categories of imagination, one is God-given and the stimulus of sublime works of art and the other purely solipsistic, emanating from the ego-self and directed essentially to personal aggrandizement. These two categories have a point of contact in the human agent. "The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak," said Jesus about the sleeping disciples as he was overwhelmed by distress and anguish.[9] This was Jesus' initial time of suffering when he was experiencing all the sins of the world. It culminated in the six hours of crucifixion when he had to bear his own pain as part of the sins of all of us. In the first instance in Gethsemane his disciples (Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John) fell asleep. By the time of the crucifixion they had all fled – though John reappears in the Fourth Gospel.[10]

God-given imagination is inevitably modified by the human vehicle. The human, usually, simply has to take complete charge. The challenge is ambition which was considered in Chapters 3 and 4 in connection with temptation. Imagination is usually strongly related to the self, with such matters

as personal progress, fear of the future with special emphasis on death, and the loyalty of one's friends sited prominently in the foreground. How easy it is to imagine disaster in the offing especially if one is insecure in one's own being! Guilt exacerbates the unease, but the person's life may be conspicuously considerate to those around them. If the person has had a hard background with a loveless childhood they are likely to imagine all manner of disasters facing them at the present moment, to say nothing of the unknown future.

Yet the same sort of background may be exactly requisite for the growth of character that is called for in an exceptional practitioner in the arts, sciences or humanities. A person who loves humankind is called a philanthropist; the word bears an implication of great financial generosity to charitable causes, but it can just as well apply to those who give of themself to help others in pain of body or mind. Indeed, it is easier to give from something of which one has much than to give only oneself who is poor and unknown. This is real faith for it comes from the heart, whereas the gift of large sums of money, admirable as it undoubtedly is, can also have the tendency of elevating the individual in the eyes of the general public. In the Sermon on the Mount we read, 'When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing; your good deed must be secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.'[11]

We are what we imagine. To the secular type of person the imagination is bound to be harnessed to things of their own world, often with a self-centred motive. This may perhaps be realized, but the end is invariably futile because of the limited duration of human life. To the dreamer the imagination oscillates between various aspects of wish fulfilment with a longing for a better world, but very little is in fact attained. To the spiritually aware person the world is of material substance, but when addressed and served with loving care, it assumes a spiritual character and leads all who pray to the end which is God. Imagination is valuable in so far as it raises the individual from a world dominated by self-centredness to the care of other people and of all life.

Imagination has no ultimate end since it leads us to the vision of God, which can be contemplated in terms of integrity and love; these are mere outlines of the divine nature which is ineffable. We know it by the effect it has upon us. The old way of selfish acquisitiveness is displaced by an awareness of the identity of every person as an aspect of our being as well as having their own identity, 'for we belong to one another as parts of one body.' [12] We live by faith, in hope. As indicated above, this may vary from solipsistic desire to universal concern. The factors that determine which is to be the decisive attitude are our family background and the tenor of our life. All life, as the Buddha put it, is suffering, the cause of which is personal desire. Only when this is left behind and our motivation is geared to a great way of life called the Eightfold Noble Path (Chapter 12) can we know the satisfaction of inner peace and our imagination move from being anchored to the self to embracing the whole world.

This has little in common with the way of religious enthusiasts whose very existence is geared to converting everybody to their vision of the truth. Proselytism is usually repelling because it places dogma ahead of the person whom they intend to be 'saved' – or merely put on the right path if the motive is more deliberately secular such as politics or nationalism. The intrinsic objection to any form of proselytism is that it lowers the native capacity of imagination under a set of beliefs imposed by a dominating external power of questionable spiritual authority.

Imagination cannot be fettered. In John's Gospel,[13] there is an atmospheric conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, who was a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish Council. Nicodemus paid Jesus a nocturnal visit to enquire about the mechanism of his acknowledged miracles. Jesus stressed the necessity of being born again, an allusion to the sacrament of baptism which bears testimony to the new life born from water and the Spirit. The Spirit is comparable with the wind, whose sound is audible, but whose origin and destination are mysterious. The love of God is revealed in the birth of his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not perish but have eternal life. Having faith in the person of Christ is a lifelong process; it may begin with a conscious

acceptance of Christ intellectually and emotionally but it becomes real only when one has suffered greatly for a while and not thrown in the sponge. The way of Christian imagination cannot evade the crucifixion of the personality, but its end is the joy of resurrection, to be imagined as humankind working together for the renewal of the world.

What starts in inspiration as a fresh insight suddenly strikes home and fuels the imagination, so that it cannot forget the idea which soon grows into a burning resolve. This is the vital part that the imagination plays in creation: it brings the initial inspiration down to earth, whether the source is divine or human. Imagination is a mental faculty without moral qualities. The resolve indicates the moral attitude of the subsequent response. It is the rule that the young and inexperienced are generally self-centred, so their resolve will be selfish. This is not simply to be condemned, for they have to survive in what is often an unsatisfactory background. Experience that comes with age broadens the resolve to awareness of other people's needs also. Then the divine nature which is also an aspect of the personality, described as 'Christ in you, the hope of glory,'[14] shines forth like the rising sun, and their resolve becomes truly blessed. In some gifted people the spark of God is clearly visible even at an early age. They have special work to do. They are agents of God's grace in a confused world. God communicates with them by way of their imagination.

The less self-centred we are, the freer is our imagination to build relationships with many kinds of people. In this way we are able to come into fellowship with the world. Then mutual suspicion will be replaced by friendship and care, and peace will come in reasonable faith to all nations. 'Perfect love banishes fear;'[15] fear sets up imaginary barriers of self-protection, but these are calmly laid to rest as the personality is restored to its pristine splendour.

In the way of great spiritual geniuses we see the true meeting of spirituality and religion: spirituality is the awareness of God and the yearning to come close to his presence, whereas religion brings the aspiration of spirituality down to solid earth. It is one thing to lose oneself in

expansive spiritual imagination, lamenting the unperceptive crassness of humankind, and another to inspire it to the service of God and the renewal of the world. This is the role of religion when it adheres to its own work and desists from attempting to convert all and sundry to its own sectarian way. The imaginative type of person tends to have sufficient sensitivity to respect other people's attitudes.

Chapter 15

The Necessity of Tolerance

Let your own motto be: have patience, and let God do the work. For, when all is said, you can do no other. Yours is merely to say: 'I adore and resign myself; may your will be done.' (Jean-Pierre de Caussade, [1675–1751] *Self-abandonment to Divine Providence*)

Tolerance is the capacity to live with a wide variety of different opinions. When the views of clearly eccentric people can be forborne without any hostile disparagement, one's tolerance is very powerful indeed. But the attitude of the tolerant individual is important. There should be open-hearted respect and not supercilious indifference. It is a fact that those who strive hard to convert others to their own point of view, especially in politics and religious belief, can before long become fanatics; therefore tolerance has its limits also.

There is a strong case for firm control when practices are pursued that are manifestly injurious to the common good in such areas as public health, political action and national security. The experience of the world shows us how few adults grow up into emotionally mature people who are morally responsible. 'When I was a child I spoke like a child, thought like a child, reasoned like a child; but when I grew up I finished with childish things.'[1] We may certainly grow up physically, but emotional and mental development often lags disconcertingly behind, while spiritual awareness with its attendant moral behaviour may never emerge in a lifetime.

How is tolerance acquired? It is a gift of God with the experience of forgiveness after having lived in thoughtless selfishness for some time. This attitude isolates us progressively from other people until the loneliness strikes us and we are submerged in a sea of darkness. Then at last we may take heed of the voice of God within us which we do not hear until the clamour of the world has departed in our self-imposed isolation.

This is a moment of truth. When we emerge from its hard, cold embrace we feel lightened and free from gloom. We experience love of a kind about which the unenlightened person knows nothing; they would tend to see love in terms of sexual gratification and social acceptance, whereas the spiritually aware individual would know love as a gentle warmth that lifts up the soul to the foundation of reality, which is yet another way of describing God who is closer to us than anything we can describe. If one were to 'place' God in terms of human awareness, one would think of the centre of the soul, that 'point' of divine aspiration from which creative inspiration emanates.

The nature of tolerance is beautifully expressed in 1 Corinthians; 'Love is patient and kind. Love envies no one, is never boastful, never conceited, never rude; love is never selfish, never quick to take offence. Love keeps no score of wrongs, takes no pleasure in the sins of others, but delights in the truth. There is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, its endurance.' [2] In fact St Paul is writing about love, but the description fits in with tolerance quite easily. Tolerance is indeed a particular facet of love, the ability to live in harmony with different types of people, yet maintaining one's own personal identity.

The way of becoming a composite part of humanity and yet unique at the same time is by constant prayer, which is actualized in a life of service to the community. This community might start with one's family, from which it would extend to embrace many other people who may need one's assistance. One's tolerance would allow one to mix with everybody in their own setting as well as in the general commerce of life. All this is of little avail until one has established one's own niche in the world's service. We are all unique, therefore it is necessary to know how best we may play our part in whatever situation we may be placed. We do this work best when we know our principal assets and can use them appropriately. The way is less by introspection than by the experience of life, but each encounter should pose a question about our most deeply felt attitudes towards the greater world as well as towards ourself.

The patience and kindness of tolerance knows no bounds since it understands with patient compassion the weakness and foibles of other people. Far from shrinking from these, it responds with unjudgemental sympathy and seeks to make its way to these disadvantaged persons. Kind-heartedness may be a natural trait encountered in those who have been blessed with a loving family background, but quite often it follows a miserable childhood when the individual has been forced to strive for their own mental integrity, their sanity no less, in the face of very unkind family relationships. Among the most pernicious of these is paedophilia practised by perverted fathers on their young, defenceless children.

The interesting thing about this criminal offence is that the offender is often subsequently quite kind to its abused offspring (or at least a member of it), whereas the mother is much more direct and down-to-earth. Nevertheless the abused child, though forgetful of the assault, still shrinks from the father and is quite happy and at ease with the apparently cooler, less concerned mother. The psychological consequences of paedophilia can be devastating; the worst being a terrible loss of self-esteem that is all too likely to lay the child open to later bullying by their peers at school. The feeling of inferiority may persist indefinitely, even into adult life and cast a blight on its progress. Established ways of thought are seldom outgrown spontaneously. Psychotherapy may be of help.

More important by far is the person's perseverance in prayer, in this case the ability to raise their consciousness to the crown of the head in devout faith. When one can pray in this way, the divine presence fills the head with warmth, and the depression lifts rapidly. This practice must be continued at least several times a day, for otherwise the way of thought is liable to revert to its former state especially if the general atmosphere is uncongenial. The end of this procedure is the filling of the mind with love. God is always at hand, but we are too often engrossed in our own affairs to be aware of him. The culmination of this prayer is the replacement of negative attitudes of inferiority and debasement by such warmth and love that nothing is any longer beyond the person's range of achievement.

Thus even the defiler of the child can be forgiven for the suffering his perverse action has occasioned. This is the best way of dealing with painful memories of various events. What is done cannot be undone, but the experience may in the end prove to be a blessing in disguise if the net result is a positive change of heart towards people generally and more specifically to those who appear to be perverted. In this way tolerance may raise its radiant head among the jangled emotions of the unhappy past. No wonder Jesus teaches us to love our enemies and pray for our persecutors, for only so can we be children of our heavenly Father whose care embraces good and bad, innocent and wicked, alike.[3]

This love is not to be interpreted as a sentimental (and often uncaring) dismissal of clearly perverse behaviour or criminal actions, but as an accommodating concern for the perpetrator, not seeing them simply as recidivists to be isolated but as fellow souls who should be cherished and guided into constructive ways of thought. The recidivist is also our neighbour, 'for we belong to one another as parts of one body.'[4] St Paul was addressing this observation to his Christian audience but it is a universal truth intrinsic to human nature and brought into focus by the power of God in Christ and the other great souls he inspired.

Love in its essence is universal in extent. One may like a number of people; a special person may be so attractive that one loses one's heart to them. This emotion is called 'falling in love', and it may lead immediately to behaviour quite different from that usually associated with the individual. They seem sometimes to be out of their mind in enthusiasm evoked by the beloved one. This response can be very touching and beautiful as the parties plight their troth, pledge their word, especially in betrothal and marriage. This promise may be very impressive, but the depth of its sincerity is proved by its permanence. Is it simply a flash in the pan of emotional instability or do the couple fulfil not only 1 Corinthians 13.4–7, quoted earlier, but also the next verse? 'Love will never come to an end.'[5]

Whereas true love withstands 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,'[6] tolerance, as already noted, has its point of considered assessment at which it may become necessary (or more practical) to review the situation and keep matters under firm control, when clearly malevolent practices are being committed to the peril of the surrounding, or even the worldwide, community. Love, tolerance and vigilance form a necessary continuum in a world community that can fluctuate rapidly between the extremes of international goodwill and nationalistic self-assertiveness to the point of invading contiguous countries as was seen to its most appalling extent in the Nazi regime of 1933–1945.

There is a teaching at present in vogue that all true forgiveness is radical; its origin is divine not human even if this is genuinely intentioned. This is certainly true, but during our period of life in the world it is our place to be in contact with God in ceaseless prayer. The divine – human communication is bilateral. The greatest Christian mystic Meister Eckhart put it this way: 'God can no more do without us than we can do without him.' This is because God put the human in charge of the rest of the created order [7] by virtue of their cerebral development, but the responsibility entailed is enormous. We are sustained by the love of God which we learn to reciprocate in terms of personal gratitude and prayer, and giving service to the world around us. The finest human qualities like forgiveness, generosity, compassion, goodwill and tolerance are a realm of union between the human being and God. It is the divine impulse that inspires us, and the noble action that mirrors God in our daily life.

It is important not to confuse tolerance with toleration. Toleration has the power and authority to allow different points of view to be heard without discrimination, and various ethnic groups to live together without restraint. Though toleration may bring with it a degree of freedom, the cordial acceptance that is typical of tolerance is lacking. Toleration is the product of an intelligent, well-disposed mind, but tolerance flows from the soul like a mighty river across a wide plain. It could be said that God is the direct source of tolerance. Nevertheless there is a close relationship between

the two: tolerance contracts into stern toleration when the moral order is being challenged, whether the author of the order is divine or human as is discussed in Chapter 11.

The fruit of tolerance is acceptance of ourself as we now are. This does not imply that we are now at the peak of our performance; it shows the way forward, not by determined will-power but by joyful submission to the sacrament of the present moment mentioned in Chapter 13. The better we accept ourself in our present state of mind, the more fully and lovingly do we encounter those around us, not only our friends but strangers also. If we accept ourselves fully, 'warts and all' as the saying goes, the less jealous do we become of those who on the surface seem so much more successful than ourself. To escape this self-imposed prison of inferiority is a striking advance into 'real life', which is a time of powerful self-actualization. It should ideally proceed up to the moment of our death even if we are destined to live to a ripe old age. We continue the soul's journey even more powerfully when we are physically undermined, since at last the inner person, soul and mind, has a golden opportunity to blossom into their full glory.

But can this be so if the person is afflicted with senile dementia, of which Alzheimer's disease is a well-known example? One cannot give a considered opinion about a condition characterized by an absolute failure of rational communication. Yet it is within the bounds of possibility that the soul is still functioning. It may be learning some essential lessons while the person lies bereft of all reason in a state of mute helplessness. It is worth remembering that the eye sees the outer world only. Whereas the inner eye is connected to the Source of all life because it is a function of the soul. It is the soul that is the immortal part of the personality; all our life's experience is recorded in its annals.

Acceptance of our limitations is the first step towards their being transcended. The power behind this blessed state of leaving previous inhibitions and doubts behind is not so much a greater psychological understanding of our past ineptitude as the presence of the Holy Spirit. A warm

glow informs our heart and mind, and broadens the range of our vision to the promised life ahead of us, for the soul is now fully articulate and directing the course of our activity. Our memories are part of our life's chronicle and can never be completely expunged probably even at the time of our death. But it is good that many remain in the unconscious. If these have an unpleasant sting attached to them, their aura may from time to time emerge into full consciousness and induce unhappiness, at times rising to inarticulate depression within us. The method of dealing with these focuses of subversion within ourself has already been indicated in respect of sexual abuse in children.

Acceptance soon extends in a tolerant person to those people in their vicinity. Without blinding themselves to their manifest character defects, they feel, if anything, more affectionate towards the wayward individual. This is the way to building a caring community: each member brings with them their weak points as well as their manifest strengths. Indeed, in a well-integrated community these can fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. It could well be that even the spiritual geniuses that inspired new religious faiths had to come to terms with less perfect aspects of their own characters, but their acceptance of these imperfections served to increase their tolerance to the common run of humanity that comprised their followers, and still does to the present day. Tolerance, like charity, begins at home, but for different reasons. Until our living conditions are adequate we cannot donate sizable contributions to all and sundry. We cannot in truth tolerate ourselves completely, until we have accepted our true nature in good humour. Only then can we have the capacity to accept the intrusion of other people with their own problems into our lives and endure adverse circumstances with grace.

Life is our great teacher. What we learn from the world's scriptures is edifying, enlightening and inspiring. It challenges us to be true to God's will for us, to be human like the great religious teachers of the world, especially Jesus and Gautama, have indicated to us. But the end result cannot be achieved before we have started to grow in sufficient self-knowledge to know our

present place in life's rich tapestry. Only then can we commence the slow ascent to our goal, which is to fulfil the purpose for which we have been born. This is: 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.'[8] It is translated in the Revised English Bible: 'There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds.'

This is the purpose of human life; the particular way to that attainment depends upon the person's own character and abilities. As we grow in proficiency, so we should become tolerant to other people's opinions; intolerance is an indication of personal weakness, for we fear that which we do not understand and trust. As we become more centred in our soul, so we are able to relate more generously to a variety of people of different backgrounds. Far from fearing them, we appreciate their individual contributions to our own understanding. This applies not only to the highly gifted people who generously lay their expertise open at our feet, but also those who tend to irritate us and undermine our confidence. In laying bare our annoyance they release a fresh spring of compassion, so that our acceptance broadens and our tolerance increases in strength. We are all here to assist our fellows when they are hindered by their own inadequacy. 'Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing.'[9] This saying is traditionally known as the First Word on the Cross.

It is a great joy to incorporate people in a large scale who may subsequently be instrumental in undertaking creative work or preventing disease epidemics. Their association may resemble a birth pang, indeterminate at first but soon assuaged as the participants come to know each other and rejoice in the work ahead of them with its promise of achieving a noble purpose. Tolerance reaches a high peak when a whole population's mind is set on countering a national or international disaster or cooperating to eliminate a disease. A fine example was the hope of virtually the whole of humanity that the crew of the space-ship Apollo 13 would return safely to earth when it was stranded on the dark side of the moon. The goodwill generated must surely have aided the successful outcome.

‘How good and pleasant it is

to live together as brothers in unity!

It is like the fragrant oil poured on the head

and falling over the beard,

Aaron’s beard, when the oil runs down

over the collar of his vestments.

It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling

on the mountains of Zion.

There the Lord bestows his blessing,

life for evermore.’ Psalm 133.

Yes, indeed, the Spirit of God anoints everyone who transcends their desire for personal greatness and public esteem, and joins quite anonymously the multitude of well-wishers who form the foundation of the edifice whose intention is the chapel of benevolence constructed by the charity of the philanthropist. The bricks are money and the mortar is love. It is here that a person’s love of God is actualized.

The cash provided by the philanthropist is not the only substance provided for the erection of this holy temple. The heart and devotion of the nameless poor add their contribution to the construction of the heavenly city. ‘As he was sitting opposite the temple treasury, he watched the people dropping their money into the chest. Many rich people were putting in large amounts. Presently there came a poor widow who dropped in two tiny coins, together worth a penny. He called his disciples to him and said, “Truly I tell you: this poor widow has given more than all those giving to the treasury; for the others who have given had more than enough, but she, with less than enough, has given all that she had to live on.”’[10]

It may well be that the generosity of the poverty-stricken individual acts to shame the mean type of tycoon into divesting themselves of some of their wealth to their less affluent neighbours. Ebenezer Scrooge needed the terrible testimony of the ghost of his partner Marley (in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*) to awaken him to the consequences of monumental meanness in the here and now, so that he might repent at once while there was still time for benevolence. 'Make no mistake about this: God is not to be fooled; everyone reaps what he sows.'[11] We have considered this doctrine in Chapter 6.

The Self as Agent

> 'O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
>
> To see oursels as others see us!
>
> It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
>
> And foolish notion.'

This request of Robert Burns from *To a Louse* might prove a mixed blessing, but at least it would make us more reticent in our utterances and more cautious in our affiliations with outside agencies; if we took ourself very seriously we would practise complete silence and remain uncommitted except to those whom we trusted implicitly. We would limit our social relationships, and our fellowship with many of our neighbours might be severely restricted to our mutual loss. If we were to practise self-awareness in our daily life we would be able to see ourselves not merely through the eyes of a detached observer but with a truth of vision of unadorned simplicity.

The practice of self-awareness is the key to self-knowledge. When we know ourselves 'warts and all' we can play our part in the present scene with little ado but great effectiveness. The following points are worth noting on the path:-

1. Keep your attention fixed on the present moment, and do not let it unconsciously drift on to past recollections or future possibilities. If it is necessary to remember a past event or prepare for a future eventuality devote your undivided attention to such matters. When you have reached a conclusion, let go and rest in total silence for some little time, the length of which is dictated by your working agenda.
2. Avoid doing two things at the same time if possible. This clearly has to be tailored to a special occasion, for instance talking while eating in company, but even here the meal should take priority, for the conversation can proceed far more satisfactorily on its own. Outer interference disturbs our self-awareness.
3. Think before you speak. Casual conversation can readily be a transmitter of scandal and thoughtlessly hurt other people.
4. Avoid clinging on to the past in respect of injuries received. The memory evoked easily blocks full self-awareness. Of course, the memory of the past cannot simply be expunged nor should it be. We have gradually to come to terms with it by focusing our attention fully on it for a definite period and then, laying that recollection to one side, attending to the work of the present moment to the exclusion of all else. This process should be repeated each day. Soon its acrid taste will be mollified until the memory ceases to evoke discomfort. Forgiveness should follow, primarily in our own heart: Jesus recommends that it should be unceasing – not merely seven times but seventy times seven.[12]

Forgiveness belongs to God; what is required of us is patience and faith. The person who injured us may be quite impenitent for causing this suffering and go on their own thoughtless way until disaster overtakes them, forcing them to a sudden halt. Their humiliation may bring them down to

earth so that their spiritual obtuseness is revealed to them. They may then be penitent for their past misdemeanours and seek forgiveness from those who suffered from their inconsideration. In such a circumstance we should offer forgiveness at once and work towards friendship – a true friend would never have behaved hurtfully to us in the first instance. If we are truly loving people we will pray for those who have hurt us in the spirit of Matthew 5.44–5.[13] This prayer, if sincere and not articulated in an attitude of condescending sanctimony, will certainly allay any residual discomfort we may feel. One hopes it will promote the spiritual growth of the offender as well. It seems certain that the father of the prodigal son never ceased remembering him in his prayers, for he saw him while he was still a long way off and ran out to meet him.[14] In fact the basis of prayer is communion with God; the concern we may have for a person or a cause is subsumed under his all-embracing love.

To begin to see ourselves as others see us we should first practise awareness of the present moment with our mind and soul. The impact various incidents make upon us widens our inner vision quite dramatically and promotes the practice of introspection, the observation and examination of our mental and emotional reactions and attitudes. Vital as introspection is in bringing us closer to the reality of our personality with its intricate nuances, it can, like so many habits, be greatly overdone. Self-knowledge can slip into solipsism, the view that the self is all that exists or can be known. The result of this philosophical opinion is a conceited egotism, the practice of continually talking about oneself. It is an attitude of self-centredness. Egoism, by contrast, is an ethical theory that treats self-interest as the foundation of morality. The senses of egotism and egoism overlap, but egotism alone is a term used in philosophy and psychology to mean 'self-interest'. It is contrasted with altruism, which is the regard for others as a principle of action and manifested as unselfish concern for other people. As in most human aspirations a rigorous sense of balance is essential. We should love our neighbour as ourself.[15] But first we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our stregth.[16] When we

know God's love we are in a very real sense our neighbour also. This is because the more we know the Creator, by loving him, the more we know we are at one with other creatures of his. This love will never wane because its source is divine grace and not human desire.

It is not an exaggeration to assert that the more profound purpose of a human life is to broaden its aspiration from self-interest to world service. Then we become one with all living creatures, and can indeed give up our life for our friends.[17]

Chapter 16

The Full Life

'To love is to give light with inexhaustible oil.' (Rainer Maria Rilke, [1875–1926] *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*)

'I have come that they my have life, and have it in all its fullness.'[1] The passage goes on to affirm Christ as the good shepherd; the good shepherd, unlike the worthless one described in Zechariah 11.3–17, lays down his life for his sheep. The hired man, on the other hand, when he sees the wolf coming, abandons the sheep and runs away, because he is not the shepherd and the sheep are not his. Then the wolf harries the flock and scatters the sheep.[2] It is no surprise that Jesus is the door of the sheepfold. The sheep paid no attention to any who came before him, for they were all thieves and robbers. Jesus claimed to be the door, and anyone who comes into the fold through him will be safe.[3]

Whether this stirring assertion was spoken by Jesus himself or was merely an encomium articulated by an enthusiastic disciple in the context of the Fourth Gospel (of disputed authorship) becomes somewhat immaterial. The Master's function is not dulled by being articulated by a dedicated follower; on the other hand, it would be confirmed by the supporting praise from those who had benefited from his teaching and example. It is evident that in the presence of Jesus the old way of calculated personal success in a life of affluence was being replaced by one of concern for and dedication to one's neighbours, who grew to embrace an ever-widening spectrum of humanity as a prelude to including animals and vegetation also in its range.

What constitutes the full life? Is it one replete with material benefits like prosperity, social success, political power or the esteem of the community? Even if health is added to this imposing list, the one

absent component is permanence. While no material benefit should be spurned, its transience in the span of an active life cannot be ignored. The ageing process is almost invariably marred by vicissitudes in health, and the sparkle of material benefits is largely controlled by the financial state of the country in which one resides. Therefore the full life is not adequately encompassed by the things of this world; they are here today and gone tomorrow.

The full life emphasizes the difference between the human being and even their closest mammalian relatives, the anthropoid apes. These appear to be satisfied with the things of the flesh such as food, sexual gratification and physical security. The enormous evolution of the human from this humble background is amazing, and it has resulted in a great change in its cerebral capacity. The human can think and feel with a depth which is on a vastly more complex scale to that of any other member of the ape species, so much so that humanity can control its environment, communicate in speech and writing and experience emotions of great power. This ability to think and feel enables the human to create, to plan and to destroy on a massive scale.

The full human life embraces self-actualization, the capacity to fulfil oneself as a person of distinct creative qualities integral to the society of which one is a member. These qualities certainly include the cognitive (thinking), volitional (willing) and emotional aspects of the mind, but there is in addition a spiritual component: aesthetic appreciation, personal sacrifice for the benefit of the community, and an intensity of love that will not hold back from giving its life for its friend.[4] People assuredly live on different planes of self-actualization: to one individual the acquisition of the things of this world is the *summum bonum*, whereas a divine discontent drives another to the intangible heights of artistic creativity or social endeavour, where they can alone feel fulfilled in their human capacity. The material benefit may be sparse, even negative, if the visionary flies in the face of the multitude, but the person knows intuitively that they have acted correctly. Hence the punch line to an old joke; ‘The pay is no good, but the fringe benefits are out of this world.’ In truth, posterity can alone be the judge of the consequences of their inspiration.

The full life actualizes its own potentialities and gives of itself generously to the larger community also; the two tendencies ought ideally to run in tandem. If one is intent only on achieving one's own potentialities, one slips insidiously into an attitude of self-centredness. If, on the other hand, one's concerns are so devoted to the common good that one neglects one's own private life, one not only weakens one's own special contribution to the community, but one's health also suffers.

Moreover, there is a subtle tendency to take charge of affairs. How easily we can feel disillusioned at the apparent ingratitude of those for whom we believe we have slaved! If only we could mind our own business while unobtrusively offering what assistance we can usefully give to people in immediate need, they would on many occasions rise quite rapidly into independence once more. Instead of being only clients they would become colleagues. For we are all on the same trail is search of the one universal Reality, whom we name according to our own tradition and preference. We lose our way often enough, but a benign power puts us on the one universal path each time.

The full life is a process as much as an end point, as much a striving as an achievement. Its purpose is to fulfil Jesus' command: 'There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds.'[5] This counsel of perfection is incompatible with an egotistical view of life, for selfishness by its very nature limits the bounds of our charitable intentions. At the most our good works could reveal a subversive tendency towards currying the favour and admiration of those around us. This would bear the clear stamp of our own incompleteness as people, however sincere the lip service we may be paying to the most praiseworthy ideals. It is only when we have progressed beyond the stage of being affected by others' opinions of ourselves, while at the same time knowing that we have our own special work to do, that we are glimpsing the nature of the full life.

Our view of other people is strongly conditioned by our own earlier experiences of our peers and the views of our teachers. These soon crystallize into prejudices distorted by attitudes of racial mistrust, sexual domination and religious bigotry. Mental and emotional stereotypes are particularly convenient and satisfying ways of disposing of irritating and challenging people who do not conform to a particular political or religious norm. One doubts whether any saint had an inviolate spiritual record,

but their off days were known only to their immediate circle. And in this unconditional forgiveness lies the acceptance that is the hallmark of true love.

'Do not judge, and you will not be judged. For as you judge others, so you will yourselves be judged, and whatever measure you deal out to others will be dealt to you.'[6] If we are doing our work properly, our eyes should be centred on the present moment and not on the attitudes and actions of others except if these obtrude so noticeably upon our attention that they cannot be ignored. We cannot judge another person even if their attitude is far from satisfactory until we have stood in their place.

This constructive mode of avoiding the tendency to generalize about human behaviour except when divine morality is being contravened is mentioned in chapter 11. The essence of this morality is the care of those who are endangered through their age or weakness, and the protection of society (the customs and organization of an ordered community) against recidivists who prey on its members. When divine morality is being challenged it must be defended at once for the good of the offender no less than the victim.

As we approach the full life, the grandiose illusions of ourself conjured up by our imagination are dispelled, and we can see a weak, insecure soul battling bravely against 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune', to quote from a famous soliloquy from *Hamlet*.[7] In another observation from *Hamlet* Shakespeare says, 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew them how we will.'[8] As we enter into the full life we become increasingly aware of the divine presence. It encompasses us, yet at the same time leaves us free to be entirely ourselves. Fear of consequences falls away, and we are endowed with the blessing of being ourselves, in service certainly but without any attitude of abasement to authority figures, those whose power would seem at least on the surface to be of moment in our worldly advancement. The full life is its own fulfilment, requiring no additional elements to confirm it.

What is the relationship of worship to the full life? It ought to be a period of celebration when we can, in the company of all like-minded people, flow out in thanksgiving to our divine Creator. It ought to be

able to transcend differences of opinion, which are necessarily part of the human condition inasmuch as each person has their own vision of a truth far beyond rational definition. These separate views are neither to be dismissed as immature objections nor insensitively incorporated into an imposing façade that rides roughshod over their precious insights. Religion that reflects God treats each worshipper as a creature of God in their own right. To be sure there should be a common liturgy, but what really matters is the love of the worshippers and their devotion to all people irrespective of their personal beliefs. Such worship is comparable to the sun at dawn; it lightens the dark gloom of past mistrust and ill feeling by spreading light in the mind and warmth in the heart.

In the full life we no longer need to make our voice heard with anxious vehemence. It is the general rule that silence speaks more eloquently than a loud barrage of words. Our presence indicates our attitude on many occasions, and when a declaration of opinion needs to be made it can be effected quietly but with an authority that needs no force to implement it. Controversy cannot always be avoided, but in the hands of responsible people it loses much of its acerbity and becomes a friendly discussion whose purpose is the benefit of the assembly and not the triumph of the individual convinced of their own opinion. We seldom know the entire truth of any situation, therefore it is good to share insights from a number of informed sources. The need to be always right is an indication of weakness. At its very best it points to the insecurity of the proponent, while its more noxious excesses reveal a tendency to dominate the group. Dictators are made of such stuff.

The full life is one of simplicity. One does not need to accumulate belongings either to assert one's importance or as a defence against future misfortune. No one knows for certain the final outcome of any situation except that death is the inevitable end of our spell of duty on this planet. One's importance is related to who one is as a person and what one is doing as a world citizen, not to what one possesses. The tenth commandment forbids us to covet our neighbour's possessions.[9] Desire of this magnitude is the inevitable precursor of theft.

In the Parable of the Good Samaritan[10] Jesus explains the breadth of the neighbour so universally as to embrace anybody who is in need of assistance. He proceeded with this disquisition when a lawyer had

asked him what he had to do to inherit eternal life, and after Jesus' interrogation had replied with the summary of the law: loving the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself. The lawyer responded to Jesus' affirmation by asking who exactly his neighbour was.[11] He received an authoritative answer!

The essence of the full life is its tendency to incorporate more and more people until the time when it may become universal in extent. One can certainly live fully as a private person, but in the process one's very excellence elevates one above the larger community. Throughout history there have been individuals who have been blessed with the larger vision of self-sacrifice that is the basis of the full life. These are the world's spiritual geniuses of whom Jesus and Gautama stand supreme. Their examples have inspired countless millions of people to actualize their own spiritual humanity, albeit with varying degrees of success. As noted in chapter 9, there may be a chasm between spirituality and religion: the one unites all life in the love of God, whereas the other is a particular charted path to the worship of God. There is no one exclusive path, and as soon as its exponents claim their way to be the only right one, the full life of spiritual enlightenment is shattered into dissident fragments.

The full life unites humility and joy; we dismiss our claim of being special by assuming our own radiant character and rejoicing in it. To be identified with the common whole is a joyful experience, for we no longer need to prove ourselves as being in any way outstanding. Instead we are united with everything that lives, assuredly our human peers primarily but as time goes by with our animal friends and the flowers of the field which Jesus valued so highly as well.[12] Humility entails our unqualified dependence upon God, however he may be conceived, while joy expresses our delight in this relationship. Dependence on the love of God, unlike the subordination and domination that are a part of reliance on human assistance, leaves us free to become what we are meant to be, children of God, made in his image, after his likeness, to have dominion over all the other living animals and the use of all vegetation for our nutrition.[13]

The Genesis myth compresses the story of creation into the span of six days.[14] On the seventh day, having finished all his work, God blessed the day and made it holy; because it was the day he finished all his work of creation.[15] It is called the Sabbath, the day when God rested after his gigantic work.

In the fourth of the Ten Commandments we are enjoined to keep the Sabbath day holy;[16] the Jews observe it on Saturday and Christians on Sunday. Muslims have an equivalent day of rest on Friday. This period of prayerful silence is not to be seen as an escape from worldly concern; it diverts our attention directly to our own inner life where we have an opportunity to assess our endeavours more closely than when we are about our personal business in the clamour of the streets. The silence also makes us more open to the divine presence than when we are lost in action about personal matters.

The full life is one of constant awareness of and devotion to its divine source, from whom alone all good things come. As St Paul told the Athenians, 'in him we live and move and have our existence.'[17] The more we come to that source, the better we know our true nature.

Chapter 17

The Human Enigma: God's Work of Art

'Two men look out through the same bars.
One sees the mud, the other the stars.' (Frederick Langbridge, [1849–1923] *A Cluster of Quiet Thoughts*)

Hamlet apostrophizes God warmly but equivocally in a well-known passage of the play: 'What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god, the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me – no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling, you seem to say so.'[1]

Man was created in God's own image; male and female he created them.[2] The passage goes on with God's blessing and his order to be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over fish in the sea, the birds of the air and every living thing that moves on the earth. The human was to be God's obedient servant as faithful guardian of the earth.

In the second chapter of Genesis follows the account of the heavens and the earth after their creation. There was neither shrub nor plant growing on the earth because the Lord God had sent no rain; nor was there anyone to till the ground. Moisture used to well up out of the earth and water all the surface of the ground.

The Lord God formed a human being from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, so that he became a living creature. The Lord planted a garden in Eden away to the east, and in it he put the man he had formed. The Lord God made trees grow up from the ground, every kind of tree pleasing to the eye and good for food; and in the middle of the garden he set the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.[3] After establishing the topography of the four rivers that

flowed from Eden to water the garden, the story proceeds with God placing the man in the garden of Eden to till it and look after it.

He was given the fateful warning not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for the day he ate from that he was doomed to die. God saw that it was not good for the man to be alone, and decided to make a partner suited to him. All the wild animals of the earth and the birds of the air were presented to the man; to each of whom he gave a name, but he could find no suitable partner for himself.

Therefore the Lord God put the man into a deep sleep (surely the earliest recorded account of general anaesthesia!) and, while he slept, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the flesh over the place. The rib he had taken out of the man, God built up into a woman, and he brought her to the man. He rejoiced: 'This one at last is bone from my bones, flesh of my flesh! She shall be called woman, for from man was she taken.'[4] This is why a man leaves his father and mother and attaches himself to his wife, and the two become one. Both were naked, but they had no feeling of shame.

Then follows the fateful third chapter of Genesis. The serpent, the most cunning of all the creatures God had made, encouraged the woman to eat the fruit of the various trees in the garden, with special emphasis on the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, that associated with the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent dismissed the dire warning of death associated with this disobedience, stating that in fact God was apprehensive of their consuming the forbidden fruit, because after doing this, their eyes would be opened and they would be like God himself, knowing both good and evil.

The woman was seduced quite easily by the tempting serpent, and she gave some of the fruit to the man, who also ate it. At once their eyes were opened, and they knew they were naked. The glorious innocence of the small child was a cause of shame to them, and they stitched fig-leaves together, making themselves loincloths; thus a harmless nudity of the body had assumed the sin of indecent exposure. When God was heard walking about the garden at the time of the evening breeze, they hid

from him among the trees. They explained their unwonted reticence because of their fear of being found naked before God.

And so the sequel of their disobedience was revealed; God punished the serpent by making it crawl on its belly and putting enmity between it and the woman and their respective offspring.[5] The woman was afflicted with the pain integral to childbirth and an uneasy relationship with her husband, who would be her master.[6]

The man bore the most severe punishment: on his account the earth would be cursed, and he would get his food only by labour all the days of his life. It would yield thorns and thistles for him, and he would eat the produce of the field. Only by the sweat of his brow would he win his bread until he returned to the earth from which he was taken. He was dust, and to dust he would return.[7]

The man named his wife Eve because she was the mother of all living beings. God made coverings of skin for the man, Adam, and his wife and clothed them. But he said, 'The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; what if he now reaches out and takes fruit from the tree of life also, and eats it and lives forever?' So God banished him from the garden of Eden to till the ground, from which he had been taken. When he drove him out, God settled him to the east of the garden of Eden, and he stationed the cherubim (angelic beings of the second order of the celestial hierarchy) and a sword whirling and flashing to guard the way to the tree of life.[8]

This fascinating allegory of the Creation bears a strong, if harsh, element of justice. It is the basis of the doctrine of original sin, the innate depravity of all mankind held to be a consequence of the Fall. With our scientific understanding of the evolution of life from its simplest to its most complex manifestations extending over many millions of years, the biblical account of the world's origin has the atmosphere of myth rather than a historical fact. Nevertheless there may be profound spiritual truth hidden in a myth or allegory which is entirely overlooked in a direct recital of facts without a deeper understanding of their significance.

What does the story of the Fall tell us about ourselves, 'who are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the life of good deeds which God designed for us?' [9] It affirms our divine origin, similar in its way to the conception and birth of any human being. It also bears witness to our native curiosity and intelligence allied to an innate disobedience and deficiency of moral discernment. The serpent could easily be identified with the spirit of evil, Satan (or Lucifer), waiting at all times to tempt an unsuspecting human victim into sinful (selfish) ways of life.

The particular temptation laid before Eve and then Adam by the serpent was to be like God, an invitation to assume infinite power. Indeed, one cannot act with any degree of responsibility until one can face the challenge of discerning good from evil, which is the basis of morality. The power consequent on moral action is beneficial or detrimental depending upon the attitude of the person.

We mentioned earlier in chapter 11 the ambivalence of human concepts of morality in the realm of sexual practices. Far more terrible were the outrages committed in the name of God during the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition. The perpetrators of these enormities had no doubt they were acting under divine sanction. In many of the twentieth-century atrocities we considered in chapter 1 God was not brought into the picture at all; the conflict lay simply between two sets of people, and the weaker was relentlessly persecuted to the point of their extermination. This was certainly the intention of the Holocaust, in which the Nazis nearly succeeded in murdering all continental European Jews between 1941 and 1945.

The appalling aspect of this slaughter lies not only in the attempted elimination of an extremely gifted people by a superbly civilized nation under the evil influence of a hate-filled, fanatical dictator, but also in a deeper consideration of the human situation itself. Are we in truth God's work of art, his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works which God has already designated to make up our way of life (to return in part to the New Jerusalem Bible version of Ephesians 2.10 which was quoted in the Preface)?

A time has come when many human mental functions of thinking and willing can be performed by impersonal, mechanical computers. The extreme example is the robot, a machine with a human appearance or functioning like a human. The one distinctly human quality these computers lack is autonomy; they need to be instructed according to a program devised by a human agent.

In the realms of science fiction these completely autonomous computers have arrived, and they are the masters of the world. The human has been relegated to the status of a mere work- piece. This nightmare scenario has been approached in the actions of the secret police that terrorized populations in the time of Fascism and Nazism, and it persists in Communist countries like China, Cuba and North Korea. Truth is often stranger than fiction.

Yet what is the function of evil in human life? It is doubtful whether this question would enter the consideration of any animal other than the human. Evil is an attitude or experience that is harmful to one's welfare. Its tendency is to defile and destroy. When one sees animal programmes on television, the larger, stronger species impress one with their brutality and native guile, but they are also quite open in their behaviour and not infrequently evoke affection as they remind us of our kinship with them.

It is noteworthy that domesticated animals are considerably more tractable than their wild counterparts, so much so that bonds of considerable affection may develop between humans and their pet dogs, cats and horses. It could well be that this pacification of our animal environment is part of the education and work of the human, opening the mind to other forms of life that we are bound to meet as part of our own experience.

St Francis of Assisi was able to love all aspects of creation. Thus one favourite paean of his was, 'Praised be my Lord for our mother the earth, the which doth sustain and keep us, and bringeth forth divers fruits, and flowers of many colours, and grass.'[10] Another beautiful salute occurs in the same *Canticle*,

'And thou, most kind and gentle death,

waiting to hush our latest breath,

O praise him, Alleluia!

Thou leadest home the child of God ,

And Christ our Lord the way hath trod.'

The apogee of Francis' spirituality is found in two of his most celebrated prayers:

'Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.'

From this noble aspiration flows the second petition:

'O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved, as to love;

for it is in giving that we receive,

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,

and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.'

He gave the animals he met the titles 'brother' and 'sister', even extending this human solidarity to the earth and the sun.

The human possesses a range and depth of spiritual understanding that far exceeds even the most devoted animal loyalty. The creativity and enterprise of human activity is of a different order to even the most intelligent animal. There is loyalty of a basic type among groups of similar species of animals, especially mammals, but it appears to be geared more to general survival than any impulse of self-sacrifice on behalf of the whole. Instances are on record when so close a relationship grew between a man and his dog on an expedition of considerable hazard that the animal gave up his life spontaneously to protect his master, but these occasions are rare. One is reminded of John 15. 13, ' there is no greater love than this, that someone should lay down his life for his friends.'

An experience of a dog's friendship occurred in an acquaintance's life some forty years ago when the proprietors of a friendly boarding house in the Earls Court district of London sold their property and moved with their Airedale terrier to a house further east in South Kensington. He did not like the new proprietor of the house in Earls Court, and took a tentative walk to the new house. He was, and still is, reticent in making his presence known, but he had no fear of rejection, because when he was still on the pavement, Chummie, the dog, barked vigorously and literally drew him into the new premises. He spent a very happy ten years' sojourn there, only terminated when the friends once again sold their house and moved to Hampshire, where they in due course died. Interestingly, he did not play around affectionately with animals because of his innate reserve, but Chummie sensed a deeper regard in the soul.

When all this is considered, there is a vast difference between day-to-day human behaviour governed by the range of reflex responses to the unexpected events that affect people and the relative predictability and unconcern of the other animals, who work largely by their natural instincts. The simple life brings with it fewer responsibilities, but it is deficient in spontaneous service to others which is the basis of true happiness and fulfilment. It is a great privilege to be born human, but the event is also potentially hazardous. Humanity includes a broad spectrum of types ranging from Jesus Christ to Adolf Hitler, from Siddhartha Gautama Buddha to Genghis Khan. Buddha's last command to his disciples was to 'go now and wander for the welfare and happiness of many, out of compassion for the world. Let not two of you proceed in the same direction. Proclaim the Dhamma (Truth).'

The similarity of Jesus' instruction to his disciples is striking. 'Do not take the road to gentile lands, and do not enter any Samaritan town; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go proclaim the message: "The kingdom of Heaven is upon you." Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. You received without cost; give without charge.'[11]

The dominant element of conscious, moral choice is unique to humanity. This confronts us squarely with the problem of evil in a world allegedly created by a loving, all-powerful God. Theodicy, the vindication of divine providence in view of the existence of evil, has been a subject of debate at least since the time of Job, and no entirely satisfactory answer has been forthcoming. Why for that matter did our mythological ancestors Adam and Eve commit the original sin? They certainly were not made perfect morally.

We are in the end left with the fact of evil in creation, and monotheistic religion can do no other than place its origin in the one God, who is creator of all things seen and unseen. Once we have confronted this truth directly we are able to see a possible function of the evil element intrinsic to life. It challenges the comfortable security that we all so keenly desire, seen so well planned in the idea of the welfare state. It was inaugurated in Britain after the Second World War, and is a system whereby the state undertakes to protect the health and well-being of its citizens, especially those in financial and social need. It is a noble ideal, but it is still a long way off the efficiency its founders would have desired.

The end of evil is certainly destruction if it is permitted to run its course without restraint. But there is also a paradoxical alternative end: perfection. Evil keeps us on our toes as it did Adam and Eve when they were expelled from the garden of Eden. Then they could no longer thoughtlessly rely on divine providence, as do our animal relatives, but had to learn to fend for themselves.

Experience teaches us that we function far better as a united body than as isolated individuals, for 'we belong to one another as parts of one body.'[12] Animals also function in packs, but their purpose serves no higher ideal than self-preservation, which is more safely achieved in the company of their group than in isolation.

In the case of the human there is a more compelling urge than this: a desire to serve with compassion or to control with power. Power is closer to the animal consciousness than is compassion. The emergence of human consciousness saw a tiny flame of light within the gloom of self-centred existence; all selfishness is dark and gloomy no matter what immediate satisfaction it may evoke, because it isolates the person from the greater light of God, which is seen in the first case in the love one bears one's neighbour.[13] Selfishness is the root of sin, which is the breaking of divine law, especially by a conscious act of disobedience. Divine law is incorporated in human morality at its most inspired,.

It is the destiny of the human to transcend selfishness with a love that unites the individual with the community. This does not imply self-deprecation; on the other hand, we are charged to love our neighbour as ourself. It is only when we have accepted our own personality completely with no attempt to conceal its blemishes or inadequacies 'warts and all', that we can relate unaffectedly to other people. In this attitude the craving for power over others wanes and the desire to serve them grows stronger. Subtle criticism of others, which is in reality a way of denigrating them especially when they threaten us with their talents which we cannot match, slackens, and we can rejoice in their excellence. We share their gifts with warm regard, and become stronger than before in the mutual exchange of special abilities.

It is at least as praiseworthy to be able to relate in appreciative warmth to people of different aptitudes as to be specially gifted with an enviable talent oneself. Imitation, as the saying goes, is the sincerest form of flattery. If one is genuine in one's regard, the imitation will in due course follow its own path and a new creation will emerge.

A fine example is the musical development of Beethoven: in his delightful early compositions he is clearly indebted to Haydn and Mozart, but these are succeeded in his 'middle period' by works of much greater depth and individuality. An outstanding example is the third symphony in E flat, popularly called the *Eroica*, whose expansiveness far transcends any previous 'classical-style' works of the eighteenth century. The precipitating factor in this transformation was the menace of increasing deafness which directly threatened his work as a musician. After a period of severe depression of almost suicidal intensity he faced the challenge resolutely, and the Eroica symphony is the crowning achievement of his early middle period. His courage was in no way rewarded by any amelioration of his disability; on the other hand, its growing severity was attended by all his most mature works. In his last years when he was so stone-deaf as to live in a largely private world, he composed the ninth (*Choral*) symphony in D minor and the five final string quartets, works of transcendental vision and spiritual grandeur. This is a compelling example of evil playing its part in the creation of perfection.

It may be worth noting also that the word *evil* as in 'the evil' or *d' evil* is at the beginning of our word *development*. In fiction-writing there are four stages to the construction of a story. The plot begins with a group of characters in stasis;
a threat is introduced from seemingly outside the group,
there is a period of great upheaval and attempts to cope with this intrusion
and finally there is a resolution in which the characters remaining are able to reach another state of stasis which has moved on, grown or developed as the story has unfolded.
For the writer, the devil is in the detail as the saying has it. Life, of course, is stranger than fiction. 'God instructs the heart not by means of ideas, but by pains and contradictions' wrote Jean Pierre de Caussade.

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) was a sharp, realistic surveyor of the human scene. In his seminal book, *Leviathan*, he had interesting comments to make about the human condition: 'the condition of man … is a condition of war of everyone against everyone'; 'they that approve a private opinion, call it opinion; but they that mislike it, heresy: and yet heresy signifies no more than private opinion'; and most categorically in his description of the life of the common person in the seventeenth century: 'no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.'

Despite the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and the colossal expansion of scientific and technical knowledge in the following two centuries, the picture of humanity painted by Thomas Hobbes has not changed very much except for a degree of social liberalization as regards race and gender and also the abolition of slavery in Western society. The current run of racial riots in some Northern English towns emphasizes the fluidity of the social scene in a generally harmonious country. In Northern Ireland conflict seems to be an inbuilt feature of existence.

Clearly, God's work of art is in a very unstable state when one reflects on the terrible events that have disfigured the twentieth century. The expansion of scientific and technical knowledge has led to the development of nuclear warheads, the use of which could signal the destruction of all life on the earth.

Chapter 18

The Way Ahead

'Let Christ's peace be arbiter in your decisions, the peace to which you were called as members of a single body. Always be thankful.' (Colossians 3.15)

The words of Psalm 8 are worth deep thought:

Lord our sovereign,

How glorious is your name throughout the world!

Your majesty is praised as high as the heavens,

From the mouths of babes and infants at the breast.

You have established a bulwark against your adversaries

To restrain the enemy and the avenger.

When I look up at the heavens, the work of your fingers,

At the moon and the stars you have set in place,

What is a frail mortal, that you should be mindful of him,

a human being, that you should take notice of him?

Yet you have made him little less than a god,

crowning his head with glory and honour.

You make him master over all that you have made,

putting everything in subjection under his feet:

all sheep and oxen, all the wild beasts,

the birds in the air, the fish in the sea,

and everything that moves along ocean paths.

Lord our sovereign,

how glorious is your name throughout the world!

This utterance of joyful praise complements Hamlet's which introduced chapter 17. The high-flown language reflects sheer wonder at the supremacy of the mortal, little more than a plaything in form when compared to the beasts of the field. Alone, the person would be torn apart by the savage animal or killed by the bite of a venomous snake, but the Creator has endowed the human with a superlative intellect that can easily cope with their pugnacious neighbours and, when necessary, harness their strength for useful purposes. Fortunately there is also a place for compassion in even the most primitive human consciousness. The outflowing love of the entire created world expressed by that most lovable Christian saint, Francis of Assisi, finds its humble counterpart in the deep affection many people have for their pets, who sometimes assume a near-dominant place in the household.

It is this combination of intelligence and love that makes the human, though frail physically, God's special servant; indeed they are master of our world. At their best humankind is not only the guardian of the creatures, animal and vegetable, of the earth and the physical framework on which they survive, but also the creator of beautiful works of art in the realms of music, painting and literature, and the

provider of good things for their afflicted brethren. It is no surprise that all the great benefactors of the world have been human.

And yet, as we saw in chapter 17, there is a viciously cruel streak in the human character as well. It showed itself so atrociously in the events of the twentieth century that the whole glorious human civilization that has existed, at least within historical records, has been sullied. Its first traces were Egyptian and Sumerian, an early non-Semitic people who inhabited Mesopotamia before the civilization of later Babylonia, and may themselves have travelled to the Nile Valley about 4000 years before the common era (BCE or BC depending on the person's religious attitude; in fact the common era dates from the approximate birthday of Christ, just as the other abbreviation, CE, extends from that date onwards and is alternatively signified AD, which means Anno Domini or 'in the year of the Lord').

We can either lament that perverse streak in human nature as something so completely intolerable as to necessitate immediate removal, or else we may lay off our rejection for a little while. Obviously any possible harm done should be redressed at once, and then we may face the fact of human cruelty with a degree of composure. It may be the destructive way of the born psychopath considered in chapter 7, but it may also be a cry for justice in a life that has known little happiness because of continual subjugation by ill health or the hostility of the population amongst which it has been obliged to live.

As we noted in chapter 17, the presence of something evil spoiling our life, if it is confronted with brave acceptance, may unfold to disclose a strange blessing that might otherwise have never been revealed. It may evoke strength in ourselves and compassionate concern for other people who are in need. Thus a circumstance of personal suffering may ignite the darkness of many searching for meaning in their own aimless lives.

The serpent in the story of the Fall was also a creature of God as were the two trees in the middle of the garden of Eden, the fruit of which Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat under pain of death. Yet the scenario was foreordained: the human has to know their own identity before they can relate to God

who is, in this case, the wholly other. Later on, when the human has undergone the prolonged silence of solitude will they experience the Deity within their own being also. The great mystics tell us not to speak long-windedly about God, for whatever we say is wrong. This is because he embraces all categories of thought, the evil no less than the good. Were this not so, the course of life would have ground to a halt a long time ago. Indeed, the process of evolution is a gigantic manifestation of divine activity.

Therefore it is inevitable that the human should be a hive of conflicting activity. Morality is the foundation of civilized living, yet the moralizer soon becomes a nuisance. Such people lay down the moral law so emphatically that they pose as God's special representatives with an assured air of judgemental authority. Their pride is intolerable especially when they ardently stress humility to others. Religion can easily assume a moralistic stance if it fails to modify morality with compassion. The life and teaching of Christ show this compassionate morality perfectly.

Perhaps the most outstanding example is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector. The Pharisee, full of pride and self-satisfaction, thanks God that he is not like other people because of his moral excellence, whereas the far from perfect tax-collector opens himself in earnest contrition for his sinful lifestyle. It is he rather than the self-righteous Pharisee who was at greater peace with his creator. 'For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled; and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.'[1]

What seems unfortunate in a person's life is often seen in perspective to have been a blessing in disguise. 'There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.'[2]

Life is a great adventure, and the individual born with the most desirable advantages is not always the most fulfilled member of their group. It is their response to life's vicissitudes that determines their success at the end of the day. Our times of trial bring us to an honest assessment of our character in a way that periods of good fortune much less often do. This is because when all is going well, our attention is so keenly focused on our worldly concerns that we take ourselves for granted.

It is no wonder that the serpent, identified as Satan, played a vital part in the history of Adam and Eve. Their 'original sin' was no tragedy either for themselves or for those who followed them. It was the inevitable onward movement that is part and parcel of human progress. After Adam and Eve came the tragic story of their children, Cain who murdered his brother Abel out of anger because God showed favour to him rather than to Cain.[3]

The account of the slow decline in human morality proceeds to Noah, who was the one righteous man who walked with God. God decided to destroy the entire human race apart from Noah and his family, and so there was a general destruction of all living things in a universal flood that lasted a hundred and fifty days. Noah, his family, and a pair (male and female) of all the animals who inhabited the earth were preserved in an ark created by God during the course of the flood, and when it had subsided Noah, his family and the accompanying animals came out of the ark and repopulated the earth.[4]

This was in a way a new birth slightly comparable to the original creation story, but now there was a fear of the human by all the creatures, who were the animals on earth, the birds of the air, everything that moved on the ground, and the fish of the sea. These and also the green plants would serve as food for the human. The pristine harmony that attended the creation was disrupted.[5] Two other provisos were added: not to eat flesh with its blood still in it, and not to shed human blood because God made human beings in his own image. Then followed the command to be fruitful and increase in number, to people the earth and rule over it.[6]

Human development brought to the fore two essential properties, obedience and tenacity, but the sinfulness of the general population was of monumental proportions. The final example of the mythological introduction to the Book of Genesis is the story of the tower of Babel;[7] the temptation here was the desire of the inhabitants to make a name for themselves, or they would be dispersed over the face of the earth. Selfishness is a third fundamental human property which, in the compass of an intelligent mind, can wreak terrible havoc so that the person may assume a godlike authority.

What appears to be authentic history starts in the twelfth chapter of Genesis with a fascinating, inspiring account of Abraham, the ancestor of the three Semitic monotheistic faiths, and his descendants Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. The morality of the five books of Moses[8] (the Law, also called the Pentateuch) is of a high standard for the period they describe when polygamy was a part of everyday life. Women have, until little more than a century ago, been obliged to adopt a lower social status as compared with men in matters of suffrage and higher education. This is one of the highlights of the twentieth century when put in balance with the savagery that has disfigured it so terribly.

The understanding of the means of human development was deeply influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of the evolution of the species by the action of 'natural selection', often described as the survival of the fittest. This natural selection may follow the sudden appearance of a quirk of nature, or even the occurrence of a dramatic cosmic calamity. But St Paul believed, 'as we know, that all things work together for good for those who love God.'[9] Were we not constantly on the move, we would soon become stuck in a desert of inanimation.

Our destination is the city of God, and yet, unbeknown to ourselves, we have never been far from its precincts. This amazing assertion applies not only to the good people but also to the bad. Hence we encounter the challenging command in the Sermon on the Mount: 'But what I tell you is this: Love your enemies, and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who causes the sun to rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the innocent and the wicked.'[10]

This being so, why are we so distant from God, the nameless presence who is closer to us than our own being? The answer is because we do not sufficiently clearly know our own selves; if we did we would know God. It is because we are so habitually engrossed on the past with its memories of varying emotional quality and the future with its blurred fears and hopes, that we are virtually incapable of focusing our attention on the present moment, where alone we encounter reality. The Hindu mystic is not wrong in saying that the mind is the slayer of the Real. The mind is the seat of awareness, thought, volition and feeling, and is an essential part of the personality. But behind it there is a deeper seat of awareness, that transcends the concerns of the present moment and illuminates it with the joy of a

loving relationship, the beauty of nature, the nobility of a selfless action and the caring sternness of moral courage. This seat of deeper awareness is called the soul, and in its centre (to use a metaphor) is the Spirit of God, 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.'[11]

It is the rational, emotional mind which slays the Real. Its earthly horizon cannot embrace the spiritual vision of the soul, and in its arrogant ignorance it denies anything greater than itself. The Real can so easily be dismissed as pure illusion or superstition but as one grows up one should finish with childish things.[12]

The human is a spiritual animal and he or she cannot be fobbed off indefinitely with purely material points of view. These are truly childish rather in the same way as a growing child is captivated by mechanical toys. In due course they will be replaced by the real thing as the young person learns how to drive a motor car and deal with machinery of various kinds. God is indeed the Real Thing. 'In him we live and move, and have our existence' as Paul told the Athenian crowd who came to hear him.[13]

But Paul's exposition deals with the creative aspects of God. More could be added on a different tack, that of personal experience. We know God by the effect his presence has on our being. A radiance seems to surround us which may well be registered by other people, especially those who know us well. This is the peak of Jesus' teaching which has been referred to on more than one occasion in these pages: 'This is why I say you will recognise them by their fruit.'[14] The fruit of knowing God as apart from merely believing in him on religious grounds is radiant love which rapidly grows to include all humanity and animals also.

The end of human existence is to follow God in the way of his Son Jesus Christ. Our work is certainly to become perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect,[15] but this is rather more than being morally pure. There must be love of the morally evil also, for they too are our brethren even when their actions merit our condemnation and their penal consequences. In the end they too are to follow the way to perfection as shown in the life and teaching of Jesus.

Our hell is of our own creation, and it separates us from our brethren. The wage of this personal sin is death, but God gives freely, and his gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.[16] As St Paul writes 'it is by grace you are saved through faith; it is not your own doing. It is God's gift, not a reward for work done. There is nothing for anyone to boast of.'[17] This text is followed by the one that sees the human as God's work of art.

How then should we live as God's great work of art, typified by Christ and the other spiritual heroes representing the other major religious faiths? The answer is remarkably simple: be yourself, 'warts and all,' and relax with calm gratitude that you are as you are. There is no complacency in this attitude, because evil influences will constantly tempt you into becoming assertive and dominant in your community. The three universal human delights are sexual gratification, money and social distinction, all of which, if successful, tend to separate the apparently fortunate individual from their fellows, and ultimately insert a barrier between them and the larger community of which they are willy-nilly a part. If only one could keep quiet and practice the inner discipline of silent prayer, the mutual dedication between God and the person would grow in ardour to the extent of deification, as it is termed in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

As has already been stated, adverse episodes occurring in people's lives, not only fortuitous bad luck but also crass folly, are not simply to be obliterated from their minds; they are sources of character building at their very least and spiritual lessons in the hands of humble, intelligent individuals. Age should lead to greater objectivity. The inevitably weak body bears witness to its transience. It is an admirable servant of the soul, but there comes a time when we will need to quit it.

This is the moment of death, frightening when contemplated from far off but much more welcoming when its approaches are necessarily close at hand. We will be completely unaware of its occurrence; if, for instance, we succumbed to a heart attack suddenly while addressing a group of people, we would continue with our discourse, not audibly any longer but in the compass of our own mind. Thus while the audience crowded around the collapsed corpse, we would continue blithely with our own

deliberations. But then we would suddenly become aware of the new situation and find a group of souls around us, greeting us in love and welcoming us for the new existence ahead of us.

The rational mind that once governed our attitudes and activities is now subsumed under the soul. The personality we previously revealed fades away and is replaced by the soul whose immortality is assured by the love of the Creator. Our incarnate life will determine the number of souls greeting us as we enter 'the life of the world to come', a beautiful phrase that concludes the Nicene Creed. Those whose lives on earth had borne no consideration for anybody but themselves will be alone in a vast void; this is the nature of hell. Those who gave themselves unstintingly for the love of their fellow humans will be encompassed in a vast throng of souls. World Saints like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Oscar Romero and Mahatma Gandhi come into this blessed company; this is the nature of heaven.

Most of us fall between these two extremes: we have had family responsibilities and been active in service in our local community, but our loyalty has limited ardour and we are decidedly devoted to those whom we love and with whom we agree in matters political, social or religious. This is purgatory, the condition of spiritual cleansing for those who die in the grace of God but have to expiate their inadequate response to all their fellows while they were incarnate.

Two moderations need to be made. Hell is self made; a God of love[18] would not inflict eternal punishment on any creature. But the punishment will last until the creature repents. This is the responsibility contingent upon God's sacred gift of free will that so distinguishes the human from other animals, who are conditioned to a series of responses according to the prevailing circumstances. We can be in hell now or in the life of the world to come (the afterlife) just as long as we choose. The suffering we have brought upon ourself will in due course induce the humility that is necessary for us to face ourselves with honesty and repent accordingly. The divine mercy will flow out to us and bring us into full communion with all those we have hurt, because our Father will be there among us as the host of the heavenly feast. God loves us too much and respects our dignity too highly to force himself upon us.

The second moderation concerns the nature of Heaven. When Jesus was hanging on his cross there were two criminals one on either side of him. The one taunted him (as did the crowd watching the proceedings with great enjoyment) to save himself and them if he was the Messiah. The other, however, rebuked him since he recognized that they were paying the price for their misdeeds, whereas Jesus had done nothing wrong. He asked Jesus to remember him when he came to his throne. Jesus answered, 'truly I tell you: today you will be with me in Paradise.'[19] This is traditionally called 'the third word from the Cross.'

Is Paradise synonymous with Heaven? The answer is equivocal. In Paradise there is a heavenly state of complete, enduring happiness, but it is not universal, thus only one of the two criminals was promised it when he died, and that very soon too. Jesus' very nature was paradisiacal for he mirrored God in his own life. True, he in common with all humanity had his time of pain and suffering at Gethsemane[20] and during the Crucifixion,[21] but he emerged in triumph at the Resurrection on the third day.[22] The accounts of the Resurrection are amplified in Mark 16 (though some of the most ancient witnesses bring the book to a close at the eighth verse) and especially Luke 24 and John 20–1.

Paradise is a personal state of bliss and is initially for the few who have attained it as a result of their own spirituality. They have succeeded by their own life's work, and are at one with the great souls of humanity many of whose names are now household words. Their intention now is to bring their friends still in a purgatorial state into paradise with them. This is a beautiful indication of their love, and it is not limited to their past associations only but extends to include all aspiring souls. Indeed, Heaven is still in the making. At present it is represented by the greatest souls of humanity of whom Jesus Christ and Siddartha Gautama Buddha are the most splendid. Their striving is to bring every soul to Paradise, and when this intention has been attained, the personal nature of Paradise will be broadened into Heaven, in which all souls are in bliss and God is known intimately by them all, for he is the sovereign of Heaven.

Our own concepts of time and space are conditioned by our physical body. When this is shed we enter a state of eternity, which is timeless, and infinity, which is boundless. It is very possible that the soul

may have to enter other worlds as part of their purgatorial cleansing. 'There are many dwelling-places (*mansions* in the Authorized Version of the Bible) in my Father's house; if it were not so I should have told you; for I am going to prepare a place for you.'[23] A return to an earthly state, which is called reincarnation, is one of the dwelling-places we may find it necessary to experience, but there are innumerable other 'mansions' also. One thinks of our own solar system as a prelude to the vast array of planets in the scarcely conceivable magnitude of the universe.

If we were to visit one of these cosmic mansions it is very unlikely that we would be provided with a physical body, for the climatic conditions would be unpropitious to say the least; no planet other than earth can sustain life in our own solar system – Mercury and Venus are far too hot, and Mars is too cold. Those still further from the sun are frozen. Whether any single planet in any other solar system contains any living organisms remains unknown. The existence of UFOs is reported from time to time by people who appear to be sound mentally; some of these contain 'aliens' who pay earth a visit. There is as yet no official statement about these 'unidentified flying objects.' Could they, if they really do exist, include souls on a purgatorial journey? Are there, for that matter, modes of existence of other natures than anything we can conceive from our earthly perspective? How little do we know about reality on a wider scale! Nevertheless, what really matters at all times is to live properly in the present moment with an open, alert mind and a warm, compassionate soul. In such a frame of being we will indeed know 'the truth which alone can set us free.'[24]

Heaven cannot be complete until every living creature is included in its span. The bad will become good through the experience of isolation that selfish ways bring in their train. The good will progress from self-satisfied Pharisaism to an all-embracing, accepting love illustrated by the father of the younger (Prodigal) son who squandered his share of the estate, now turned into cash, in dissolute living. When he returned home, humiliated and impoverished, his father ran out to meet him. Refusing to hear his deep apology, the father immediately robed him sumptuously and arranged a feast in his honour. The good older son was scandalized and refused to join in the festivities, but his father pleaded with him. 'His brother here was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and has been found.'[25]

Moral rectitude may be the right way to live, but it is a mere carcass until it is animated by the spirit of love.

When one considers the horrors of the twentieth century in the light of human progress, it seems inevitable that the destructive part of humanity had to be exposed and given its day. It proved absolutely that no man is an island.[26] It laid the foundation of the welfare state and also more widely-linked groups like UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). None of these is functioning as well as they might because of the failings of individuals concerned in their maintenance, but it is a wonderful thing that these processes of public and national service and protection are working at all.

They will work properly only when people behave as God's work of art as demonstrated in Jesus Christ. He is in us all,[27] but we are too full of our own concerns to take heed of his presence. It may be that the shattering of trust in human wisdom that has attended the twentieth century will evoke humility in its wake. Then will humanity work in concord and wars will cease. When we are humble, we admit our weaknesses; in this confrontation with our true nature comes our strength, for now we are truly in God, no longer as weak, impetuous children but as mature, self-controlled adults who can work alongside him as his work of art for the regeneration of the world.

Envoi

It is not easy to be God's work of art. We are animals with all the frailty inherent in the flesh. We are easily seduced to satisfy our bodily appetites as fully as do the beasts of the field.

But we also have a soul that will always nag at us until we do the right thing even in the most trying situations. This is the voice of God urging us to fulfil the plan he has set in action. If we fail, the work of art is spoilt, our life is sullied, and its end passes virtually unnoticed. But if we have sacrificed something especially dear to us for a stranger in need, the light of the One beyond all names will illuminate us, and the heavenly host will proclaim as of yore:

> 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
>
> and on earth peace to all in whom he delights.'[1]

Notes

Chapter 1

A Confused World

1. 1 Peter 5.8.
2. Kings 19.11–12.
3. Zechariah 4.6.

Chapter 2

What is Our True Place?

1. Matthew 26.41.
2. Matthew 26.56.
3. In a letter quoted in Life of Mandell Creighton (1904, vol 1, p. 372).
4. Psalm 8.4–5.
5. Alexander Pope An Essay on Man Epistle 1.95.
6. 1 John 3.2.

Chapter 3

Companions on the Way

1. Romans 7.21–3.

2. 1 John 1.5.

3. Matthew 4.1–11.

Chapter 4

Out of Darkness?

1. *Confessions* Book 10, Chapter 27.

2. Hebrews 11.1.

3. 1 Corinthians 12.9.

4. Genesis 11.2–8.

5. John 15.11–13.

6. Psalm 46.10.

7. 1 John 1.5.

8. Acts 17.28.

9. Job 42.1–3.

10. John 8.31–2.

Chapter 5

Education for Life and Death

1. *As You Like It* Act 2, Scene 7, 140–165
2. Ecclesiastes 2.14 and 16.
3. Ecclesiastes 12.13–14.
4. Luke 1.46–55.
5. *The Tablet* 2 December 2000, page 1658.
6. 2 Maccabees 12.40–43.
7. Matthew 7.20.

Chapter 6

Knowledge and Illusion

1. 1 John 4.19.
2. 1 John 4.16.
3. Matthew 5.45.
4. John 15.13.
5. Galatians 6.7–8.
6. Ephesians 4.25.
7. Matthew 7.20.

Chapter 7

The Necessity of Worship

1. Acts 17.22–3.
2. Genesis 11.9.
3. Exodus. 20.3–17.
4. Matthew 5–7.
5. Acts 17.28.
6. Matthew 18.20.
7. 1 Samuel 3.1–14.
8. Psalm 23.1–4.
9. Psalm 29.1–2.
10. Psalm 34.1–4.
11. Psalm 46.1–3.
12. Psalm 106.1–3.
13. Psalm 113.4–9.
14. Psalm 137.1–6.

Chapter 8

On Coming to God

1. *Confessions* Book 1, chapter 1.
2. Isaiah 55.6.
3. William Edward Hickson, 1803–1870.
4. Matthew 18.3–4.
5. Matthew 25.31–45.
6. John 16.22.

7. Matthew 7.14.
8. Luke 10.38–42.
9. Sören Kierkegaard *Purity of Heart*, tr. Douglas Steere. 2nd ed. New York: Harper, 1948. (*Ophyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand*, by S. Kierkegaard, pt. i. "*En Leiligheds-Tale*," 1847.)
10. Matthew 7.20.

Chapter 9

Coming Together in Worship

1. Matthew 7.21.
2. Matthew 25.40.
3. John 1.1–18.
4. Luke 2.13–4.
5. Exodus 20.13–17.
6. *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 5, 168.

Chapter 10

The Nature of Ministry in the Church

1. Matthew 18. 3.
2. See reference Chapter 8 note 9.
3. *Unseen Warfare*, Lorenzo Scupoli, edited by Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and revised by Theophan the Recluse, Mowbrays, 1978.
4. Isaiah 5. 21.
5. Luke 2.13–14.
6. Matthew 10.39.
7. verse 37–8.

8. 1 John 1.5.
9. John 1.5.
10. Matthew 11.28–30.
11. John 8.32.
12. Mark 12.30.
13. Matthew 6.21.
14. Matthew 5.45.
15. 1 Corinthians 13.4.
16. Matthew 26.20.

Chapter 11

The Fruit of the Knowledge of God

1. Matthew 13.45–6.
2. Leviticus 18.22.
3. Matthew 5.43–8.
4. Matthew 7.1–5.
5. 1 Corinthians 12.8.
6. Hebrews 10.31.
7. Galatians 5.22–3.
8. Matthew 27.46.
9. John 5.30.
10. Galatians 5.19–21.

Chapter 12

The See-Saw of Life

1. Isaac Watts, *Divine songs for Children* 21 *Against Evil Company*.
2. Ibid.
3. Mark 12.31.
4. Romans 8.28.
5. 'To faith add knowledge' is the motto of the Churches Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies. Further details are to be found on pp.169–70.
6. Dr Ian Stevenson, *Children Who Remember Previous Lives: a Question of Reincarnation* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1987).
7. John 2.1-10.
8. 1 Corinthians 13.7.

Chapter 13

The Gift of Equanimity

1. Matthew 18.20.
2. Matthew 18.19.
3. John 15.13.
4. 2 Corinthians 6.4–10.
5. Acts 9.1–2.
6. Romans 9–11.
7. Matthew 5.44–5.
8. Luke 4.18–19.

9. *The Way to Divine Knowledge* is the title of a beautiful and practical text by the Christian mystic, the Reverend William Law. See also *The Devout Life: William Law's Understanding of Divine Love* by Israel and Broadbent, (Continuum, 2001).
10. Matthew 18.21–2.

Chapter 14

The Way of Imagination

1. Matthew 5.48.
2. John 9.25.
3. John 2.23–5, 4.16–9.
4. Luke 15.11–32 and 18.10–14 are good examples.
5. Luke 7. 36–49.
6. John 8. 1–11.
7. Matthew 23.
8. Matthew 23. 29–32.
9. Matthew 26.37–41.
10. John 19.26–7.
11. Matthew 6.3–4.
12. Ephesians 4.25.
13. John 3.1–21.
14. Colossians 1.27.
15. 1 John 4.18.

Chapter 15

The Necessity of Tolerance

1. 1 Corinthians 13.11.
2. 1 Corinthians 13.4–7.
3. Matthew 5.44–5.
4. Ephesians 4.25.
5. 1 Corinthians 13.8.
6. *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1, 60.
7. Genesis 1.26–8.
8. Matthew 5.48 Authorized Version.
9. Luke 23.34.
10. Mark 12.41–4.
11. Galatians 6.7.
12. Matthew 18.21–2.
13. But what I tell you is this: Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who causes the sun to rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the innocent and the wicked.
14. Luke 15.20.
15. Mark 12.31.
16. Mark 12.30.
17. John 15.13.

Chapter 16

The Full Life

1. John 10.10.
2. John 10.11–12.
3. John 10.7–9.
4. John 15.13.

5. Matthew 5.48.
6. Matthew 7.1–2.
7. Act 3, Scene 1, 60.
8. Act 5, Scene 2, 10.
9. Exodus 20.17.
10. Luke 10.25–37.
11. Luke 10.25–29.
12. Matthew 6.26–30.
13. Genesis 1.26–31.
14. Genesis 1.1–31.
15. Genesis 2.2–3.
16. Exodus 20.8–11.
17. Acts 17.28.

Chapter 17

The Human Enigma: God's Work of Art

1. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* Act 2, Scene 2, 306–312.
2. Genesis 1.27.
3. Genesis 2.4–9.
4. verse 23.
5. Genesis 3.14–15.
6. verse 16.
7. verses 17–19.
8. verses 20–4.
9. Ephesians 2.10, Revised English Bible.
10. from *The Canticle of the Creatures*.

11. Matthew 10.5–8.
12. Ephesians 4.25.
13. Luke 10.27.

Chapter 18

The Way Ahead

1. Luke 18.9–14.
2. *Hamlet* Act 2, Scene 2, 252.
3. Genesis 4.1–16.
4. Genesis 6.7–22 to 8.1–18.
5. Genesis 9.1–13.
6. Genesis 9.4–7.
7. Genesis 11.1–9.
8. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
9. Romans. 8.28.
10. Matthew 5.44–5.
11. Colossians 1.27.
12. an oblique reference to 1 Corinthians 13.11.
13. Acts 17.28.
14. Matthew 7.20.
15. Matthew 5.48 Authorized Version.
16. Romans 6.23.
17. Ephesians 2.8–9.
18. 1 John 4.16.
19. Luke 23.39–43.
20. Matthew 26.36–9.

21. Matthew 27.27–54.
22. Matthew 28.
23. John 14. 2.
24. John 8.32.
25. Luke 15.11–32.
26. as John Donne wrote, chapter 9.
27. Colossians 1.27.

Envoi

1. Luke 2.13–14.

The Churches' Fellowship for Psychical and Spiritual Studies

The CFPSS exists to promote the study of psychical and religious experience within a Christian context. Founded in 1953 by a group of clergy and laymen on an ecumenical basis, it continues to serve the churches and its individual members who come from many and varied backgrounds. Some have sought help from the Fellowship's extensive knowledge, at significant points in life where there may have been spontaneous gifts of the Spirit, the pain of bereavement or simply a vocation to a spiritual life through psychic encounter. Many bring a wisdom and depth of vision to enrich the understanding of others.

The Fellowship takes a positive view of psychic sensitivity which many people experience quite naturally in their lives, perhaps through an unsought telepathic communication. Some seem to have a greater awareness of this dimension than others and in some it is more refined. There is a gentle call on members to relate this to a fuller Christian life in which the psychic may find consecration.

There are two classes of membership: full and associate. Those eligible for full membership must be practicing members of Churches which are members of or affiliated to the World Council of Churches, or must themselves acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of the World. Associate members, who cannot vote or hold office, need no such qualifications and may be elected if the Council of the Fellowship so determines.

Full and associate members receive the Christian Parapsychologist and the Quarterly Review four times a year. There is a library, and study material, cassettes and video tapes, books and booklets are available. A fuller prospectus together with lists of the above are available from:

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