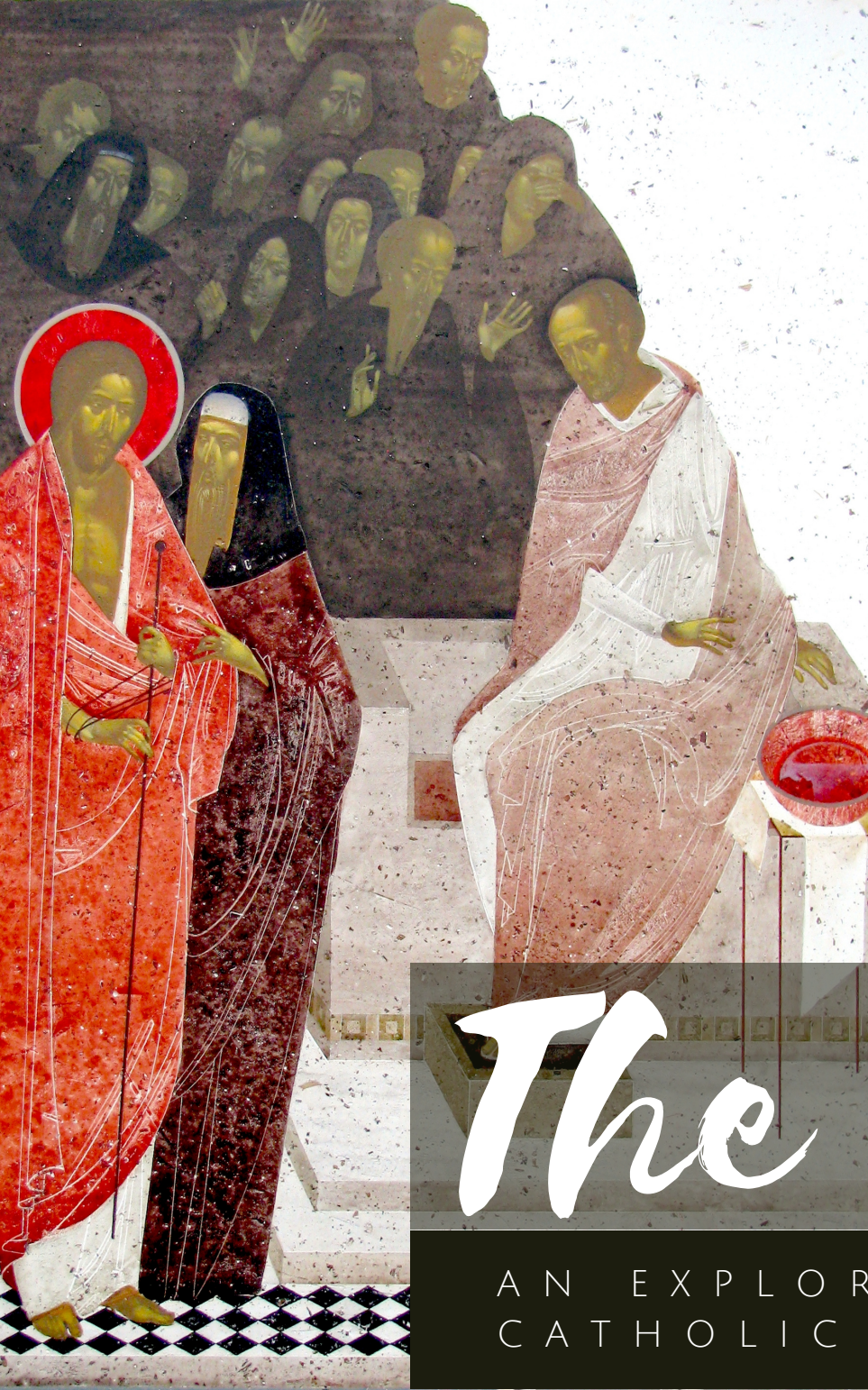




READER



# The True

AN EXPLORATION OF  
CATHOLIC HUMANISM

*together with the*

PENN CATHOLIC  
NEWMAN COMMUNITY

PRESENTED BY COLLEGIUM INSTITUTE



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# QUID VERITAS EST? WHAT IS TRUTH AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

## Session One

### Questions

- Which virtues and vices can be detected in the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate? In the quest for truth, what is the role here of what we might call “Socratic dialogue” from a careful distance vs. self-disclosure? What are the consequences here of Pilate’s efforts at fairness, restraint, and caution? What is the difference between intellectual humility and dissipation or cowardice?
- How does truth offer liberation? In which ways does truth require self-rule and in which does it demand releasing control? How does the refrain of Chaucer’s poem evolve over 3 stanzas?
- How does Newman’s view of judgment and truth seem to differ from Pilate’s? How does he reason to God? Or to anything else that he accepts as true? What is the value of doubt?
- In perhaps the most famous moment ever in western literature: what does Ivan insist is the intention of the Grand Inquisitor? What lessons might be contained therein for us?



## **I. Jesus before Pontius Pilate**

**John 18:28-40** (New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition)

<sup>28</sup> Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. <sup>29</sup> So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?" <sup>30</sup> They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." <sup>31</sup> Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." <sup>32</sup> (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)

<sup>33</sup> Then Pilate entered the headquarters<sup>[c]</sup> again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" <sup>34</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" <sup>35</sup> Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" <sup>36</sup> Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." <sup>37</sup> Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." <sup>38</sup> Pilate asked him, "What is truth?"

### **Jesus Sentenced to Death**

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. <sup>39</sup> But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" <sup>40</sup> They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.

## II. Truth Or 'Ballad of Good Counsel'

Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1340-1400)

*Poem based on John 8:32: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."*

Flee the crowd and dwell securely in trueness.

Let your own suffice, though it not be much,  
for greed leads to hate and grasping to coldness;  
the crowd leads to envy, and wealth deceives such  
as hold too tightly everything they touch.

Rule yourself well, that others clearly see,  
and have no fear: the truth shall set you free.

Don't try to amend all that is amiss,  
trusting Lady Fortune who spins like a ball;  
true rest lies in spurning busyness.

There's no sense in kicking the point of an awl  
nor in the crock's struggle against a wall.

Rule yourself, you who rule others' deeds,  
and have no fear: the truth shall set you free.

Take what is sent to you in obedience;  
struggle, for this world surely begs a fall.

We have no home here, only wilderness.

Go forth, pilgrim! Go forth, beast, from your stall!

Know our true home and thank the God of all.

Hold your course and follow your spirit's lead,  
and have no fear: the truth shall set you free.

### III. Selections on the subject of Truth and Judgment

John Henry Newman (c.1801-1890)

On the Judgment of Conscience, *Oxford University Sermons* (1826-1842), Sermon 2  
<https://www.newmanreader.org/works/oxford/sermon2.html>

Now, in the first place, it is obvious that Conscience is the essential principle and sanction of Religion in the mind. Conscience implies a relation between the soul and a something exterior, and that, moreover, superior to itself; a relation to an excellence which it does not possess, and to a tribunal over which it has no power.

From the *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864), pp. 198-99

<https://www.newmanreader.org/works/apologia65/chapter4-2.html>

If I am asked why I believe in a God, I answer that it is because I believe in myself, for I feel it impossible to believe in my own existence (and of that fact I am quite sure) without believing also in the existence of Him, who lives as a Personal, All-seeing, All-judging Being in my conscience. Now, I dare say, I have not expressed myself with philosophical correctness, because I have not given myself to the study of what metaphysicians have said on the subject; {199} but I think I have a strong true meaning in what I say which will stand examination.

Again from the *Apologia*, pp. 238-39

<https://www.newmanreader.org/works/apologia65/chapter5.html>

Many persons are very sensitive of the difficulties of Religion; I am as sensitive of them as any one; but I have never been able to see a connexion between apprehending those difficulties, however keenly, and multiplying them to any extent, and on the other hand doubting the doctrines to which they are attached. *Ten thousand difficulties do not make one doubt*, as I understand the subject; difficulty and doubt are incommensurate. There of course may be difficulties in the evidence; but I am speaking of difficulties intrinsic to the doctrines themselves, or to their relations with each other. A man may be annoyed that he cannot work out a mathematical problem, of which the answer is or is not given to him, without doubting that it admits of an answer, or that a certain particular answer is the true one. Of all points of faith, the being of a God is, to my own apprehension, encompassed with most difficulty, and yet borne in upon our minds with most power. (Italics added.)

Newman's reflections on the nature of reasoning ... how we reach the conviction that something is true. From the *Grammar of Assent* (1870), Ch. 8, pp. 320-21

<https://www.newmanreader.org/works/grammar/chapter8-2.html>

I consider, then, that the principle of concrete reasoning is parallel to the method of proof which is the foundation of modern mathematical science, as contained in the

celebrated lemma with which Newton opens his "Principia." We know that a regular polygon, inscribed in a circle, its sides being continually diminished, tends to become that circle, as its limit; but it vanishes before it has coincided with the circle, so that its tendency to be the circle, though ever nearer fulfilment, never in fact gets beyond a tendency. In like manner, the conclusion in a real or concrete question is foreseen and predicted rather than actually attained; foreseen in the number and direction of accumulated premises, which all converge to it, and as the result of their combination, approach it more nearly than any assignable difference, yet do not touch it logically (though only not touching it,) on account of the nature of its subject-matter, and the delicate and implicit character of at least part of the reasonings on which it depends. It is by the strength, variety, or multiplicity of premises, which are only probable, not by invincible syllogisms, – by objections overcome, by adverse theories neutralized, by difficulties gradually clearing up, by exceptions proving the rule, by un-looked-for correlations found with received truths, by suspense and delay in the process issuing in triumphant reactions, – by all these ways, and many others, it is that the practised and experienced mind is able to make a sure divination that a conclusion is inevitable, of which his lines of reasoning do not actually put him in possession. This is what is meant by a proposition being "as good as proved," a conclusion as undeniable "as if it were proved," and by the reasons for it "amounting to a proof," for a proof is the limit of converging probabilities.

Regarding the illative sense; from *the Grammar* (1870), pp. 331-33

<https://www.newmanreader.org/works/grammar/chapter8-3.html>

This is the mode in which we ordinarily reason, dealing with things directly, and as they stand, one by one, in the concrete, with an intrinsic and personal power, not a conscious adoption of an artificial instrument or expedient; and it is especially exemplified both in uneducated men, and in men of genius, – ... When it is characterized by precision, subtlety, promptitude, and truth, it is of course a gift and a rarity: in ordinary minds it is biased and degraded by prejudice, passion, and self-interest; but still, after all, this divination comes by nature, and belongs to all of us in a measure, to women more than to men, hitting or missing, as the case may be, but with a success on the whole sufficient to show that there is a method in it, though it be implicit. {332}

A peasant who is weather-wise may yet be simply unable to assign intelligible reasons why he thinks it will be fine tomorrow; and if he attempts to do so, he may give reasons wide of the mark; but that will not weaken his own confidence in his prediction. His mind does not proceed step by step, but he feels all at once and together the force of various combined phenomena, though he is not conscious of them. Again, there are physicians who excel in the diagnosis of complaints; though it does not follow from this, that they could defend their decision in a particular case against a brother physician who disputed it. They are guided by natural acuteness and varied experience; they have their own idiosyncratic modes of observing, generalizing, and concluding;



when questioned, they can but rest on their own authority, or appeal to the future event. In a popular novel [Note 1], a lawyer is introduced, who "would know, almost by instinct, whether an accused person was or was not guilty; and he had already perceived by instinct" that the heroine was guilty. "I've no doubt she's a clever woman," he said, and at once named an attorney practising at the Old Bailey. So, again, experts and detectives, when employed to investigate mysteries, in cases whether of the civil or criminal law, discern and follow out indications which promise solution with a sagacity incomprehensible to ordinary men. A parallel gift is the intuitive perception of character possessed by certain men, while others are as destitute of it, as others again are of an ear for music. What common measure {333} is there between the judgments of those who have this intuition, and those who have not? What but the event can settle any difference of opinion which occurs in their estimation of a third person? These are instances of a natural capacity, or of nature improved by practice and habit, enabling the mind to pass promptly from one set of facts to another, not only, I say, without conscious media, but without conscious antecedents.

Sometimes, I say, this illative faculty is nothing short of genius. Such seems to have been Newton's perception of truths mathematical and physical, though proof was absent.

From the *Oxford University Sermons* (pre-1843), Sermon 13  
<https://www.newmanreader.org/works/oxford/sermon13.html>

Reason, according to the simplest view of it, is the faculty of gaining knowledge without direct perception, or of ascertaining one thing by means of another. In this way it is able, from small beginnings, to create to itself a world of ideas, which do or do not correspond to the things themselves for which they stand, or are true or not, according as it is exercised soundly or otherwise. One fact may suffice for a whole {257} theory; one principle may create and sustain a system; one minute token is a clue to a large discovery. The mind ranges to and fro, and spreads out, and advances forward with a quickness which has become a proverb, and a subtlety and versatility which baffle investigation. It passes on from point to point, gaining one by some indication; another on a probability; then availing itself of an association; then falling back on some received law; next seizing on testimony; then committing itself to some popular impression, or some inward instinct, or some obscure memory; and thus it makes progress not unlike a clamberer on a steep cliff, who, by quick eye, prompt hand, and firm foot, ascends how he knows not himself; by personal endowments and by practice, rather than by rule, leaving no track behind him, and unable to teach another. It is not too much to say that the stepping by which great geniuses scale the mountains of truth is as unsafe and precarious to men in general, as the ascent of a skillful mountaineer up a literal crag. It is a way which they alone can take; and its justification lies in their success. And such mainly is the way in which all men, gifted or not gifted, commonly reason, — not by rule, but by an inward faculty.

*Commentary on these passages by Dr. R. Bud Marr, Penn Newman Day Lecturer October 2019:*

In light of this illustration, Nicholas Lash and Frank Rees are rightfully critical of David Pailin's claim that, for Newman, certitude is reached through a "leap of faith," this final leap being an act of the will and not the intellect. In response to Pailin's suggestion, Lash observes, "But Newman never 'leapt' anywhere in his life." Appealing to the image of the polygon expanding into the circle, Lash continues, "Is it or is it not the case that we discover the margin to have been cancelled, the gap to have been closed? Newman's analysis of assent is, as Coulson says, 'retrospective'; he is 'trying to understand backwards what has been lived forwards.' We grow, rather than leap, into conviction." In the process of reasoning conducive to the act of faith, one does not normally attain certitude through a kind of suprarational act of the will; rather, one becomes aware of the certitude that has already come into existence, so to speak, through an accumulation of probabilities. ... To remain skeptical of religious belief because one did not come to that belief through formal, or syllogistic, reasoning would involve holding faith to a higher standard than we hold a multitude of other modes of reasoning.

#### IV. Feodor Dostoevsky's "The Grand Inquisitor" (Translation by H.P. Blavatsky, 1881)

*[The following is an extract from M. Dostoevsky's celebrated novel, The Brothers Karamazov, the last publication from the pen of the great Russian novelist, who died just as the concluding chapters appeared in print. The following extract is a cutting satire on modern theology generally and the Roman Catholic religion in particular. The idea is that Christ revisits earth, coming to Spain at the period of the Inquisition, and is at once arrested as a heretic by the Grand Inquisitor. One of the three brothers of the story, Ivan, a rank materialist and an atheist of the new school, is supposed to throw this conception into the form of a poem, which he describes to Alyosha – the youngest of the brothers, a young Christian mystic brought up by a "saint" in a monastery – as follows: (– Ed. Theosophist, Nov., 1881)]*

"Quite impossible, as you see, to start without an introduction," laughed Ivan. "Well, then, I mean to place the event described in the poem in the sixteenth century, an age – as you must have been told at school – when it was the great fashion among poets to make the denizens and powers of higher worlds descend on earth and mix freely with mortals..."

"My poem is of the same character.

"In it, it is Christ who appears on the scene. True, He says nothing, but only appears and passes out of sight. Fifteen centuries have elapsed since He left the world with the distinct promise to return 'with power and great glory'; fifteen long centuries since His prophet cried, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord!' since He Himself had foretold, while yet on earth, 'Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven but my Father only.' But Christendom expects Him still. ...

"True, again, we have all heard of miracles being wrought ever since the 'age of miracles' passed away to return no more. We had, and still have, our saints credited with performing the most miraculous cures; and, if we can believe their biographers, there have been those among them who have been personally visited by the Queen of Heaven. But Satan sleepeth not, and the first germs of doubt, and ever-increasing unbelief in such wonders, already had begun to sprout in Christendom as early as the sixteenth century. It was just at that time that a new and terrible heresy first made its appearance in the north of Germany.\* [\*Luther's reform] A great star 'shining as it were a lamp... fell upon the fountains waters'... and 'they were made bitter.' This 'heresy' blasphemously denied 'miracles.' But those who had remained faithful believed all the more ardently, the tears of mankind ascended to Him as heretofore, and the Christian world was expecting Him as confidently as ever; they loved Him and hoped in Him, thirsted and hungered to suffer and die for Him just as many of them had done before.... So many centuries had weak, trusting humanity implored Him, crying with ardent faith and fervour: 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not come!' So many long centuries hath it vainly appealed to Him, that at last, in His inexhaustible

compassion, He consenteth to answer the prayer.... He decideth that once more, if it were but for one short hour, the people – His long-suffering, tortured, fatally sinful, his loving and child-like, trusting people – shall behold Him again. The scene of action is placed by me in Spain, at Seville, during that terrible period of the Inquisition, when, for the greater glory of God, stakes were flaming all over the country.

Burning wicked heretics,  
In grand auto-da-fes.

"This particular visit has, of course, nothing to do with the promised Advent, when, according to the programme, 'after the tribulation of those days,' He will appear 'coming in the clouds of heaven.' For, that 'coming of the Son of Man,' as we are informed, will take place as suddenly 'as the lightning cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west.' No; this once, He desired to come unknown, and appear among His children, just when the bones of the heretics, sentenced to be burnt alive, had commenced crackling at the flaming stakes. Owing to His limitless mercy, He mixes once more with mortals and in the same form in which He was wont to appear fifteen centuries ago. He descends, just at the very moment when before king, courtiers, knights, cardinals, and the fairest dames of court, before the whole population of Seville, upwards of a hundred wicked heretics are being roasted, in a magnificent auto-da-fe ad majorem Dei gloriam, by the order of the powerful Cardinal Grand Inquisitor.

"He comes silently and unannounced; yet all – how strange – yea, all recognize Him, at once! The population rushes towards Him as if propelled by some irresistible force; it surrounds, throngs, and presses around, it follows Him.... Silently, and with a smile of boundless compassion upon His lips, He crosses the dense crowd, and moves softly on. The Sun of Love burns in His heart, and warm rays of Light, Wisdom and Power beam forth from His eyes, and pour down their waves upon the swarming multitudes of the rabble assembled around, making their hearts vibrate with returning love. He extends His hands over their heads, blesses them, and from mere contact with Him, aye, even with His garments, a healing power goes forth. An old man, blind from his birth, cries, 'Lord, heal me, that I may see Thee!' and the scales falling off the closed eyes, the blind man beholds Him... The crowd weeps for joy, and kisses the ground upon which He treads. Children strew flowers along His path and sing to Him, 'Hosanna!' It is He, it is Himself, they say to each other, it must be He, it can be none other but He! He pauses at the portal of the old cathedral, just as a wee white coffin is carried in, with tears and great lamentations. The lid is off, and in the coffin lies the body of a fair-child, seven years old, the only child of an eminent citizen of the city. The little corpse lies buried in flowers. 'He will raise the child to life!' confidently shouts the crowd to the weeping mother. The officiating priest who had come to meet the funeral procession, looks perplexed, and frowns. A loud cry is suddenly heard, and the bereaved mother prostrates herself at His feet. 'If it be Thou, then bring back my child to life!' she cries beseechingly. The procession halts, and the little coffin is gently lowered at his feet. Divine compassion beams forth from His eyes, and as He looks at the child, His lips are heard to whisper once more, 'Talitha Cumi' – and 'straightway the damsel



arose.' The child rises in her coffin. Her little hands still hold the nosegay of white roses which after death was placed in them, and, looking round with large astonished eyes she smiles sweetly .... The crowd is violently excited. A terrible commotion rages among them, the populace shouts and loudly weeps, when suddenly, before the cathedral door, appears the Cardinal Grand Inquisitor himself.... He is a tall, gaunt-looking old man of nearly four-score years and ten, with a stern, withered face, and deeply sunken eyes, from the cavity of which glitter two fiery sparks. He has laid aside his gorgeous cardinal's robes in which he had appeared before the people at the auto da-fé of the enemies of the Romish Church, and is now clad in his old, rough, monkish cassock. His sullen assistants and slaves of the 'holy guard' are following at a distance. He pauses before the crowd and observes. He has seen all. He has witnessed the placing of the little coffin at His feet, the calling back to life. And now, his dark, grim face has grown still darker; his bushy grey eyebrows nearly meet, and his sunken eye flashes with sinister light. Slowly raising his finger, he commands his minions to arrest Him....

"Such is his power over the well-disciplined, submissive and now trembling people, that the thick crowds immediately give way, and scattering before the guard, amid dead silence and without one breath of protest, allow them to lay their sacrilegious hands upon the stranger and lead Him away.... That same populace, like one man, now bows its head to the ground before the old Inquisitor, who blesses it and slowly moves onward. The guards conduct their prisoner to the ancient building of the Holy Tribunal; pushing Him into a narrow, gloomy, vaulted prison-cell, they lock Him in and retire....

"The day wanes, and night – a dark, hot breathless Spanish night – creeps on and settles upon the city of Seville. The air smells of laurels and orange blossoms. In the Cimmerian darkness of the old Tribunal Hall the iron door of the cell is suddenly thrown open, and the Grand Inquisitor, holding a dark lantern, slowly stalks into the dungeon. He is alone, and, as the heavy door closes behind him, he pauses at the threshold, and, for a minute or two, silently and gloomily scrutinizes the Face before him. At last approaching with measured steps, he sets his lantern down upon the table and addresses Him in these words:

"'It is Thou! ... Thou!' ... Receiving no reply, he rapidly continues: 'Nay, answer not; be silent! ... And what couldst Thou say? ... I know but too well Thy answer.... Besides, Thou hast no right to add one syllable to that which was already uttered by Thee before.... Why shouldst Thou now return, to impede us in our work? For Thou hast come but for that only, and Thou knowest it well. But art Thou as well aware of what awaits Thee in the morning? I do not know, nor do I care to know who thou mayest be: be it Thou or only thine image, to-morrow I will condemn and burn Thee on the stake, as the most wicked of all the heretics; and that same people, who to-day were kissing Thy feet, to-morrow at one bend of my finger, will rush to add fuel to Thy funeral pile... Wert Thou aware of this?' he adds, speaking as if in solemn thought, and never for one instant taking his piercing glance off the meek Face before him."....

"I can hardly realize the situation described – what is all this, Ivan?" suddenly interrupted Alyosha, who had remained silently listening to his brother. "Is this an extravagant fancy, or some mistake of the old man, an impossible quid pro quo?"

"Let it be the latter, if you like," laughed Ivan, "since modern realism has so perverted your taste that you feel unable to realize anything from the world of fancy.... Let it be a quid pro quo, if you so choose it. Again, the Inquisitor is ninety years old, and he might have easily gone mad with his one idee fixe of power; or, it might have as well been a delirious vision, called forth by dying fancy, overheated by the auto-da-fe of the hundred heretics in that forenoon.... But what matters for the poem, whether it was a quid pro quo or an uncontrollable fancy? The question is, that the old man has to open his heart; that he must give out his thought at last; and that the hour has come when he does speak it out, and says loudly that which for ninety years he has kept secret within his own breast."

"And his prisoner, does He never reply? Does He keep silent, looking at him, without saying a word?"

"Of course; and it could not well be otherwise," again retorted Ivan. "The Grand Inquisitor begins from his very first words by telling Him that He has no right to add one syllable to that which He had said before. To make the situation clear at once, the above preliminary monologue is intended to convey to the reader the very fundamental idea which underlies Roman Catholicism – as well as I can convey it, his words mean, in short: 'Everything was given over by Thee to the Pope, and everything now rests with him alone; Thou hast no business to return and thus hinder us in our work.' In this sense the Jesuits not only talk but write likewise.

"'Hast thou the right to divulge to us a single one of the mysteries of that world whence Thou comest?' enquires of Him my old Inquisitor, and forthwith answers for Him. 'Nay, Thou has no such right. For, that would be adding to that which was already said by Thee before; hence depriving people of that freedom for which Thou hast so stoutly stood up while yet on earth.... Anything new that Thou would now proclaim would have to be regarded as an attempt to interfere with that freedom of choice, as it would come as a new and a miraculous revelation superseding the old revelation of fifteen hundred years ago, when Thou didst so repeatedly tell the people: 'The truth shall make you free.' Behold then, Thy "free" people now!' adds the old man with sombre irony. 'Yea!... it has cost us dearly.' he continues, sternly looking at his victim. 'But we have at last accomplished our task, and – in Thy name.... For fifteen long centuries we had to toil and suffer owing to that "freedom": but now we have prevailed and our work is done, and well and strongly it is done. ....Believest not Thou it is so very strong? ... And why should Thou look at me so meekly as if I were not worthy even of Thy indignation?... Know then, that now, and only now, Thy people feel fully sure and satisfied of their freedom; and that only since they have themselves and of their own free will delivered that freedom unto our hands by placing it submissively at our feet. But then, that is what we have done. Is it that which Thou has striven for? Is this the kind of "freedom" Thou has promised them?'"

"Now again, I do not understand," interrupted Alyosha. "Does the old man mock and laugh?"

"Not in the least. He seriously regards it as a great service done by himself, his brother monks and Jesuits, to humanity, to have conquered and subjected unto their authority that freedom, and boasts that it was done but for the good of the world. 'For only now,' he says (speaking of the Inquisition) 'has it become possible to us, for the first time, to give a serious thought to human happiness. Man is born a rebel, and can rebels be ever happy?... Thou has been fairly warned of it, but evidently to no use, since Thou hast rejected the only means which could make mankind happy; fortunately at Thy departure Thou hast delivered the task to us.... Thou has promised, ratifying the pledge by Thy own words, in words giving us the right to bind and unbind... and surely, Thou couldst not think of depriving us of it now!'"

"But what can he mean by the words, 'Thou has been fairly warned'?" asked Alexi.

"These words give the key to what the old man has to say for his justification... But listen—

"'The terrible and wise spirit, the spirit of self annihilation and non-being,' goes on the Inquisitor, 'the great spirit of negation conversed with Thee in the wilderness, and we are told that he "tempted" Thee... Was it so? And if it were so, then it is impossible to utter anything more truthful than what is contained in his three offers, which Thou didst reject, and which are usually called "temptations." Yea; if ever there was on earth a genuine striking wonder produced, it was on that day of Thy three temptations, and it is precisely in these three short sentences that the marvelous miracle is contained. If it were possible that they should vanish and disappear for ever, without leaving any trace, from the record and from the memory of man, and that it should become necessary again to devise, invent, and make them reappear in Thy history once more, thinkest Thou that all the world's sages, all the legislators, initiates, philosophers and thinkers, if called upon to frame three questions which should, like these, besides answering the magnitude of the event, express in three short sentences the whole future history of this our world and of mankind— dost Thou believe, I ask Thee, that all their combined efforts could ever create anything equal in power and depth of thought to the three propositions offered Thee by the powerful and all-wise spirit in the wilderness? Judging of them by their marvelous aptness alone, one can at once perceive that they emanated not from a finite, terrestrial intellect, but indeed, from the Eternal and the Absolute. In these three offers we find, blended into one and foretold to us, the complete subsequent history of man; we are shown three images, so to say, uniting in them all the future axiomatic, insoluble problems and contradictions of human nature, the world over. In those days, the wondrous wisdom contained in them was not made so apparent as it is now, for futurity remained still veiled; but now, when fifteen centuries have elapsed, we see that everything in these three questions is so marvelously foreseen and foretold, that to add to, or to take away from, the prophecy one jot, would be absolutely impossible!

"Decide then thyself.' sternly proceeded the Inquisitor, 'which of ye twain was right: Thou who didst reject, or he who offered? Remember the subtle meaning of question the first, which runs thus: Wouldst Thou go into the world empty-handed? Would Thou venture thither with Thy vague and undefined promise of freedom, which men, dull and unruly as they are by nature, are unable so much as to understand, which they avoid and fear? – for never was there anything more unbearable to the human race than personal freedom! Dost Thou see these stones in the desolate and glaring wilderness? Command that these stones be made bread – and mankind will run after Thee, obedient and grateful like a herd of cattle. But even then it will be ever diffident and trembling, lest Thou should take away Thy hand, and they lose thereby their bread! Thou didst refuse to accept the offer for fear of depriving men of their free choice; for where is there freedom of choice where men are bribed with bread? Man shall not live by bread alone – was Thine answer. Thou knewest not, it seems, that it was precisely in the name of that earthly bread that the terrestrial spirit would one day rise against, struggle with, and finally conquer Thee, followed by the hungry multitudes shouting: "Who is like unto that Beast, who maketh fire come down from heaven upon the earth!" Knowest Thou not that, but a few centuries hence, and the whole of mankind will have proclaimed in its wisdom and through its mouthpiece, Science, that there is no more crime, hence no more sin on earth, but only hungry people? "Feed us first and then command us to be virtuous!" will be the words written upon the banner lifted against Thee – a banner which shall destroy Thy Church to its very foundations, and in the place of Thy Temple shall raise once more the terrible Tower of Babel; and though its building be left unfinished, as was that of the first one, yet the fact will remain recorded that Thou couldst, but wouldst not, prevent the attempt to build that new tower by accepting the offer, and thus saving mankind a millennium of useless suffering on earth. And it is to us that the people will return again. They will search for us catacombs, as we shall once more be persecuted and martyred – and they will begin crying unto us: "Feed us, for they who promised us the fire from heaven have deceived us!" It is then that we will finish building their tower for them. For they alone who feed them shall finish it, and we shall feed them in Thy name, and lying to them that it is in that name. Oh, never, never, will they learn to feed themselves without our help! No science will ever give them bread so long as they remain free, so long as they refuse to lay that freedom at our feet, and say: "Enslave, but feed us!" That day must come when men will understand that freedom and daily bread enough to satisfy all are unthinkable and can never be had together, as men will never be able to fairly divide the two among themselves. And they will also learn that they can never be free, for they are weak, vicious, miserable nonentities born wicked and rebellious. Thou has promised to them the bread of life, the bread of heaven; but I ask Thee again, can that bread ever equal in the sight of the weak and the vicious, the ever ungrateful human race, their daily bread on earth? And even supposing that thousands and tens of thousands follow Thee in the name of, and for the sake of, Thy heavenly bread, what will become of the millions and hundreds of millions of human beings too weak to scorn the earthly for the sake of Thy heavenly bread? Or is it but those tens of thousands chosen among the great and the mighty, that are so dear to Thee, while the remaining millions, innumerable as the



grains of sand in the seas, the weak and the loving, have to be used as material for the former? No, no! In our sight and for our purpose the weak and the lowly are the more dear to us. True, they are vicious and rebellious, but we will force them into obedience, and it is they who will admire us the most. They will regard us as gods, and feel grateful to those who have consented to lead the masses and bear their burden of freedom by ruling over them – so terrible will that freedom at last appear to men! Then we will tell them that it is in obedience to Thy will and in Thy name that we rule over them. We will deceive them once more and lie to them once again – for never, never more will we allow Thee to come among us. In this deception we will find our suffering, for we must needs lie eternally, and never cease to lie!

"Such is the secret meaning of "temptation" the first, and that is what Thou didst reject in the wilderness for the sake of that freedom which Thou didst prize above all. Meanwhile Thy tempter's offer contained another great world-mystery. By accepting the "bread," Thou wouldst have satisfied and answered a universal craving, a ceaseless longing alive in the heart of every individual human being, lurking in the breast of collective mankind, that most perplexing problem – "whom or what shall we worship?" There exists no greater or more painful anxiety for a man who has freed himself from all religious bias, than how he shall soonest find a new object or idea to worship. But man seeks to bow before that only which is recognized by the greater majority, if not by all his fellow-men, as having a right to be worshipped; whose rights are so unquestionable that men agree unanimously to bow down to it. For the chief concern of these miserable creatures is not to find and worship the idol of their own choice, but to discover that which all others will believe in, and consent to bow down to in a mass. It is that instinctive need of having a worship in common that is the chief suffering of every man, the chief concern of mankind from the beginning of times. It is for that universality of religious worship that people destroyed each other by sword. Creating gods unto themselves, they forthwith began appealing to each other: "Abandon your deities, come and bow down to ours, or death to ye and your idols!" And so will they do till the end of this world; they will do so even then, when all the gods themselves have disappeared, for then men will prostrate themselves before and worship some idea. Thou didst know, Thou couldst not be ignorant of, that mysterious fundamental principle in human nature, and still thou hast rejected the only absolute banner offered Thee, to which all the nations would remain true, and before which all would have bowed – the banner of earthly bread, rejected in the name of freedom and of "bread in the kingdom of God"! Behold, then, what Thou hast done furthermore for that "freedom's" sake! I repeat to Thee, man has no greater anxiety in life than to find some one to whom he can make over that gift of freedom with which the unfortunate creature is born. But he alone will prove capable of silencing and quieting their consciences, that shall succeed in possessing himself of the freedom of men. With "daily bread" an irresistible power was offered Thee: show a man "bread" and he will follow Thee, for what can he resist less than the attraction of bread? But if, at the same time, another succeed in possessing himself of his conscience – oh! then even Thy bread will be forgotten, and man will follow him who seduced his conscience. So far Thou wert right. For the mystery of human being does not solely rest in the desire to live, but in the

problem – for what should one live at all? Without a clear perception of his reasons for living, man will never consent to live, and will rather destroy himself than tarry on earth, though he be surrounded with bread. This is the truth. But what has happened? Instead of getting hold of man's freedom, Thou has enlarged it still more! Hast Thou again forgotten that to man rest and even death are preferable to a free choice between the knowledge of Good and Evil? Nothing seems more seductive in his eyes than freedom of conscience, and nothing proves more painful. And behold! instead of laying a firm foundation whereon to rest once for all man's conscience, Thou hast chosen to stir up in him all that is abnormal, mysterious, and indefinite, all that is beyond human strength, and has acted as if Thou never hadst any love for him, and yet Thou wert He who came to "lay down His life for His friends!" Thou hast burdened man's soul with anxieties hitherto unknown to him. Thirsting for human love freely given, seeking to enable man, seduced and charmed by Thee, to follow Thy path of his own free-will, instead of the old and wise law which held him in subjection, Thou hast given him the right henceforth to choose and freely decide what is good and bad for him, guided but by Thine image in his heart. But hast Thou never dreamt of the probability, nay, of the certainty, of that same man one day rejected finally, and controverting even Thine image and Thy truth, once he would find himself laden with such a terrible burden as freedom of choice? That a time would surely come when men would exclaim that Truth and Light cannot be in Thee, for no one could have left them in a greater perplexity and mental suffering than Thou has done, lading them with so many cares and insoluble problems. Thus, it is Thyself who hast laid the foundation for the destruction of Thine own kingdom and no one but Thou is to be blamed for it.

"Meantime, every chance of success was offered Thee. There are three Powers, three unique Forces upon earth, capable of conquering for ever by charming the conscience of these weak rebels – men – for their own good; and these Forces are: Miracle, Mystery and Authority. Thou hast rejected all the three, and thus wert the first to set them an example. When the terrible and all-wise spirit placed Thee on a pinnacle of the temple and said unto Thee, "If Thou be the son of God, cast Thyself down, for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee: and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time Thou dash Thy foot against a stone!" – for thus Thy faith in Thy father should have been made evident, Thou didst refuse to accept his suggestion and didst not follow it. Oh, undoubtedly, Thou didst act in this with all the magnificent pride of a god, but then men – that weak and rebel race – are they also gods, to understand Thy refusal? Of course, Thou didst well know that by taking one single step forward, by making the slightest motion to throw Thyself down, Thou wouldst have tempted "the Lord Thy God," lost suddenly all faith in Him, and dashed Thyself to atoms against that same earth which Thou camest to save, and thus wouldst have allowed the wise spirit which tempted Thee to triumph and rejoice. But, then, how many such as Thee are to be found on this globe, I ask Thee? Couldst Thou ever for a moment imagine that men would have the same strength to resist such a temptation? Is human nature calculated to reject miracle, and trust, during the most terrible moments in life, when the most momentous, painful and perplexing problems struggle within man's soul, to the free decisions of his heart for the true solution? Oh, Thou knewest

well that that action of Thine would remain recorded in books for ages to come, reaching to the confines of the globe, and Thy hope was, that following Thy example, man would remain true to his God, without needing any miracle to keep his faith alive! But Thou knewest not, it seems, that no sooner would man reject miracle than he would reject God likewise, for he seeketh less God than "a sign" from Him. And thus, as it is beyond the power of man to remain without miracles, so, rather than live without, he will create for himself new wonders of his own making; and he will bow to and worship the soothsayer's miracles, the old witch's sorcery, were he a rebel, a heretic, and an atheist a hundred times over. Thy refusal to come down from the cross when people, mocking and wagging their heads were saying to Thee – "Save Thyself if Thou be the son of God, and we will believe in Thee," was due to the same determination – not to enslave man through miracle, but to obtain faith in Thee freely and apart from any miraculous influence. Thou thirstest for free and uninfluenced love, and refuses the passionate adoration of the slave before a Potency which would have subjected his will once for ever. Thou judges of men too highly here, again, for though rebels they be, they are born slaves and nothing more. Behold, and judge of them once more, now that fifteen centuries have elapsed since that moment. Look at them, whom Thou didst try to elevate unto Thee! I swear man is weaker and lower than Thou hast ever imagined him to be! Can he ever do that which Thou art said to have accomplished? By valuing him so highly Thou hast acted as if there were no love for him in Thine heart, for Thou hast demanded of him more than he could ever give – Thou, who loves him more than Thyself! Hadst Thou esteemed him less, less wouldst Thou have demanded of him, and that would have been more like love, for his burden would have been made thereby lighter. Man is weak and cowardly. What matters it, if he now riots and rebels throughout the world against our will and power, and prides himself upon that rebellion? It is but the petty pride and vanity of a school-boy. It is the rioting of little children, getting up a mutiny in the class-room and driving their schoolmaster out of it. But it will not last long, and when the day of their triumph is over, they will have to pay dearly for it. They will destroy the temples and raze them to the ground, flooding the earth with blood. But the foolish children will have to learn some day that, rebels though they be and riotous from nature, they are too weak to maintain the spirit of mutiny for any length of time. Suffused with idiotic tears, they will confess that He who created them rebellious undoubtedly did so but to mock them. They will pronounce these words in despair, and such blasphemous utterances will but add to their misery – for human nature cannot endure blasphemy, and takes her own revenge in the end.

"And thus, after all Thou has suffered for mankind and its freedom, the present fate of men may be summed up in three words: Unrest, Confusion, Misery! Thy great prophet John records in his vision, that he saw, during the first resurrection of the chosen servants of God – "the number of them which were sealed" in their foreheads, "twelve thousand" of every tribe. But were they, indeed, as many? Then they must have been gods, not men. They had shared Thy Cross for long years, suffered scores of years' hunger and thirst in dreary wildernesses and deserts, feeding upon locusts and roots – and of these children of free love for Thee, and self-sacrifice in Thy name, Thou mayest well feel proud. But remember that these are but a few thousands – of gods, not men;

and how about all others? And why should the weakest be held guilty for not being able to endure what the strongest have endured? Why should a soul incapable of containing such terrible gifts be punished for its weakness? Didst Thou really come to, and for, the "elect" alone? If so, then the mystery will remain for ever mysterious to our finite minds. And if a mystery, then were we right to proclaim it as one, and preach it, teaching them that neither their freely given love to Thee nor freedom of conscience were essential, but only that incomprehensible mystery which they must blindly obey even against the dictates of their conscience. Thus did we. We corrected and improved Thy teaching and based it upon "Miracle, Mystery, and Authority." And men rejoiced at finding themselves led once more like a herd of cattle, and at finding their hearts at last delivered of the terrible burden laid upon them by Thee, which caused them so much suffering. Tell me, were we right in doing as we did. Did not we show our great love for humanity, by realizing in such a humble spirit its helplessness, by so mercifully lightening its great burden, and by permitting and remitting for its weak nature every sin, provided it be committed with our authorization? For what, then, hast Thou come again to trouble us in our work? And why looks Thou at me so penetratingly with Thy meek eyes, and in such a silence? Rather should Thou feel wroth, for I need not Thy love, I reject it, and love Thee not, myself. Why should I conceal the truth from Thee? I know but too well with whom I am now talking! What I had to say was known to Thee before, I read it in Thine eye. How should I conceal from Thee our secret? If perchance Thou wouldst hear it from my own lips, then listen: We are not with Thee, but with him, and that is our secret! For centuries have we abandoned Thee to follow him, yes – eight centuries. Eight hundred years now since we accepted from him the gift rejected by Thee with indignation; that last gift which he offered Thee from the high mountain when, showing all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, he saith unto Thee: "All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me!" We took Rome from him and the glaive of Caesar, and declared ourselves alone the kings of this earth, its sole kings, though our work is not yet fully accomplished. But who is to blame for it? Our work is but in its incipient stage, but it is nevertheless started. We may have long to wait until its culmination, and mankind have to suffer much, but we shall reach the goal some day, and become sole Caesars, and then will be the time to think of universal happiness for men.

"Thou could accept the glaive of Caesar Thyself; why didst Thou reject the offer? By accepting from the powerful spirit his third offer Thou would have realized every aspiration man seeketh for himself on earth; man would have found a constant object for worship; one to deliver his conscience up to, and one that should unite all together into one common and harmonious ant-hill; for an innate necessity for universal union constitutes the third and final affliction of mankind. Humanity as a whole has ever aspired to unite itself universally. Many were, the great nations with great histories, but the greater they were, the more unhappy they felt, as they felt the stronger necessity of a universal union among men. Great conquerors, like Timor and Tchengis-Khan, passed like a cyclone upon the face of the earth in their efforts to conquer the universe, but even they, albeit unconsciously, expressed the same aspiration towards universal and common union. In accepting the kingdom of the world and Caesar's purple, one would

found a universal kingdom and secure to mankind eternal peace. And who can rule mankind better than those who have possessed themselves of man's conscience, and hold in their hand man's daily bread? Having accepted Caesar's glaive and purple, we had, of course, but to deny Thee, to henceforth follow him alone. Oh, centuries of intellectual riot and rebellious free thought are yet before us, and their science will end by anthropophagy, for having begun to build their Babylonian tower without our help they will have to end by anthropophagy. But it is precisely at that time that the Beast will crawl up to us in full submission, and lick the soles of our feet, and sprinkle them with tears of blood and we shall sit upon the scarlet-colored Beast, and lifting up high the golden cup "full of abomination and filthiness," shall show written upon it the word "Mystery"! But it is only then that men will see the beginning of a kingdom of peace and happiness. Thou art proud of Thine own elect, but Thou has none other but these elect, and we – we will give rest to all. But that is not the end. Many are those among thine elect and the laborers of Thy vineyard, who, tired of waiting for Thy coming, already have carried and will yet carry, the great fervor of their hearts and their spiritual strength into another field, and will end by lifting up against Thee Thine own banner of freedom. But it is Thyself Thou hast to thank. Under our rule and sway all will be happy, and will neither rebel nor destroy each other as they did while under Thy free banner. Oh, we will take good care to prove to them that they will become absolutely free only when they have abjured their freedom in our favor and submit to us absolutely. Think Thou we shall be right or still lying? They will convince themselves of our rightness, for they will see what a depth of degrading slavery and strife that liberty of Thine has led them into. Liberty, Freedom of Thought and Conscience, and Science will lead them into such impassable chasms, place them face to face before such wonders and insoluble mysteries, that some of them – more rebellious and ferocious than the rest – will destroy themselves; others – rebellious but weak – will destroy each other; while the remainder, weak, helpless and miserable, will crawl back to our feet and cry: "Yes; right were ye, oh Fathers of Jesus; ye alone are in possession of His mystery, and we return to you, praying that ye save us from ourselves!" Receiving their bread from us, they will clearly see that we take the bread from them, the bread made by their own hands, but to give it back to them in equal shares and that without any miracle; and having ascertained that, though we have not changed stones into bread, yet bread they have, while every other bread turned verily in their own hands into stones, they will be only to glad to have it so. Until that day, they will never be happy. And who is it that helped the most to blind them, tell me? Who separated the flock and scattered it over ways unknown if it be not Thee? But we will gather the sheep once more and subject them to our will for ever. We will prove to them their own weakness and make them humble again, whilst with Thee they have learnt but pride, for Thou hast made more of them than they ever were worth. We will give them that quiet, humble happiness, which alone benefits such weak, foolish creatures as they are, and having once had proved to them their weakness, they will become timid and obedient, and gather around us as chickens around their hen. They will wonder at and feel a superstitious admiration for us, and feel proud to be led by men so powerful and wise that a handful of them can subject a flock a thousand millions strong. Gradually men

will begin to fear us. They will nervously dread our slightest anger, their intellects will weaken, their eyes become as easily accessible to tears as those of children and women; but we will teach them an easy transition from grief and tears to laughter, childish joy and mirthful song. Yes; we will make them work like slaves, but during their recreation hours they shall have an innocent child-like life, full of play and merry laughter. We will even permit them sin, for, weak and helpless, they will feel the more love for us for permitting them to indulge in it. We will tell them that every kind of sin will be remitted to them, so long as it is done with our permission; that we take all these sins upon ourselves, for we so love the world, that we are even willing to sacrifice our souls for its satisfaction. And, appearing before them in the light of their scapegoats and redeemers, we shall be adored the more for it. They will have no secrets from us. It will rest with us to permit them to live with their wives and concubines, or to forbid them, to have children or remain childless, either way depending on the degree of their obedience to us; and they will submit most joyfully to us the most agonizing secrets of their souls – all, all will they lay down at our feet, and we will authorize and remit them all in Thy name, and they will believe us and accept our mediation with rapture, as it will deliver them from their greatest anxiety and torture – that of having to decide freely for themselves. And all will be happy, all except the one or two hundred thousands of their rulers. For it is but we, we the keepers of the great Mystery who will be miserable. There will be thousands of millions of happy infants, and one hundred thousand martyrs who have taken upon themselves the curse of knowledge of good and evil. Peaceable will be their end, and peacefully will they die, in Thy name, to find behind the portals of the grave – but death. But we will keep the secret inviolate, and deceive them for their own good with the mirage of life eternal in Thy kingdom. For, were there really anything like life beyond the grave, surely it would never fall to the lot of such as they! People tell us and prophesy of Thy coming and triumphing once more on earth; of Thy appearing with the army of Thy elect, with Thy proud and mighty ones; but we will answer Thee that they have saved but themselves while we have saved all. We are also threatened with the great disgrace which awaits the whore, "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots" – who sits upon the Beast, holding in her hands the Mystery, the word written upon her forehead; and we are told that the weak ones, the lambs shall rebel against her and shall make her desolate and naked. But then will I arise, and point out to Thee the thousands of millions of happy infants free from any sin. And we who have taken their sins upon us, for their own good, shall stand before Thee and say: "Judge us if Thou canst and darest!" Know then that I fear Thee not. Know that I too have lived in the dreary wilderness, where I fed upon locusts and roots, that I too have blessed freedom with which thou hast blessed men, and that I too have once prepared to join the ranks of Thy elect, the proud and the mighty. But I awoke from my delusion and refused since then to serve insanity. I returned to join the legion of those who corrected Thy mistakes. I left the proud and returned to the really humble, and for their own happiness. What I now tell thee will come to pass, and our kingdom shall be built, I tell Thee not later than to-morrow Thou shalt see that obedient flock which at one simple motion of my hand will rush to add burning coals to Thy stake, on which I will burn Thee for having dared to come and trouble us in our work.

For, if there ever was one who deserved more than any of the others our inquisitorial fires – it is Thee! To-morrow I will burn Thee. Dixi! "

Ivan paused. He had entered into the situation and had spoken with great animation, but now he suddenly burst out laughing.

"But all that is absurd!" suddenly exclaimed Alyosha, who had hitherto listened perplexed and agitated but in profound silence. "Your poem is a glorification of Christ, not an accusation, as you, perhaps, meant to be. And who will believe you when you speak of 'freedom'? Is it thus that we Christians must understand it? It is Rome (not all Rome, for that would be unjust), but the worst of the Roman Catholics, the Inquisitors and Jesuits, that you have been exposing! Your Inquisitor is an impossible character. What are these sins they are taking upon themselves? Who are those keepers of mystery who took upon themselves a curse for the good of mankind? Who ever met them? We all know the Jesuits, and no one has a good word to say in their favor; but when were they as you depict them? Never, never! The Jesuits are merely a Romish army making ready for their future temporal kingdom, with a mitered emperor – a Roman high priest at their head. That is their ideal and object, without any mystery or elevated suffering. The most prosaic thirsting for power, for the sake of the mean and earthly pleasures of life, a desire to enslave their fellow-men, something like our late system of serfs, with themselves at the head as landed proprietors – that is all that they can be accused of. They may not believe in God, that is also possible, but your suffering Inquisitor is simply – a fancy!"

"Hold, hold!" interrupted Ivan, smiling. "Do not be so excited. A fancy, you say; be it so! Of course, it is a fancy. But stop. Do you really imagine that all this Catholic movement during the last centuries is naught but a desire for power for the mere purpose of 'mean pleasures'? Is this what your Father Paissy taught you?"

"No, no, quite the reverse, for Father Paissy once told me something very similar to what you yourself say, though, of course, not that – something quite different," suddenly added Alexi, blushing.

"A precious piece of information, notwithstanding your 'not that.' I ask you, why should the Inquisitors and the Jesuits of your imagination live but for the attainment of 'mean material pleasures?' Why should there not be found among them one single genuine martyr suffering under a great and holy idea and loving humanity with all his heart? Now let us suppose that among all these Jesuits thirsting and hungering but after 'mean material pleasures' there may be one, just one like my old Inquisitor, who had himself fed upon roots in the wilderness, suffered the tortures of damnation while trying to conquer flesh, in order to become free and perfect, but who had never ceased to love humanity, and who one day prophetically beheld the truth; who saw as plain as he could see that the bulk of humanity could never be happy under the old system, that it was not for them that the great Idealist had come and died and dreamt of His Universal Harmony. Having realized that truth, he returned into the world and joined – intelligent and practical people. Is this so impossible?"

"Joined whom? What intelligent and practical people?" exclaimed Alyosha quite excited. "Why should they be more intelligent than other men, and what secrets and mysteries can they have? They have neither. Atheism and infidelity is all the secret they have. Your Inquisitor does not believe in God, and that is all the Mystery there is in it!"

"It may be so. You have guessed rightly there. And it is so, and that is his whole secret; but is this not the acutest sufferings for such a man as he, who killed all his young life in asceticism in the desert, and yet could not cure himself of his love towards his fellowmen? Toward the end of his life he becomes convinced that it is only by following the advice of the great and terrible spirit that the fate of these millions of weak rebels, these 'half-finished samples of humanity created in mockery' can be made tolerable. And once convinced of it, he sees as clearly that to achieve that object, one must follow blindly the guidance of the wise spirit, the fearful spirit of death and destruction, hence accept a system of lies and deception and lead humanity consciously this time toward death and destruction, and moreover, be deceiving them all the while in order to prevent them from realizing where they are being led, and so force the miserable blind men to feel happy, at least while here on earth. And note this: a wholesale deception in the name of Him, in whose ideal the old man had so passionately, so fervently, believed during nearly his whole life! Is this no suffering? And were such a solitary exception found amidst, and at the head of, that army 'that thirsts for power but for the sake of the mean pleasures of life,' think you one such man would not suffice to bring on a tragedy? Moreover, one single man like my Inquisitor as a principal leader, would prove sufficient to discover the real guiding idea of the Romish system with all its armies of Jesuits, the greatest and chiefest conviction that the solitary type described in my poem has at no time ever disappeared from among the chief leaders of that movement. Who knows but that terrible old man, loving humanity so stubbornly and in such an original way, exists even in our days in the shape of a whole host of such solitary exceptions, whose existence is not due to mere chance, but to a well-defined association born of mutual consent, to a secret league, organized several centuries back, in order to guard the Mystery from the indiscreet eyes of the miserable and weak people, and only in view of their own happiness? And so it is; it cannot be otherwise. I suspect that even Masons have some such Mystery underlying the basis of their organization, and that it is just the reason why the Roman Catholic clergy hate them so, dreading to find in them rivals, competition, the dismemberment of the unity of the idea, for the realization of which one flock and one Shepherd are needed. However, in defending my idea, I look like an author whose production is unable to stand criticism. Enough of this."

"You are, perhaps, a Mason yourself!" exclaimed Alyosha. "You do not believe in God," he added, with a note of profound sadness in his voice. But suddenly remarking that his brother was looking at him with mockery, "How do you mean then to bring your poem to a close?" he unexpectedly enquired, casting his eyes downward, "or does it break off here?"



"My intention is to end it with the following scene: Having disburdened his heart, the Inquisitor waits for some time to hear his prisoner speak in His turn. His silence weighs upon him. He has seen that his captive has been attentively listening to him all the time, with His eyes fixed penetratingly and softly on the face of his jailer, and evidently bent upon not replying to him. The old man longs to hear His voice, to hear Him reply; better words of bitterness and scorn than His silence. Suddenly He rises; slowly and silently approaching the Inquisitor, He bends towards him and softly kisses the bloodless, four-score and-ten-year-old lips. That is all the answer. The Grand Inquisitor shudders. There is a convulsive twitch at the corner of his mouth. He goes to the door, opens it, and addressing Him, 'Go,' he says, 'go, and return no more... do not come again... never, never!' and – lets Him out into the dark night. The prisoner vanishes."

"And the old man?"

"The kiss burns his heart, but the old man remains firm in his own ideas and unbelief."

"And you, together with him? You too!" despairingly exclaimed Alyosha, while Ivan burst into a still louder fit of laughter.

*Fides Querens Intellectum.*

-St. Anselm

## **STARTING WITH FAITH OR STARTING WITH DOUBT**

### **Session Two**

#### **Questions**

- If we think of Eve and Mary as students, how would you characterize them? Who has a better approach to knowledge and truth?
- What is the value of starting with doubt? How does that shape our vision of life and reality?
- Why does faith lead us to understanding? And why does understanding need faith? Why is it ultimately better to start with faith than to start with doubt?

## **I. Mary and Eve: Thinking through ways of pursuing truth**

*As you read these two scriptural accounts, try to pay attention to these two women as students, person pursuing understanding. If they are types or symbols of the human pursuit of wisdom and knowledge, which one is the better symbol? And why?*

### **Genesis 3:1-6**

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" <sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; <sup>3</sup> but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" <sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. <sup>5</sup> For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." <sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.

### **Luke 1:26-38**

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born<sup>[c]</sup> will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God." <sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

## II. Doubt Seeking Certainty: Rene Descartes's *Meditations on First Philosophy*

*This is the beginning of Descartes' Meditations a classic of philosophical inquiry. Pay attention to the value of doubt for perceiving reality. Of note, Descartes is writing in a time when the world has almost literally been turned upside down due to the Copernican revolution which cast into doubt Aristotelian science and more importantly the capacity of our senses to actually perceive reality.*

FIRST MEDITATION: On what can be called into doubt

Some years ago I was struck by how many false things I had believed, and by how doubtful was the structure of beliefs that I had based on them. I realized that if I wanted to establish anything in the sciences that was stable and likely to last, I needed – just once in my life – to demolish everything completely and start again from the foundations. It looked like an enormous task, and I decided to wait until I was old enough to be sure that there was nothing to be gained from putting it off any longer. I have now delayed it for so long that I have no excuse for going on planning to do it rather than getting to work. So today I have set all my worries aside and arranged for myself a clear stretch of free time. I am here quite alone, and at last I will devote myself, sincerely and without holding back, to demolishing my opinions.

I can do this without showing that all my beliefs are false, which is probably more than I could ever manage. My reason tells me that as well as withholding assent from propositions that are obviously false, I should also withhold it from ones that are not completely certain and indubitable. So all I need, for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, is to find in each of them at least some reason for doubt. I can do this without going through them one by one, which would take forever: once the foundations of a building have been undermined, the rest collapses of its own accord; so I will go straight for the basic principles on which all my former beliefs rested.

Whatever I have accepted until now as most true has come to me through my senses. But occasionally I have found that they have deceived me, and it is unwise to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.

Yet although the senses sometimes deceive us about objects that are very small or distant, that doesn't apply to my belief that I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter dressing-gown, holding this piece of paper in my hands, and so on. It seems to be quite impossible to doubt beliefs like these, which come from the senses.

Another example: how can I doubt that these hands or this whole body are mine? To doubt such things I would have to liken myself to brain-damaged madmen who are convinced they are kings when really they are paupers, or say they are dressed in purple when they are naked, or that they are pumpkins, or made of glass. Such people are insane, and I would be thought equally mad if I modelled myself on them.

What a brilliant piece of reasoning! As if I were not a man who sleeps at night and often has all the same experiences while asleep as madmen do when awake – indeed

sometimes even more improbable ones. Often in my dreams I am convinced of just such familiar events – that I am sitting by the fire in my dressing-gown – when in fact I am lying undressed in bed! Yet right now my eyes are certainly wide open when I look at this piece of paper; I shake my head and it isn't asleep; when I rub one hand against the other, I do it deliberately and know what I am doing. This wouldn't all happen with such clarity to someone asleep.

Indeed! As if I didn't remember other occasions when I have been tricked by exactly similar thoughts while asleep! As I think about this more carefully, I realize that there is never any reliable way of distinguishing being awake from being asleep.

This discovery makes me feel dizzy, which itself reinforces the notion that I may be asleep! Suppose then that I am dreaming – it isn't true that I, with my eyes open, am moving my head and stretching out my hands. Suppose, indeed that I don't even have hands or any body at all....

However, I have for many years been sure that there is an all-powerful God who made me to be the sort of creature that I am. How do I know that he hasn't brought it about that there is no earth, no sky, nothing that takes up space, no shape, no size, no place, while making sure that all these things appear to me to exist? Anyway, I sometimes think that others go wrong even when they think they have the most perfect knowledge; so how do I know that I myself don't go wrong every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square? Well, you might say ; God would not let me be deceived like that, because he is said to be supremely good. But, I reply, if God's goodness would stop him from letting me be deceived all the time, you would expect it to stop him from allowing me to be deceived even occasionally; yet clearly I sometimes am deceived.

Some people would deny the existence of such a powerful God rather than believe that everything else is uncertain. Let us grant them – for purposes of argument – that there is no God, and theology is fiction. On their view, then, I am a product of fate or chance or a long chain of causes and effects. But the less powerful they make my original cause, the more likely it is that I am so imperfect as to be deceived all the time – because deception and error seem to be imperfections. Having no answer to these arguments, I am driven back to the position that doubts can properly be raised about any of my former beliefs. I don't reach this conclusion in a flippant or casual manner, but on the basis of powerful and well thought-out reasons. So in future, if I want to discover any certainty, I must withhold my assent from these former beliefs just as carefully as I withhold it from obvious falsehoods.

It isn't enough merely to have noticed this, though; I must make an effort to remember it. My old familiar opinions keep coming back, and against my will they capture my belief. It is as though they had a right to a place in my belief-system as a result of long occupation and the law of custom. It is true that these habitual opinions of mine are highly probable; although they are in a sense doubtful, as I have shown, it is more reasonable to believe than to deny them. But if I go on viewing them in that light I shall

never get out of the habit of confidently assenting to them. To conquer that habit, therefore, I had better switch right around and pretend (for a while) that these former opinions of mine are utterly false and imaginary. I shall do this until I have something to counter-balance the weight of old opinion, and the distorting influence of habit no longer prevents me from judging correctly....

### III. Faith Seeking Understanding

*In these readings, Augustine argues both for the rationality of faith but also for why understanding is ultimately impossible without it. This is true in our day-to-day life but also in our seeking God. Faith is the beginning of our search to understand God. It is thus in no way incompatible with reason.*

#### **Augustine: *On the Free choice of the Will***

We want to know and understand what we believe.

We cannot deny what we held even at the very beginning... Believing is one thing, understanding another; we should first believe the great and divine matter that we desire to understand. Otherwise, the prophet's words, "Unless you believe you shall not understand" [Is. 7:9], would be in vain. Our Lord Himself also encouraged belief in those whom He called to salvation with both His words and His deeds. But afterwards, when speaking about the gift He was going to give to those who believe, He did not say "This is life eternal, that they might believe..." but rather: "This is life eternal, that they might know you, the true God, and Jesus Christ, the one whom You have sent" [Jn. 17:3]. Then He said to those who already believed "Seek, and you shall find" [Mt. 7:7]. For something that is believed but not known cannot be said to be 'found.' Nor is anyone made suitable for the task of finding God unless he first believes what he will later know. Consequently, let us obey the Lord's precepts in pressing our inquiry. What we seek with His encouragement we shall find when He Himself shows it to us – at least insofar as these things can be found in this life by people such as ourselves.

#### **Augustine: *Faith in the Unseen***

There is a class of people who maintain that the Christian religion should be despised rather than embraced, because what it presents is not something tangible but something that demands faith in matters which lie beyond human vision.<sup>1</sup> In our efforts to refute such people, who consider themselves wise by refusing to believe what they cannot see, even if we are unable to demonstrate visibly the divine truths which we believe, we are nonetheless in a position to demonstrate that the human mind is duty-bound to believe those things which cannot be seen.

In the first place, those people stand rebuked who in their folly believe themselves answerable to what fleshly eyes alone can see and consequently maintain that they are not bound to believe what they cannot see. Yet in truth, many are the things which they not only believe, and indeed know to be true, but which they cannot see with eyes of that sort. Take this human mind of ours: it is the repository for such an immense number of things, a faculty whose nature remains unseen, to put it simply. Yet that very trust itself by which we believe, the act of thinking through which we know whether we believe or disbelieve something, which is far removed from the sight of those eyes – what else is so resplendent, so clear, and so certain before the interior gaze of our minds

than this? How is it, therefore, that what we cannot see with our bodily eyes we are not bound to believe when, without any hesitation and without the assistance of our bodily eyes, we are able to see immediately whether we believe or not?

"But," they retort, "we have no need to see with the eyes of our body what is in the soul, since we can do that with our mind. You people assert that there are things we should believe, yet you are unable to let us see externally that we may verify them through the evidence of our bodily eyes, nor are such things to be found in our minds so that we may catch sight of them through reflection."

This is the way they argue, as if a person were only bound to believe once he was able to see for himself the object of his belief. Consequently, we must believe in many things pertaining to the temporal realm which we cannot see, so that we may also deserve to see those eternal things which we presently believe in.

But whoever you are,<sup>2</sup> you who refuse to believe what you cannot see: with the evidence of your bodily eyes you can assuredly see physical bodies all around you. With your mind you can also see the inclinations of your will and your thoughts. Tell me then, I beg you, with what manner of vision do you observe the will of a friend in your regard? To actually see the will of any person is beyond the possibilities of the bodily eye. Or is it possible for you to glimpse with your mind what takes place in another person's mind? And if it is the case that you fail to see this, how can you possibly return mutual friendship if you refuse to believe what you cannot see? Or will you perhaps answer that you are indeed able to see the will of someone else manifested through his behavior? Therefore, because of the actions you are about to witness and the words you are going to hear, you intend to believe the intentions of a friend's will in your regard, something which it is impossible to see or hear. For the will we are referring to possesses neither color nor shape so as to be visible, nor has it sound or melody by which it can reach our ears, neither is it your own will of which you are conscious in your heart. The fact remains that what you cannot see or hear or glimpse within yourself you nevertheless believe, lest your life be totally devoid of that friendship and the affection shown you by your friend remains unacknowledged on your part.<sup>3</sup>

So, what about that statement of yours that you should not believe anything unless you see it either externally through the body or internally by the heart? For the truth is that from your heart you trust a heart other than your own and are prepared to believe what you are unable to see either with the eye of your flesh or with that of the mind. With your body you can see the face of a friend, with your mind you can see your own trust, but the trust of your friend cannot be the object of your love if no such mutual trust is found in you, a trust which enables you to believe something you cannot actually see in your friend. However, it is possible for a person to deceive by feigning goodwill and concealing his evil intentions; or, if the intention is not to harm, yet in the hope of gaining some advantage from you he may act deceitfully because he is lacking in love.



Yet you insist that you keep faith in your friend, whose heart you cannot see, because you have discovered his worth in time of trial and are aware how that friend feels towards you, since he refused to abandon you when you were in dire straits. Do you really think, therefore, that we should hope for adversity in order to prove the affection of our friends? And is no one to rest content in the certainty of his friends unless he has first experienced misery through adverse circumstances? In other words, is he not to enjoy the proven friendship of another without first passing through the crucible of suffering and fear? And, in the act of acquiring true friends, how can happiness be desired rather than feared, when happiness is a state which unhappiness alone can prove? Yet the truth of the matter is that in good times we can also have a friend, while bad times only serve to make that friendship even more assured.

But, unless you believed in a friend, you would not entrust yourself to him in time of danger so as to prove the worth of his friendship. And so for this reason, when you do entrust yourself to a friend in order to prove his friendship, you are actually putting your faith in him before you have proof that he is your friend. For it remains true that if we are not to believe what we cannot see, yet, at those times when the dispositions of our friends remain somewhat uncertain and we do give them our trust, then, when we eventually ascertain proof of their intentions in adverse circumstances, it still comes down to a matter of believing rather than seeing their goodwill towards us. Unless, perhaps, the degree of trust is such that, through what we may not inappropriately refer to as a kind of eyes that it has, we judge ourselves to see the friendship we believe in when normally we ought to believe what we cannot see.

If trust of this kind were to disappear from human affairs, how could anyone escape being aware of the confusion and appalling upheaval which would follow? Since the love of which we speak is unseen, who then could enjoy the mutual love of another, if I don't feel bound to believe what I cannot see? Friendship as a whole would therefore disappear, because its essence is mutual love.<sup>4</sup> Who could ever receive anything from another if no visible, credible proof has first been given? Indeed, were friendship to disappear, there would be no way of preserving spiritually those bonds which exist between married couples, families and relatives, for the harmony characteristic of these relationships has its basis in friendship. It would therefore be impossible for a husband to show mutual love to his wife since, unable to see the love for himself, he would not believe she loves him. Likewise, they will cherish no desire to have children because they do not believe that they would return their love. If it should happen that they did beget and rear children, these in their turn will show even less love for their parents, because they will not see the love that they have for them in their hearts, since it is invisible. Such a state of affairs would result if those things which cannot be seen are not the object of a praiseworthy faith but instead are recklessly and rashly believed.

What am I to say about those other ties existing between brothers, sisters, sons-in-law, fathers-in-law, and any other kind of blood relationship and bonds between friends, if the love and goodwill of children for parents and of parents for their children remains unsure and dubious? And is a kindness which is obligatory to go unreciprocated or not

to be considered obligatory, since what cannot be seen in another person is not believed to exist? Furthermore, caution of this kind is not clever but despicable, when we refuse to believe we are loved because we cannot see this love for ourselves, and we do not return it to those to whom we believe it is not due. The consequence of our refusal to believe what we cannot see is that human relationships are thrown into chaos, and foundations are utterly swept away by our failure to trust the goodwill of people, a goodwill which is impossible for us to actually see.

I refrain from mentioning how numerous is that particular class of people who find fault with us for believing things we cannot see, yet who themselves give credence to tradition and history and even to places they have never visited. Such people do not assert: "We withhold belief because we have not seen it for ourselves." Were they to make such a statement, they would be compelled to admit that the identity of their parents was a matter of doubt, for they have believed this on the basis of what others have told them, who were not in a position to demonstrate a fact which already belonged to the past. Of themselves, they retain no awareness of the period in question; nonetheless they are prepared to give their assent unhesitatingly to others who told

them about it. For unless this were the case, and as long as we evade a bold act of faith in those things we cannot see, an upsurge of faithless impiety against parents would be the inevitable outcome.

3, 4. If therefore human society itself could not endure because of our refusal to believe what we cannot see, and in view of the disappearance of mutual harmony, how much more credence ought to be given to those divine matters which remain unseen. And, if this credence were not forthcoming, not merely would certain human friendships suffer profanation but so would even the most supreme form of religion itself, with the direst possible consequences.<sup>6</sup>

"But," you will retort, "although I may be unable to see the goodwill of my friend, I can still discover this through numerous proofs; whereas, for your part, you who would have us believe things we cannot see fail to give us any proofs." However, it is no small concession for you to admit that there are certain things which, although not visible but because of certain clear proofs, must still be believed. Consequently, we are agreed on the fact that we are not to refrain from believing everything we cannot see, and that opinion, which maintains that we are in no way bound to believe what we cannot see, lies discredited and disproved.

Yet those people who allege that our faith in Christ lacks any proof are greatly mistaken. For what proofs could be clearer than the ones which were foretold and which we now see come true? You, then, who think that no visible proofs exist which would enable you to believe in Christ, should pay attention to the things you can actually see.

The Church herself addresses you with words of maternal love: "I, whose ongoing fruitfulness and growth throughout the whole world you admire, once did not exist as

you see me now, but *in your offspring all the nations will be blessed* (Gn 22:18). By conferring a blessing on Abraham, God was at the same time promising me; in consequence of the blessing given to Christ, I am spread through all the nations. The sequence of generations testifies that Christ is the seed of Abraham. Let me recall briefly that Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of the twelve sons from whom arose the people of Israel. Jacob himself was also called Israel. One of his twelve sons was Judah, whence the name of the Jewish people, from whom was born the Virgin Mary, who bore Christ. And look: you see and are amazed at the fact that all nations are blessed in Christ, that is, in the seed of Abraham, and still you are afraid to believe in Christ, someone you ought to fear rather than believe in!

"Or could it be that you doubt or balk at the virgin birth, a truth that you ought to believe was appropriate to the birth of the God-man? Believe also what was foretold by the prophet: *Behold, a virgin shall conceive in her womb and bear a son, and he shall be called Emmanuel, which means God-with-us* (Is 7:14). Therefore have no doubts about the virgin giving birth, if you wish to have faith in the birth of God who, without abdicating his governance of the world, came in the flesh to humankind, bestowing fecundity on his mother, yet not taking away her integrity. "If he was always God, it was entirely fitting that he should be born a man in this way and by such a birth become God for us. To this God the prophet speaks again: *Your throne, O God, shall last from age to age; a scepter of justice is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved justice and hated evil; therefore, God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your peers.* (Ps 44:7-8)<sup>2</sup> The anointing spoken of here, where God anointed God, is a spiritual one, referring to the Father's anointing of the Son. Consequently, we acknowledge that Christ is derived from chrism, which means anointing.

"I am the Church, about whom it is spoken to him in the same psalm and foretold as a deed to be accomplished: *The queen stands on your right hand, adorned in garments of gold and varied clothing* (Ps 44:10), that is, in the mystery of wisdom, clothed with a diversity of languages. There it is said to me: *Listen, daughter, and pay heed and give ear, forget your own people and your father's house, because the king has desired your beauty; for he is the Lord your God, and the daughters of Tyre shall worship him with gifts, all the richest of the land shall seek your presence. All the glory of the king's daughter is within; she is arrayed in cloth-of-gold. Virgins shall be led to the king after her, those who are her companions shall be brought to you; they shall be led amid joy and gladness, and brought into the king's temple. Sons have been born to you in place of your fathers; you shall establish them as princes throughout the whole earth. They shall make your name remembered from one generation to the next; therefore the nations shall praise you for ever and ever.* (Ps 44:11-18)

"If you yourselves are unable to recognize even now this queen, fertile with royal offspring; if she fails to see fulfilled the promise made to her: *Listen, daughter, and pay heed*; if she, to whom it was said: *Forget your own people and your father's house*, has not willingly rejected those observances of this world which previously obtained; if she, to whom it was said: *The king has desired your beauty, for he is the Lord your God*, does not confess Christ as Lord in every part of the world; if she does not witness the nations of

the world offering prayers to Christ and bringing him gifts, the one of whom it was said to her: *The daughters of Tyre shall worship him with gifts*; if it is not evident that the rich lay aside their pride and beg help from the Church, she whom the psalm addresses: *All the richest of the land shall seek your presence*; if the daughter of the queen, who has been commanded to pray: *Our Father, who art in heaven* (Mt 6:9), goes unrecognized and says this of her holy ones: *Our inner human nature is being renewed day by day* (2 Cor 4:16); if all the glory of the queen's daughter is within after his good odor is spread in every place<sup>8</sup> and consecrated virgins are not brought to Christ, and it is not she who is addressed and referred to as follows: *Virgins shall be led to the king after her, those who are her companions shall be brought to you*; and lest 'being led' might suggest captivity in some prison, the text continues: *They shall be led amid joy and gladness, and brought into the king's temple*; if she fails to bring forth sons, who shall be appointed rulers by her everywhere, like fathers, she to whom it has been said: *Sons shall be yours in place of your fathers; you shall establish them as princes throughout the whole earth*, and who, being a mother and both superior and subject, commends herself to their prayers, which explains what follows: *They shall make your name remembered from one generation to the next*; if, because of the preaching of these same fathers who make his name forever remembered, such great numbers of people do not gather and give praise ceaselessly to his grace, he to whom it is said: *Therefore the nations shall praise you for ever and ever* –

"If these things are not clear beyond doubt, so that our opponents do not know where to look to avoid being overcome by the same force of argument and consequently find themselves forced to admit that they are obvious, you would in that case perhaps have good reason to retort that you see no proofs which would compel you to believe in what you cannot see. But were it to happen that the things you now can see, which have been long foretold and are now most clearly coming to pass; if truth itself resounds both through the word of ancient prophets and then with subsequent dramatic fulfillment – O vestiges of unbelief! blush at what you can clearly see, so that you may believe in those things you cannot see.<sup>9</sup>

"Pay heed to me," the Church is saying to you, "pay heed to me whom you can see, even if you don't want to see. Those faithful people who were present in Judea at that particular time learned directly of the virgin-birth, the miracles, the passion, resurrection and ascension of Christ, and of all those divine utterances and deeds of his. You did not witness these events and so refuse to believe them. Therefore consider these facts, weigh them up carefully, ponder on what you can see, for they are not narrated to you as past events, nor predicted as things yet to come, but are proved to be a present reality.

"Or does it appear absurd and inconsequential to you, and the divine testimony of little or no worth at all in your estimation, that the whole human race flocks to the name of a single crucified man?<sup>10</sup> You did not see what was foretold and brought to pass regarding the human birth of Christ: *Behold, a virgin shall conceive in her womb and bear a son* (Is 7:14), yet you do see how the promise made to Abraham has been fulfilled: *In your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed* (Gen 22:18). "You did not see what

was foretold about the miracles of Christ and what has come to pass: *Come and consider the works of the Lord, the wonderful deeds he has done on the earth* (Ps 45:9), but you do see what was foretold: *The Lord said to me: You are my Son, today I have begotten you; ask me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession* (Ps 2:7-8). "You did not see what was foretold and fulfilled about the passion of Christ:<sup>11</sup> *They have pierced my hands and my feet, and have numbered all my bones; they stared at me and fixed their gaze upon me; they divided my clothing among them and cast lots for my robe* (Ps 21:17-19), yet you do see what that same psalm foretold and what now clearly has reached fulfillment: *All the ends of the earth shall remember and return to the Lord, and all the nations of the world shall pay homage in his presence; for the kingdom belongs to the Lord and he shall rule over the nations* (Ps 21:28-29).

"You did not see what was foretold about the resurrection of Christ and is now fulfilled: *They went outside and began to speak; all my enemies whispered together about me and thought evil against me; they engaged in evil talk against me* (Ps 40:7-9). Showing that they achieved nothing by killing him who would rise again, the psalmist goes on to say: *Will the one who sleeps not succeed in rising again?* (Ps 40:9) And further on in the same prophecy, having foretold the role of the traitor, which is also recorded in the gospel, as follows: *The person who ate at my table has raised his heel against me*, the psalmist immediately adds: *But you, Lord, have mercy on me and I will repay them* (Ps 40:11). This is precisely what has been fulfilled: Christ fell asleep but reawakened; in other words, he died and rose again. Speaking in the same prophetic way he says in another psalm: *I fell asleep and took my rest, but I arose because the Lord upheld me* (Ps 3:6).

"I concede that you may not have seen any of this, but you see his Church, about which the following prediction was both made and fulfilled: *To you, Lord my God, shall the nations come from the ends of the earth and declare: Our fathers did indeed worship false idols, and in them there was no profit* (Jer 16:19). Willing or unwilling, this you can certainly see, and if you still labor under the impression that there ever was profit in these idols, or still could be, then you can surely hear the exclamation of those countless nations of the world, which have abandoned, discarded or destroyed vanities of this kind: *Our fathers did indeed worship false idols, and in them there was no profit; if human beings devise their own gods, in truth they are not gods at all* (Jer 16:19-20)....

When the peoples of the world come to the God of Christians, the supreme and true God, they do so not by walking but by believing. Indeed, this very fact was foretold by another prophet when he said: *The Lord shall prevail against them and destroy all the gods of the nations; and each from his own place, the islands of the nations, shall worship him* (Zep 2:11). Jeremiah had expressed it this way: *To you shall the nations come*, while Zephaniah declared: *Each from his own place shall worship him*. They shall therefore come to him without leaving their own place, because by believing in him they will find him in their own heart.

"You have not seen what was foretold about Christ's ascension and then brought to fulfillment: *O God, be exalted above the heavens*, but you see what immediately follows: *And let your glory shine over the whole earth* (Ps 107:6). "You have not seen all



these prophecies which referred to Christ and have now been accomplished and completed, but you do not deny the present reality within his Church of all these other things. We have pointed out to you how both sets of events have been foretold, yet we are unable to show you visibly both sets of prophecies now fulfilled – because to recall the past for inspection is beyond our power."

Yet, just as the good dispositions of our friends, though unseen, are considered trustworthy because of visible proofs, so in similar fashion the present visible reality of the Church is demonstrated in those writings where she is also foretold. Moreover, she is the proof of past prophecies and the herald of things yet to come, both of which are unseen. The reason for this is that past prophecies, which can no longer be seen, and those of the future, which still remain to be seen, as well as those of the present, which can now be seen – all of these lay in the future when they were first foretold, and not a single one of them at that time could be seen. When, therefore, these predictions began to be fulfilled, beginning from those which have already come to pass to those which, foretelling Christ and his Church, are at present being fulfilled – they unfolded in orderly sequence. Included in this same sequence are prophecies about the day of judgment, the resurrection of the dead, the eternal damnation of the wicked with the devil, and the eternal happiness of the just with Christ, which were similarly predicted and will come to pass.

Why is it then that we refuse to believe the first and the last things, which we do not see, although we have as witnesses of both the things midway between them, which we do see? I am referring to those prophetic writings in which we either hear or read how these first, middle and last things were foretold before they come to pass. Unless perhaps people of no faith are under the impression that matters of this kind were put into writing by Christians, in order that those other things, which they do not believe or fail to see, might possess greater authority if the belief existed that they had already been promised before they came to pass....

Even were we to suppose that no prior prophetic witnesses existed pertaining to Christ and the Church, what person would not be immediately impelled to believe that the divine splendor had indeed burst forth upon humanity, when he sees how false gods are now abandoned and their images smashed, their temples destroyed or put to another use,<sup>14</sup> and the empty rituals for so long part of human habit discontinued, while the one true God is invoked by the whole human race? And all this took place through one man who was mocked, arrested, bound, scourged, beaten, insulted, crucified, scorned and put to death!

Those disciples he chose to proclaim his teaching were simple and uneducated persons and fishermen and tax-collectors. They proclaimed his resurrection and ascension into heaven, which they declared they had seen for themselves and, filled with the Holy Spirit, they gave voice to this gospel in all manner of languages which they had never learned. The crowd that heard them partly believed, while the remainder, refusing to believe, resisted stubbornly. These disciples thus fought to death for the truth, declining to repay evil with evil, and were victorious by dying rather than by killing.

As you see, the world has been transformed by this religion. To this gospel human hearts have likewise turned: the hearts of men and women, of people great and small, of learned and ignorant, of wise and foolish, of powerful and weak, those of noble and those of common birth, those of exalted and those of lowly estate. Spread throughout the world, such has been the manner of the Church's growth that no sect or any kind of anti-Christian error arises which does not have glorying in the name of Christ as its aim and aspiration.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, unless adverse movements of this sort exercised a healthy restraint they would not be permitted to spring up in the world.<sup>16</sup>

How could that crucified one possibly have accomplished so much, if not for the fact that God had assumed human nature, even supposing he had not foretold any of these future events through the prophets? But since so wonderful a mystery of love had its own earlier prophets and heralds who prophesied in God's name that he was to come,<sup>17</sup> and he did come as foretold, who then could be so deranged as to assert that the apostles lied about Christ? For they proclaimed that he had indeed come, just as the prophets had earlier foretold that he would. Nor did the prophets remain silent about the future as far as the apostles were concerned, for they had this to say about the apostles: *No speech, no word of theirs goes unheard; their sound has gone forth through all the earth and their words to the ends of the world* (Ps 18:4-5). Without a doubt we see this prophecy fulfilled in the world, even if we did not see Christ in the flesh. What person, therefore, unless mentally blinded through some astonishing ailment, or so coarse and unfeeling, could refuse to believe in those sacred writings which predicted that the whole world would one day believe?

As for you, my dear people, let this faith be nurtured and increase within you, a faith which you already have, or have only lately, embraced. For just as those temporal events long since foretold have come to pass, so likewise will those promises of eternity come to fulfillment. Do not allow yourselves to be misled either by arrogant pagans or deceitful Jews or erroneous heretics or even ill-disposed Christians within the Church itself, who as enemies are all the more harmful because they come from within. The divine prophecies in this regard are not silent, for fear that those who are weak in faith should be unduly disturbed, for in the Song of Songs Christ the bridegroom addresses his bride the Church in these words: *As a lily among the thorns, so is my beloved among daughters* (Sg 2:2). He does not say "among strangers" but *among daughters*.

*He who has ears to hear should hear* (Mt 13:9); and, while the net which was cast into the sea collects fish of every kind, as the holy gospel relates, and is being hauled to the shore, in other words to the end of the world, people should separate themselves from the bad fish in their hearts, not in their body. This they do by changing their wicked ways and not tearing asunder the holy nets.<sup>18</sup> If it appears that those who have been tried and tested intermingle at present with the wicked, the reason is that, when the separation takes place on the shore, it is not punishment they shall receive but everlasting life.

# BEING TRUE TO REALITY

## Session Three

### Questions

- What does it mean to be true to reality? How are Augustine and William Desmond framing the meaning of truth when they center it on our being-truthful or doing the truth”
- How is fidelity to the real an important part of our lives? Why might we want to avoid truth, even hate truth?
- How do we achieve knowledge of the truth?
- What does it mean that there is a proportionality or ‘measuring’ up between our minds and things?



## I. Being True and Doing Truth

### Augustine *Confessions* Book X

*Augustine reflects on our life, and confessional practice, as a way of doing the truth. "The Confessions" as a text are meant to be emblematic of what doing the truth looks like. This is in contrast to the hatred of the truth expressed in the lie which is a privatization of the truth.*

1. You love the truth because anyone who 'does truth' [*facere veritatem*] comes to the light. Truth it is that I want to do, in my heart by confession in your presence, and with my pen before many witnesses....

33. They do not wish to be deceived, they must love truth; and when they love the happy life, which is nothing else but joy in the truth, they are unquestionably loving truth also; but they could not be loving the truth unless there was some knowledge of it in their memories. Why, in that case, do they not rejoice over it? Why are they not happy? Because they are more immediately engrossed in other things which more surely make them miserable than that other reality, so faintly remembered, can make them happy. For a little while yet there is light for human beings; let them walk in it, yes, let them walk, lest the darkness close over them.<sup>t77</sup>

34. Why, though, does "truth engender hatred,"<sup>t78</sup> why does a servant of yours who preaches the truth make himself an enemy to his hearers,<sup>t79</sup> if the life of happiness, which consists in rejoicing over the truth, is what they love? It must be because people love truth in such a way that those who love something else wish to regard what they love as truth and, since they would not want to be deceived, are unwilling to be convinced that they are wrong. They are thus led into hatred of truth for the sake of that very thing which they love under the guise of truth. They love truth when it enlightens them, but hate it when it accuses them.<sup>t80</sup> In this attitude of reluctance to be deceived and intent to deceive others they love truth when it reveals itself but hate it when it reveals them.

## William Desmond from *The Intimate Strangeness of Being*

*In this reading, Desmond lays out his idea of truthfulness and being true. For Desmond this involves a fidelity to reality, a recognition of ourselves as beings between absolute knowing and ignorance, and as beings called to be true. You'll see a section with a black line alongside it, feel free to skip that section if you don't have time.*

*"Truth exists. Only lies are invented."*

– Georges Braque

### TRUTH AND CONSTRUCTION

How we understand truth cannot be disconnected from how we understand ourselves, or from how we understand how we humans are to be. "How we are to be": this phrase indicates the human being as a creature with a certain *promise of being* that calls out to be realized in one way or another. Some ways will enable fulfillment of the promise, if we are true to what we are. Some ways may betray the promise, if we are false to what we are. The intimate connection of being human and being true is not a merely theoretical issue but has inescapably ethical and indeed religious significance.

In philosophy we are familiar with a plurality of significant theories of truth. I mention a few of them. There is the correspondence theory: truth is the adequation, more or less exact, of our intellect to things. There is the coherence theory: what is most important is not an external correspondence but the immanent self-consistency of our concepts or thoughts or propositions. There are idealistic theories in which the identity of being and thought is claimed, or in which, in Hegel's famous words, "the true is the whole." There are pragmatic theories of truth: truth is what works for us, in the long run. And there are more.

This plurality of theories might seem congenial to our own contemporary ethos which seems highly pluralistic. Yet none of these theories celebrate sheer plurality in an indiscriminating way. Our diverse answers to the question of truth call us back from any attitude that endorses "anything goes." Not everything goes. Rorty smirked that truth is what your colleagues let you get away with, but no discerning colleague would let him get away with this. We would smile at the joke and pass on. We would carry on thinking. For there are different senses of being true, some more appropriate to the more objective determinations of actuality, some more fitting for the elusive enigmas of the human heart. To be true to something is to enact a certain fidelity to that thing, hence depending on that thing, our "being true" will be different. There is a pluralism with regard to "being true" in that sense; but this does not preclude something more than diversity without relation. I will come to this

later in terms of the spirit of truthfulness.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, in the contemporary pluralistic ethos there is a fairly widespread attitude that is worth noting. I mean the view that connects *the true and the constructed*. Truth is our construction. Initially one might think this is a fine view. Not only do we the constructors of truth become the sources of truth, but we also begin to enjoy our proper destiny as its coming masters. What better augury for the betterment of the human condition, and the pathway toward the (true) self-empowerment of humankind, could there be? And, of course, the practices of science and medicine are one central area where this self-empowerment is in play. If we are such constructors, perhaps we can reconstruct the conditions of life that will overcome the given patiences that often drag down our energies, such as sickness, disease, death, everything bearing on our frail, finite bodies. Truth as a construction seems to offer a marvelous beacon of hope.

There is a widespread cultural attitude that endorses a pluralism of approaches to things, a pluralism possibly unlimited except perhaps by the powers of human invention and imagination. The call is to celebrate the many, let a thousand flowers bloom. This is not unconnected with a democratic ethos in which each different one is said to deserve the same respect as the next one. It is not unconnected with a view of tradition as a hegemonic univocalism that subordinates differences to a more or less tyrannical homogeneity. Truth, with a capital T, is judged guilty of such a tyranny. We must not seek Truth, but truths, or as Nietzsche claimed, my truth. Let a thousand truths bloom. But this is entirely too passive a proclamation: let us *make* a thousand truths. Again, on this view, all turns on the power of creativity or the force of free imagination. In Nietzsche, not surprisingly, the poets or the artists generally enjoy a preeminence: they are the creators par excellence, and hence in a sense they dictate the truth that is to be. There is no truth that is, truth is to be what we determine it to be, and in terms of certain values we consider the most important for life. I mention in passing that there is often a half-hidden metaphysical presupposition to this: reality "in itself" has a dark ugly side; the "lies" of art save us from *this* truth; art's *as if* "truth" gives us the constructed truth that allows us to live, protected from the Medusa stare of this truth.

The true is the made: so said Vico. *Verum et factum convertuntur*. The human being can only know what it makes: hence human truths are appropriate to us. God makes the world, and hence can know it; we can know what is proportionate to us.<sup>2</sup> Marx liked to quote Vico's maxim, but "making" for Marx becomes unanchored from the idea that there is a creator other than the human being. The human being is the only creator in a godless world. As the creators, the workers and makers of this world, we become the truth of this world, and indeed, through our own work,

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<sup>1</sup> On different senses of truth and being true, see my *Being and the Between*, chapter 12.

<sup>2</sup> See *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, abridged translation of the third edition (1744), by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970), 331, 349.

the creators of value also. The difference between Marx and Nietzsche is not so great on this score – it lies more in an accent than in a basic metaphysical difference: will to power as industrial production, will to power as poetic creativity.

While Marx is now in retreat, the attitudes he expresses are not quite so. We see this with Nietzsche, the patron saint of postmodern pluralism. And perhaps it is not surprising that the pluralism of the postmodern ethos throws us that strange mutant: the left-wing Nietzschean. Something of this has to do with the shared sense of transgressive thinking, as well as the familial bond with negativity as bleeding our autonomies beyond old, established heteronomies. It is also connected with the view that truth is what we construct. For to construct we have to destroy; and, in this instance, this often means we have to transgress what is traditionally taken to be truth. Assault on the old truth is part of the intoxication of constructing the new truth. Once again, it seems that we must overcome the inhibition of the (moral) imagination to unleash hitherto untapped sources of creativity and construction in ourselves.

#### BETWEEN ABSOLUTE TRUTH AND TRUTHFULNESS

I rehearse a widespread view, which I do not endorse. One need not deny a certain qualified creativity to the human being, but the meaning of the qualification is all important. The pluralism of truths often goes with, as I said, a perception of traditional theories of truth, especially the correspondence theory, as hegemonic and totalitarian. The truth, the absolute truth, is just there and given and to it we must submit; and then, the complaint goes forth, the putative possessors of the absolute truth – be they religious, political, ethical, or philosophical – are repressing us.

The interesting issue here is this: Perhaps we do not possess the absolute truth. Perhaps only God can and does. That we do not possess the absolute truth is not a postmodern view – it is as old, for instance, as Plato. Human beings are not God, hence we do not – and in a sense cannot – possess the absolute truth. But the consequence does not follow that we are simply to construct what truths we consider relevant or interesting for ourselves. We do not possess absolute truth, yet we seek the truth or the true. And we could not seek at all were there not some relation between us, our desire, and the truth sought. To seek is always to be related to the truth sought. Hence to know we have not the absolute truth is already to be in relation to truth. Otherwise we could not know our ignorance, nor seek what we lack and obscurely anticipate. In short, we are intermediate beings, neither in absolute possession of truth, nor in absolute destitution: somewhere between.

The important point is that this condition is not something we construct; this “somewhere between” is the space, indeed the ethos of being, within which we might seek to construct, but it is presupposed by all our constructing power. This being in the between, the *metaxu*, defines our participation in the milieu of being within which our own middle being inter-mediate with the truth, truth that might well be beyond us,

though not out of relation to us. In other words, there is a relation to the truth that is prior to, and more ultimate than, any claim made that the truth is something we construct. We are in the space of truth, or truthfulness, which itself contributes to our own endowment with capacities to discern the difference between the true and the false, and more mediately, this truth and that. To have that endowment is to be marked by something given, not something we construct through ourselves alone. Gift is prior to construction.

You might still wonder why this is significant. I think it immediately calls forth a different relation to the whole question of truth. It makes us understand ourselves differently, including the fragility of our finite being, and not least how we relate to our incarnate condition. It asks about a respect, indeed a reverence, for something that we do not ourselves create or construct, but that is intimately necessary for the truthfulness and worthiness of all our own efforts at constructive or creative life. There is a call of truth on us that is coeval with our being: it is constitutive of the kinds of beings we are. It releases us into a certain freedom of seeking, but this freedom and release are not themselves self-produced. There is something more at work in our searches for truth than simply our own searching and the results of that searching.

#### TRUTH AND TRUTHFULNESS: OUR INTERMEDIATE BEING

If we take seriously this intermediate nature of the human being, what becomes evident is quite other to an “anything goes” attitude to truth. Rather there emerges in our very searching a call to fidelity to truth we do not possess, and yet that endows us with something eminently distinctive. It is a somewhat paradoxical fact that the constructivist view (as we might call it) emerges from a deep *skepticism* about truth: the traditional view that we can know the truth in itself is questioned, and indeed despaired of. And there is a switch from such a sense of truth as other to us and to our own powers, to a sense of ourselves as capable of making what truths we need in the circumstances we find ourselves. The paradox: We veer from a skepticism that is stymied by the difficulty of such an ideal of truth to an orientation in which “truth” seems far more easily to hand, in what we construct ourselves. And since this last seems to be within our power, instead of skepticism about the otherness of truth, we can be given over to intoxication with our own truth-making capacities. We reject the god of absolute truth, but there is a new god in the wings, and *mirabile dictu*, this god is we ourselves. When this god comes we are finally now liberated as self-liberating, autonomous creators.

I would see our intermediate being differently. Let us grant we do not possess absolute truth. Then this very granting is itself witness to our participation in truth *not constructed*. To say “granted” is to give oneself over to something we do not construct ourselves: we grant that something has to be accepted as granted. It is true

we do not possess the absolute truth, and so we are in intimate relation to truth, no matter that we do not know the absolute truth. We are constrained by a necessity that limits all our pretensions to absoluteness, as well as all our claims to unconstrained constructivism.

The point could be put less negatively, and perhaps it is better put that way. It is not a matter just of showing certain deep instabilities in denying a sense of truth that is not our own construction – although this is important. It is rather a matter of attending to the fact that in the search for all truth, even in the denial that we possess the truth, we are called upon to “be truthful.” One can be truthful, even in searching for the truth, and even in knowing that one does not possess the truth. Our being truthful is a testament to that intermediate condition, the human seeker as between the fullness of truth of the divine and the ignorance of the beast: beyond the second, though the first be beyond us, and yet in intimate relation to what is so beyond us, by virtue of the call to be truthful.

Being truthful is an exigency that makes a call on us before we endeavor to construct any system of science or philosophy that might claim to be true. It may call us actively to construct; but the call itself shows us to be open to something other than our own self-determination, something that endows us with a destiny to be truthful to the utmost extent of our human powers. In that regard, there is no way of separating the theoretical and the practical, the metaphysical and the ethical. For this being truthful is also called to a fidelity that solicits a way of life appropriate to it, a fidelity that issues in a way of being mindful in which we are to live truthfully, and to live truly.

This being truthful is not an objective truth that lies “out there, somewhere,” univocally fixed in advance. It has more to do with the immanent porosity of the human being to being as it is, and to what is good and worthy in itself to be affirmed. It may be the case that there are forms of truth that take on a more objective and univocal character such as we find in the so-called hard sciences. I think this is true. But the search for such truths itself testifies to this other sense of being truthful, which is as much an ethical as a theoretical demand. For instance, the scientist seeking objective truth must be faithful to the call of being truthful – or else the whole edifice of objective science is itself corrupted. Once again it is a sense of truthfulness having to do with *what we are*: not what we seek simply, not what we are simply, but what we are to be, as beings that seek truth and that seek to be truthful.

And yet if it is not simply objective, it is not simply subjective either. We know the call to be truthful intimately in our own selves, yes, but there is something transsubjective about it. Something here comes to us, something here endows us, something here gifts us with a power we could not produce through ourselves alone. The spirit of truthfulness in us points to something transsubjective in our own selves or subjectivity. As transsubjective, it is “objective” in the sense that it is other to us, even while it is in intimate relation to us. But it is not objective in terms of this object or that. In that regard, the spirit of truthfulness witnesses in what is objective



to something that is transobjective. Without it we would have no participation in objective truth, but it is not this or that objective truth, but our participation in something more fundamental.

I might put it in terms of Pascal's very helpful distinction between *l'esprit de géométrie* and *l'esprit de finesse*. The former is appropriate to objective truths such as we pursue in the hard sciences and mathematics. But the latter is required when we deal with the human being, in the deep ambiguity of its being, somewhere between nothing and infinity, marked alike by wretchedness and glory, and called into relation to God, beyond all our knowing had not God already mysteriously made himself known to us. The spirit of truthfulness, our being truthful, is first more related to *l'esprit de finesse* than *l'esprit de géométrie*, which is not to say the latter does not participate in it. In a sense, this spirit of truthfulness transcends the difference of the two, if we are tempted to see them as dualistically opposed. But it is itself intimate to the finesse of the human being.

Finesse is very important in a time such as ours in which *l'esprit de géométrie* is often in the ascendant. Finesse recalls us to modes of mindfulness in attunement with the fuller subtleties at play in human existence. Geometry is greatly helpful when univocal exactness is required, but this is not always most appropriate in addressing the equivocalities of the human heart. Pascal is a great exemplar of the tremendous advances in the modern scientific univocalizing wrought by empirical and mathematical science. Unlike Descartes and Spinoza, Pascal was not bewitched by its power, or seduced into making it the one and only way to truth. Spinoza is not lacking his own finesse, but in his ethics *more geometrico* I can find no appropriate name for the generous acknowledgment of finesse as such. "Geometry" seems entirely to take over the role of finesse. Spinoza amazingly claims that the human race would have lain forever in darkness were it not for the development of mathematics. "Truth would be eternally hidden [*in aeternam lateret*] from the human race had not mathematics, which does not deal with ends but with the nature and properties of figures, shown to humankind another norm of truth."<sup>3</sup> Is a kind of soteriological power being claimed for mathematics, without which humanity would be lost forever in the caves of night? If this means that mathematics rescues us from, or advances us beyond, ends (*fines*), would not its saving knowledge then be a purposeless knowing in a purposeless universe? Such an advance beyond darkness would be an advance into a different darkness. In that new darkness, which is the ultimate darkness for us of a purposeless world, a new finesse beyond geometry would be needed to illuminate us.

Finesse reveals a readiness for a more intimate knowing, bearing on what is prior to and beyond geometry. It bears on a mindfulness that can read the signs of the equivocity of human existence, and not simply by the conversion of these signs into a

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<sup>3</sup> *Ethics*, part 1, appendix, in *Spinoza Opera*, ed. Carl Gebhart (Heidelberg: Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1924), 79; see *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza*, trans. R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover Books, 1955), 77.

univocal science or a philosophical system. In a way, here the power of the poetic come into its own, as well as its sister, religious reverence. Finesse is by its nature an excellence of mindfulness that is singularly embodied. It cannot be rendered without remainder in terms of neutral and general characteristics. It cannot be geometricized. We come first to know of it, know it, by witnessing its exemplary incarnation in living human beings of evident finesse. There is no geometrical “theory” that could render it in an absolutely precise univocal definition.

Finesse refers us to the concrete suppleness of living intelligence that is open, attentive, mindful, attuned to the occasion in all its elusiveness and subtlety. We take our first steps in finesse by a kind of creative mimesis, by trying to liken ourselves to those who exemplify it, or show something of it. This creative likening renews the promise of finesse, but it also is itself new, since it is openness to the subtlety of the occasion in its unrepeatable singularity. Singularity here does not betoken a kind of autism of being, nor does it mean that any communication of its significance to others is impossible. Rather this singularity is rich with a promise, perhaps initially not fully communicated, and yet available for, making itself available for, communicability. Communicability itself cannot be confined to articulation in neutral generality, or homogeneous universality. Finesse is in attendance on what is elusive in the intimacy of being, but that intimacy is at the heart of living communicability.

Witness the dominance of the often scientific and cybernetic forms of thinking in our time – though again these are often complemented by a kind of self-serving subjectivity in which the gratification of private desires is the point of it all. Think of this paradox: how the Internet – an extraordinary result of cybernetic thinking and *l’esprit de géométrie* – is infested with pornographic sites: on the one hand, hard geometrical heads and, on the other, the mush of erotic exploitation, without the heart of reverence and modesty.

Pascalian finesse should be given a place of honor in the context of postmodern pluralism in view of the latter’s claim to celebrate ambiguity, equivocity, and so on. For finesse has to do with a discernment of what is worthy to be affirmed in the ambiguity. It is not the indiscriminate glorification of ambiguity. It is the excellence of mindfulness that does not deny the ambiguity, is not false to it, but seeks to be true to what is worthy to be affirmed in it – and not everything is worthy to be affirmed. If nothing else, finesse is not a matter of construction. Quite the opposite, the gifts that it fosters are receptivity and attentive mindfulness of singular occasions, happenings, persons, openness to the singularity of things, a readiness for the surprising and the genuinely other. It nourishes a feeling for the intimacy of being itself, and the secret spirit of truthfulness in our own intimate selves. Religion and art have often been the great fathers and mothers of finesse about finitude. Without finesse there is no discerning ethical judgment. Without finesse there is no spiritual seriousness in philosophy. Without finesse the political huckster, even the well-dressed criminal, succeed to the place of the wise statesman.



## TRUTHFULNESS AND THE PATIENCE OF BEING

Finesse, and not just geometry alone, is needful in the practice of medicine. But we live in a time of ascendant geometry and it is not always clear if we have the finesse to match what geometry constructs. I now want to connect more explicitly these remarks on truthfulness with anthropological consequences that have an ethical and theological bearing. I connect this with the patience of being.

I mean that the constructivist generally thinks that our being is to do, to act: in the beginning and in the end, and in the middle is the act, the constructive act. Goethe wrote *Im Anfang war die Tat!* Not quite – not quite for us human beings, certainly. My point is not a denial of construction but a relativization of any tendency to absolutize its claims. Our constructive act is not the first or the last, or the middle either. This follows from the sense of being truthful outlined earlier. The spirit of being truthful indicates first on our part a certain patience to the truth before we ourselves are called to be truthful in a more active sense. We find ourselves in the middle space between absolute ignorance and absolute truth; we do not create this middle space; this is the middle space wherein the spirit of being truthful makes its solicitation to us. We need finesse to be attentive about this, since it is not merely an objective truth, nor merely a subjective opinion or preference, though it is intimate to us, hence subjective, and yet other to subjectivity, and hence objective in the sense of being other than our construction – it is not “made up.”

I would say that there is a patience of being before there is an endeavor to be, a receiving of being before an acting of being, in accord with our singular characters as humans. The patience and receiving make the endeavor and the acting possible; and when acknowledged with finesse, they are understood differently than they are within a philosophy that seeks the self-absolutizing of our activist character or our endeavor to be.

There is a *passio essendi* more primal than the *conatus essendi*. This last is the phrase Spinoza uses to describe the essence of a being: the essence of a being is its *conatus* – and this is defined by its power to affirm itself and its range. This range for Spinoza is potentially unlimited, in the absence of external countervailing beings who express their power of being in opposition to us, or in limitation. Note that for Spinoza *conatus* is the being of a being: it is the being of the human being. Without an external limitation, the endeavor to be is potentially infinite, like a motion that will continue indefinitely without a check from the outside. One might infer from this, in the sphere of human relations, that an external other always presents itself as potentially hostile to my self-affirming. The other, so seen, while needful for my flourishing, is potentially alien or opposed to my self-affirmation, and hence one strategy of continuing the *conatus* will be for one to disarm that other in advance. Big fish, eating little fish, grow bigger. Such a relation of implicit hostility can come to define our embodied relation to the rest of nature. The latter as other can be as much the source of our sustenance as a threat to the integrity of our healthy self-affirming being. It is equivocal, but the equivocal face is most known in the threat to us that we meet in disease, infection, and

finally death. Against this equivocality, we must protect ourselves, by overcoming the threat. By contrast, on this view, a passivity is something to be avoided or overcome. Being patient to something places us in a position of subordination: to receive from the other is a sign of weakness. To receive is to be servile, whereas to act and to endeavor is to be sovereign. The emotions, for instance, are servile, the dominating reason is sovereign. One sees how this fits in with the ethos of modernity in which the autonomous subject as self-law is implicitly in an ambiguous, potentially hostile relation to what is other, or *heteros*.

Some of these concerns seem to me to be in the background of the constructivist theory of truth. We are not gifted with truth, or even the power to discern truth as other to us, but we make it for ourselves. For ourselves: for we ourselves are the truth of the construction. We self-construct—even to the point of constructing, or reconstructing, the bodies originally given to us. Or of which we are originally the victims, since we did not first choose our bodies.

What of the *passio essendi*? We are first given to be, before anything else. At a theological level this bears on our being creations: creatures of an absolute source that gives us to be and gives us to be as good. This is the good of the “to be” in which we participate but that we do not construct but rather that allows us to construct. This view goes at a different angle to the modern constructivist view, but it is dependent on the recognition of an otherness more original than our own self-definition. We are only self-defining because we have originally been given to be as selves, and as serving; only creative because created; only courageous because encouraged; only loving because already loved and shown to be worthy of love; only become good to the degree that we are grateful for a good we do not ourselves produce; only become truthful because there is a truth more original than ourselves that endows us with the power to seek truth and the confidence that should we search truly we will find that truth (insofar as this can be understood by the finite human being).

Being patient, or being in the patience of being, is not here a defect. It is only a defect from the point of view of a *conatus* given over to the temptation to affirm itself alone, and hence closed off from the acknowledgment that it is at all because it is first affirmed to be: created. The patience of being might be theologically connected with *the givenness of creation*. Very frequently we take this givenness for granted. Creation as a being given is as a being granted, but this being granted we take for granted. This is the primal *passio essendi*. It is an ontological patience in that here is named the original receiving of being at all. That beings are at all, something and not nothing, signals a deeper ontological givenness than, say, the indigent being of immediacy in Hegel’s conception. There is an idiocy of being, a given happening of the intimate strangeness of being, that is more primordial than any spontaneous happening of this event or that, or our determinate participations in this or that form of life. Without this ultimate and ontologically intimate givenness, nothing finite is constructed or can construct itself. The self-affirmation of the finite follows on the received affirmation of the finite that is

its being given to be and received in being as thus and thus. In an ontological patience before this surplus happening there is for us the offer of an agapeic astonishment, or wonder, before there is determinate or self-determining cognition. Wonder, marvel, reverence all reveal something of what is *good and worthy of affirmation* in the patience of being, even apart from any construction or further mediations by our own endeavor to be.

What I am saying is that there is no denial of the *conatus* but rather a changed vision of it that sees it as deriving from something other to itself. If we think of *the healthy body* we immediately see something of the *conatus* in the will to self-perpetuation and self-affirmation that marks it. This is our being – to affirm itself and indeed to affirm itself as good – it is good to be. I do not deny this at all. The question is its meaning and whether there is something more that relativizes self-affirmation, gives it to be at all, and makes it porous relative to something other than itself, and not just as a servile passivity. In fact, we find ourselves in this self-affirmation; we do not first construct it. Spontaneously we live this affirmation of the “to be” as good – we do not first have a choice – it is what we are. And since we find ourselves as thus self-affirmation, there is a patience to this primal self-affirmation. There is something received in our being given to be, something not constructed through our own powers alone.

Of course, we have to say “yes” to this original “yes” to being, and we can develop our powers diversely. The endeavor to be in a more self-chosen way here emerges, and necessarily so. If we decide to live in a healthy way, it is following on the first “yes,” but it is the living of a second “yes” that tries to respect, for instance, the integrity of the body, to live with finesse for its subtle rhythms, to embody a kind of reverence, even for a sort of sanctity that is intimate to the human body. But none of this tells against the more primal patience.

Modern constructivism forgets or wants to forget this patience. There is even a hatred of that patience that can come to be expressed, for all patience is a reminder of our status as finite creatures, and hence is a constitutive sign of the fact that we are not the masters of being, not even of our own being. The weaknesses of the latter are often rejected, refused. And there is a qualified sense in which that refusal has some right. But when it loses any porosity to the more primal patience, its seeming self-affirmation is really a kind of self-hatred, for this endeavor to be is in flight from itself, from what it is, from the patience of being that gives it to be at all in the first instance. The conditions that make possible its being at all are refused. Hence we find ourselves in the impossible situation of the flower trying to ingest its own ground – impossible, yet were it even conceivable, it would show the inner self-hatred of the flower that must only destroy itself in this way of absolutizing itself.

One wonders how much of modern constructivism is in flight from this patience, and hence from itself, even when it seems to flee only to itself. The patience of being shows what is not our own, even in what is most intimately our own. Just so the spirit of being truthful shows some sense of truth more primally other than our self-determination, in the deepest intimacy of our own self-determination.

## BEING TRUTHFUL AND PATIENCE

Being truthful is impossible without this patience. It calls for the practice of finesse: this is a matter of giving the time for this patience, in order to attend to what is both within us and before us. True, given the energies that carry our endeavor to be, it tends to happen again and again that there is an *overriding* of this patience by the *conatus*. Being alive is to find oneself always tempted to this impatient overriding. The fulfillment of life is impossible if this happens. We have not taken the proper time, and respected the rhythms of time, to attend to what is within us and before us, and hence to be truthful concerning our proper response to the promise of our being, and indeed to its sickness, when we have deserted what is good in promising. This is also to say that the healthy perpetuation of life is itself conditional on a perpetual recurrence of the patience, and a perpetual receiving of the promise of life. This recurrence and this receiving come to their term when we meet the limit of mortality: when death reveals the finitude that calls time on the endeavor to be.

This recurrence of patience, however, is not only a matter of when the endeavor to be meets an external or hostile limit and is brought low. It is always happening, and its gift of promise always being offered, even though we do not notice or acknowledge it. It concerns the gift of life as received, granted to us in the first instance, but, in the rush forward of the endeavor to be, taken for granted rather than as granted. In the sweep of a life, the external limits of encroaching others, or the limit of mortal time, both internal and external, can serve as reminders of this more primal patience of being, in which we may again consent to the goodness of the gift of life. Alternatively, at the other extreme, we may continue to turn against its givenness in rejection, just because it is given and not produced by us: not made by us, hence beyond our full self-determination. We can so insist that everything be subject to our self-determination that we betray the joy of this gift, in the overriding of our own self-affirmation. Consent to death, in gratitude for the gift of life, is our final opportunity to make our peace with this patience.

## II. Truth as Relation Between Mind-as-Knowing and Reality-as-Knowable

### Thomas Aquinas on truth in the *Summa Theologica*

*This is Aquinas's famous reflection on the nature of truth. Note that Aquinas engages several definitions of truth, none of which he dismisses. Aquinas will conclude that we right speak of truth in the intellect [primary sense of truth] and truth in things [secondary sense of truth] and so a full sense is truth as aedequatio intellectus et rei. I have included two short quotes from Catherine Pickstock and Elizabeth Anscombe to (hopefully) help clarify a challenging text.*

#### ***Summa Theologica* Prima Pars Q. 16 Article 1**

As the good denotes that towards which the appetite tends, so the true denotes that towards which the intellect tends. Now there is this difference between the appetite and the intellect, or any knowledge whatsoever, that knowledge is according as the thing known is in the knower, whilst appetite is according as the desirer tends towards the thing desired. Thus the term of the appetite, namely good, is in the object desirable, and the term of the intellect, namely true, is in the intellect itself. Now as good exists in a thing so far as that thing is related to the appetite – and hence the aspect of goodness passes on from the desirable thing to the appetite, in so far as the appetite is called good if its object is good; so, since the true is in the intellect in so far as it is conformed to the object understood, the aspect of the true must needs pass from the intellect to the object understood, so that also the thing understood is said to be true in so far as it has some relation to the intellect. Now a thing understood may be in relation to an intellect either essentially or accidentally. It is related essentially to an intellect on which it depends as regards its essence; but accidentally to an intellect by which it is knowable; even as we may say that a house is related essentially to the intellect of the architect, but accidentally to the intellect upon which it does not depend.

Now we do not judge of a thing by what is in it accidentally, but by what is in it essentially. Hence, everything is said to be true absolutely, in so far as it is related to the intellect from which it depends; and thus it is that artificial things are said to be true a being related to our intellect. For a house is said to be true that expresses the likeness of the form in the architect's mind; and words are said to be true so far as they are the signs of truth in the intellect. In the same way natural things are said to be true in so far as they express the likeness of the species that are in the divine mind. For a stone is called true, which possesses the nature proper to a stone, according to the preconception in the divine intellect. Thus, then, truth resides primarily in the intellect, and secondarily in things according as they are related to the intellect as their principle. Consequently there are various definitions of truth. Augustine says (*De Vera Relig.* xxxvi), "Truth is that whereby is made manifest that which is;" and Hilary says (*De Trin.* v) that "Truth makes being clear and evident" and this pertains to truth according as it is in the intellect. As to the truth of things in so far as they are related to the intellect, we have Augustine's definition (*De Vera Relig.* xxxvi), "Truth is a supreme likeness without any unlikeness to a principle": also Anselm's definition (*De Verit.* xii), "Truth is

rightness, perceptible by the mind alone"; for that is right which is in accordance with the principle; also Avicenna's definition (Metaph. viii, 6), "The truth of each thing is a property of the essence which is immutably attached to it." The definition that "Truth is the equation of thought and thing" is applicable to it under either aspect.

**Catherine Pickstock from *Truth in Aquinas***

There is an intrinsic *proportio* or analogy between the mind's intrinsic drive towards truth, and the way things manifest themselves, which is their mode of being true.

**Elizabeth Anscombe from "Truth: Anselm or Aquinas"**

"The famous 'measuring up to one another of mind and object': *aedequatio intellectus et rei* ... Thomas is sure that the proper seat of truth is the intellect' and this is tied up with his examination of knowledge and desire. There is knowledge according as the thing is in the knowing mind according to the manner of the mind; there is desire according as the desire reaches out towards the desired thing itself. 'Good' names what desire tends toward. 'true' what the understanding tends towards.... Because truth is in the intellect as according it conforms to the thing it is thinking of, the adjective 'true' has a secondary, derived, use in which *it* applies to the thing that is being thought of. Hence the thing thought of is called 'true' according as it has a certain relation to the intellect.

# BEING TRUE TO SELF

## Session Four

### Questions

- Who are we? How do we find ourselves but also allow ourselves to be formed? How is that informed by what is True?
- What is the relation in these texts between light (beams in Day) and vision and the self? Why does that seem important in seeking one's true self?
- How do we find ourselves in the busyness of life? Do we carve out space for it?
- What is the relationship to the other (God and neighbor) in the process of being true to ourselves?

## I. Being True to Yourself

Know thyself.

-The Oracle at Delphi

This above all: to thine own self be true,/ And it must follow, as the night the day,/ Thou canst not then be false to any man.

-William Shakespeare

### **Letters of Spiritual Direction by St. Francis de Sales, excerpt from a letter to a married woman (1604):**

Yes, truly, ever so gently we must continue to cut out of our lives all that is superfluous and worldly. Don't you see that no one prunes vines by hacking them with an axe but by cutting them very carefully with a pruning hook, one shoot at a time?

I saw a piece of sculpture once that an artist had worked at for ten years before it was completed; during all that time which chisel and burin he never stopped chipping away at everything that was in the way of exact proportions. No, there is no doubt about it, we cannot possibly arrive in a day where we aspire to be. We have to take this step today; tomorrow, another; and thus, step by step, achieve self-mastery, which is no small victory.

I beg you, keep up confidently and sincerely this holy pursuit on which depends all the consolation you will have at the hour of your death, all true peace in this present life, and every assurance of the next life. I know this is a huge undertaking, but still it is not as great as the reward. There is nothing that a generous person cannot do with the help of the Creator (cf. Phil. 4:13). And how happy you will be if in the midst of the world you keep Jesus Christ in your heart! I beg Him to live and rule there eternally.

Keep in mind the main lesson He left us – in three words so that we would never forget it and could repeat it a hundred times a day: “Learn of me,” He said, “that I am gentle and humble of heart” (Mt. 11:29). That says it all: to have a heart gentle toward one's neighbour and humble toward God. At every moment give this heart, the very heart of your heart, to our Saviour. You will see that as this divine, delicate Lover takes His place in your heart, the world with its vanities and superfluities will leave.

I have said this to you in person, madam, and now I write it: I don't want a devotion that is bizarre, confused, neurotic, strained, and sad, but rather, a gentle, attractive,



peaceful piety; in a word, a piety that is quite spontaneous and wins the love of God, first of all, and after that, the love of others.

## **“Self Portrait as a Lighthouse,” by Elizabeth Spires (2017)**

*Peggy Rosenthal reflects on Elizabeth Spires’s poem ‘Self Portrait as a Lighthouse.’*

“Thomas Merton wrote, ‘Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time.’ I feel like this sentiment is especially potent when the literary and visual arts intermingle. Elizabeth Spires employs aspects of ekphrastic poetry as well as persona poetry in order to both lose and find herself in this imaginative poem. Inspired, possibly, by Edward Hopper’s paintings of lighthouses, the poet becomes a lighthouse in order to explore her internal musings and identity in the world. She writes in the final stanza, ‘On clear days/I seem to go on forever. But secretly I wonder,/ What matters? And a voice (within or without?)/ answers, The light. Only the light.’ I appreciate the imagery and personal reflections within this poem that are enlivened by the perspective of this solitary and complicated structure.”

-Peggy Rosenthal

## **“Self Portrait as a Lighthouse” by Elizabeth Spires**

*All his lighthouses are self-portraits....*

— — — Jo Hopper on Edward Hopper

Darkness. Darkness & a wild crashing & smashing  
of waves on the rocks below. My light swinging  
round & round — shining for a split second  
on shards of rocky coast & a vast oily blackness  
ready to swallow small craft & large.  
I preside over this. Inside it is dry.  
Iron stairs spiral up & up to where a keeper lives,  
a keeper who prefers solitude to speaking,  
who wordlessly goes up & down  
how many times each night, how many times?

Days, too, it is rarely calm.  
Seabirds fly round me & the wind blows.  
The terrible wind that screeches & screams  
until I think I cannot bear it for a moment longer.  
But do. If I could steady the light & stop it.  
If every circling thing would be quiet  
for a while & let me collect myself.  
If the windy whirling world would stop.  
If. If. And if. But it cannot.

I should not be saying this. I should not.  
I stand so straight & tall. On clear days

I seem to go on forever. But secretly I wonder,  
What matters? And a voice (within or without?)  
answers, The light. Only the light.  
So I shall go on trying to see myself  
as you see me: a pretty lighthouse framed  
against the bluest sky. Encircled by  
the green green grass, a few tufts of flowers.  
White seabirds flying round & round me.

### **Varieties of Quiet, an essay by Christian Wiman in *Image Journal*, Issue 73**

I HAVE TRIED to learn the language of Christianity but often feel that I have made no progress at all. I don't mean that Christianity doesn't seem to "work" for me, as if its veracity were measured by its specific utility in my own life. I understand that my understanding must be forged and reformed within the life of God, and dogma is a means of making this happen: the ropes, clips, and toe-spikes whereby one descends into the abyss. But I am also a poet, and I feel the falseness – or no, not even that, a certain inaccuracy and slippage, as if the equipment were worn and inadequate – at every step. And that's in the best moments. In the worst, I'm simply wandering through a discount shopping mall of myth, trying to convince myself there's something worth buying.

§

What is the difference between a mystery in which, and by means of which, one's whole spiritual and intellectual being is elated and completed, and a mystery that merely deflates one's spirit and circumvents one's intellect? The latter, you might say, occurs in quotes. Nothing is more frustrating than listening to an inept or unprepared preacher (or poet!) defer to the mystery of existence and God when more mystery is the last thing his words need or can bear – nothing, that is, except perhaps plowing through some twelve-volume Teutonic tome explicating every last letter of the laws of God. I begin to think that anything that abstracts us from the physical world is "of the devil," as we said in the baked – and sometimes half-baked – plains of west Texas where I was raised, though there we were more inclined to blame Satan for tempting us too close to the sweet stinks of the earth. What I crave – and what I have known, in fugitive instants – is mystery that utterly obliterates reality by utterly inhabiting it, some ultimate insight that is still sight. Heaven is precision.

§

Eternity, the idea of it, is a powerful magnet for the mind, but the heart remains unmoved. It is a truism to say that we are never more alive than when we are closest to our deaths. (It is also, at times, if said of one whose suffering has swamped his humanity, an obscenity.) Yet under the easy gesture toward this fatal intensity (easy so

long as it is safely intellectual, remote from us) there is a sharp edge: it might take an illness for you to feel that edge, either in your body or in the body of one you love, or it might simply be a kind of cut in consciousness so sharp that there is a pause between you and all that is not you, and, like a quick-handed cook whose deft slicing suddenly opens his own thumb, you are stuck in the shock of watching.

We live in and by our senses, which are conditioned in and by our deaths. When some singular aspect of reality – an object, a person, even a duration of time – seems to acquire a life in excess of itself, what we feel is more complicated than joy. This is because that excess is at once some inexplicable ongoingness of the thing and the loss of the thing as it is, at once eternity and oblivion. And this is why poetry is so powerful, and so integral to any unified spiritual life: it preserves both aspects of spiritual experience, because to name is to praise and lose in one instant. So many ways of saying God.

§

Joy's trick is to supply  
Dry lips with what can cool and slake,  
Leaving them dumbstruck also with an ache  
Nothing can satisfy.

– Richard Wilbur, "Hamlen Brook"

§

"God is distant, difficult," writes Geoffrey Hill, a contemporary religious poet whose work – distant, difficult – might be said to have grown out of the seed of that assumption. But in fact distance from God – the assumption of it – is often not the terror and scourge we make it out to be, but the very opposite: it is false comfort, for it asks nothing immediate of us, or what it asks is interior, intellectual, self-enclosed. The result is a moment of meditative communion, perhaps, or a work of art, or even – O my easy, hazy God – one more little riff on the ineffable.

To believe in – to serve – Christ, on the other hand, is quite difficult, and precisely because of how near he is to us at all times. In Seattle once, when I was twenty-one and working at some crap temp job downtown, I used to spend my lunch hours near the docks. One particular day when everything was crisp, blue, new, and even the molten men emerging from the metal with which they were working, and the bickering gulls buoyed up in gusts, and my own release from numbing office efficiency seemed to verge on some mysterious, tremendous articulation of light and time – suddenly a tattered gangrenous man staggered toward me with his arms out like a soul in hell.

Modern spiritual consciousness is predicated upon the fact that God is gone, and spiritual experience, for many of us, amounts mostly to an essential, deeply felt and necessary but ultimately inchoate and transitory feeling of oneness or unity with existence. It is mystical and valuable, but distant. Christ, though, is a thorn in the brain.

Christ is God crying *I am here*, and here not only in what exalts and completes and uplifts you, but here in what appalls, offends, and degrades you, here in what activates and exacerbates all that you would call not-God. To walk through the fog of God toward the clarity of Christ is difficult because of how unlovely, how ungodly that clarity often turns out to be.

I thrust my lunch into that man's hands, one of which was furred green as if a mold were growing on it, and fled.

§

It is easy enough to write and talk about God while remaining comfortable within the contemporary intellectual climate. Even people who would call themselves unbelievers often use the word gesturally, as a ready-made synonym for mystery. But if nature abhors a vacuum, Christ abhors a vagueness. If God is love, Christ is love for this one person, this one place, this one time-bound and time-ravaged self. Geoffrey Hill:

What is there in my heart that you should sue  
so fiercely for its love? What kind of care  
brings you as though a stranger to my door  
through the long night and in the icy dew

seeking the heart that will not harbor you,  
that keeps itself religiously secure?

*from "Lachrimae"*

Religiously secure. A brilliant phrase, and not simply because it suggests the radical lack of security, the disruption of ordinary life, that a turn toward Christ entails, but also this: for some people, and probably for all people for some of the time, religion, church, the whole essential but secondary edifice that has grown out of primary spiritual experience – all this is the last place in the world where they are going to find God, who is calling for them in the everyday voices of other people, other sufferings and celebrations, or simply in the cellular soul of what *is*.

§

And yet the merely individual connection with the divine, that moment of supernatural communion, the whole modern muddle of gauzy ontologies and piecemeal belief that leads so many people to dismiss all doctrine out of hand, or to say that they are spiritual but not religious, or to emphasize some form of individual transcendence over other aspects of spiritual experience – all this is fine until life, or death, comes crashing into you with its all-too-specific terrors and sufferings. We do not need definite beliefs because their objects are necessarily true. We need them because they enable us to stand on steady spots from which the truth may be glimpsed. And not simply glimpsed – because certainly revelation is available outside of dogma; indeed all dogma, if it's alive at all, is the result of revelation at one time or another – but gathered in. Definite beliefs

are what make the radical mystery – those moments when we suddenly know there is a God, about whom we know absolutely nothing – accessible to us and our ordinary unmysterious lives. And more crucially: definite beliefs enable us to withstand the storms of suffering that come into every life, and that tend to destroy any spiritual disposition that does not have deep roots.

§

Of course I say all this as someone who gets so bored in church that I often recite poems to myself in my head, someone an interviewer once called (approvingly, I think) an “atheist Christian,” someone who all too often forgets that it is much more important to assert and lay claim to the God you believe in rather than forever drawing the line at the doctrine you don’t. But I say it, too, as someone who has had his own gauzy ontology overwhelmed with real blood, my mystical sense of God-in-nature obliterated by nature wreaking havoc with my body. If wisdom is, as Kant said, “organized life,” I’m afraid I have little to offer. I am still right down in the filthy tumult. If I ever sound like a preacher in these passages, it’s only because I have a hornet’s nest of voluble and conflicting parishioners inside of me.

**Dorothy Day, from *Little by Little* excerpted in *The Reckless Way of Love*, Plough Publishing**

AND NOW I PICK UP Thomas Merton's last book, *Contemplative Prayer*, which I am starting to read, and the foreword by our good Quaker friend Douglas Steere brought back to my memory a strange incident in my life. He quotes William Blake: "We are put on earth for a little space that we may learn to bear the beams of love." And he goes on to say that to escape these beams, to protect ourselves from these beams, even devout men hasten to devise protective clothing. We do not want to be irradiated by love.

Suddenly I remembered coming home from a meeting in Brooklyn many years ago, sitting in an uncomfortable bus seat facing a few poor people. One of them, a downcast, ragged man, suddenly epitomized for me the desolation, the hopelessness of the destitute, and I began to weep. I had been struck by one of those "beams of love," wounded by it in a most particular way. It was my own condition that I was weeping about – my own hardness of heart, my own sinfulness. I recognized this as a moment of truth, an experience of what the *New Catechism* calls our "tremendous, universal, inevitable and yet inexcusable incapacity to love." I had not read that line when I had that experience, but that is what I felt. I think that ever since then I have prayed sincerely those scriptural verses, "Take away my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh." I had been using this prayer as one of the three acts of faith, hope, and charity. "I believe, help thou my unbelief." "In thee have I hoped, let me never be confounded." Take away my heart of stone and give me a heart of flesh, so that I may learn how to truly love my brother because in him, in his meanest guise, I am encountering Christ.

Perhaps I knew in that moment in the bus in Brooklyn what Saint Augustine meant when he cried out, May I know myself so that I may know Thee. Because I felt so strongly my nothingness, my powerlessness to do anything about this horrifying recognition of my own hardness of heart, it drove me to the recognition that in God alone was my strength. Without him I could do nothing. Yet I could do all things in him who strengthened me. So there was happiness there, too. The tears were of joy as well as grief.

Henry Ossawa Tanner's *Annunciation*, 1898, Philadelphia Museum of Art





# BEING TRUE TO OTHERS

## Session Five

### Questions

- How is reverence for each other as persons a form of being true to the reality of our neighbors?
- Why does truth need charity? Why does charity need truth?
- What is the nature of dialogue? Why is it essential to a truth-filled life? How can we fail in dialogue?

## I. An Ethics of Interpersonal Relations

### Dorothy Day from *The Long Loneliness*

We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know Him in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone anymore. Heaven is a banquet and life is a banquet, too, even with a crust, where there is companionship."

### *Fundamental Moral Attitudes* by Dietrich Von Hildebrand

*Dietrich Von Hildebrand, a mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher and opponent of fascism, help develop a philosophy centered on the human person as a locus of moral values. In this piece, he reflects on reverence as a fundamental moral attitude.*

#### Chapter One: Reverence

Moral values are the highest among all natural values. Goodness, purity, truthfulness, humility of man rank higher than genius, brilliancy, exuberant vitality, than the beauty of nature or of art, than the stability and power of a state. What is realized and what shines forth in an act of real forgiveness, in a noble and generous renunciation; in a burning and selfless love, is more significant and more noble, more important and more eternal than all cultural values. Positive moral values are the focus of the world, negative moral values, the greatest evil, worse than suffering, sickness, death, or the disintegration of a flourishing culture.

This fact was recognized by the great minds, such as Socrates, or Plato, who continually repeated that it is better to suffer injustice than to commit it. This pre-eminence of the moral sphere is, above all, a basic proposition of the Christian ethos.

Moral values are always personal values. They can only inhere in man, and be realized by man. A material thing, like a stone or a house, cannot be morally good or bad, just as moral goodness is not possible to a tree or a dog. Similarly, works of the human mind (discoveries, scientific books, works of art), cannot properly be said to be the bearers of moral values; they cannot be faithful, humble and loving. They can, at the most, indirectly reflect these values, as bearing the imprint of the human mind. Man alone, as a free being, responsible for his actions and his attitudes, for his will and striving, his love and his hatred, his joy and his sorrow, and his super-actual basic attitudes, can be morally good or bad. For, far above his cultural accomplishments, rises the importance of the man's own being: a personality radiating moral values, a man who is humble, pure, truthful, honest and loving.

How can man participate in these moral values? Are they given to him by nature like the beauty of his face, his intelligence, or a lively temperament? No, they can only grow out of conscious, free attitudes; man himself must essentially cooperate for their

realization. They can only develop through his conscious, free abandonment of himself to genuine values. In proportion to man's capacity to grasp values, in so far as he sees the fullness of the world of values with a clear and fresh vision, in so far as his abandonment to this world is pure and unconditional, will he be rich in moral values.

As long as a man blindly disregards the moral values of other persons, as long as he does not distinguish the positive value which inheres in truth, and the negative value which is proper to error, as long as he does not understand the value which inheres in the life of man, and the negative value attached to an injustice, will he be incapable of moral goodness. As long as he is only interested in the question of whether something is subjectively satisfying or not, whether it is agreeable to him or not, instead of asking whether it is something important, whether in itself it is beautiful, good, whether it should be for its own sake, in a word, whether it is something having a value he cannot be morally good.

The soul of every morally good attitude is abandonment to that which is objectively important, is interest in a thing because it has value. Two men are, for example, witnesses of an injustice which is being inflicted upon a third person. The one who in every situation asks only whether something is agreeable to himself or not will not be concerned about it because he calculates that no personal damage to himself can result from the other's injury. The second man, on the contrary, is willing to take suffering upon himself rather than remain disinterested in the injustice which is about to be done to the third person. For the second man, the preponderant question is not whether something is agreeable to him or not, but whether it is important in itself. The one behaves morally well, the other one morally badly, because he indifferently by-passes the question of value.

Whether one chooses or rejects something which is agreeable, but is indifferent from the point of view of value, depends upon one's own pleasure. Whether one does or does not eat an excellent meal is up to oneself. But the positive value calls for an affirmation, and the negative value for a refusal on our part. Confronted with these, the way in which one should behave is not left to one's arbitrary pleasure; instead it should be the subject of preoccupation and the right response should be given, for interest in and adequate responses on our part are due to values. Whether one does or does not help another person who is in need does not depend upon one's arbitrary pleasure; he is guilty who ignores this objective value.

Only he who understands that there exists things "important in themselves," that there are things which are beautiful and good in themselves, only the man who grasps the sublime demand of values, their call, and the duty to turn toward them and to let oneself be formed by their law, is capable of personally realizing moral values. Only the man who can see beyond his subjective horizon and who, free from pride and concupiscence, does not always ask, "what is satisfying for me?", but who leaving behind him all narrowness, abandons himself to that which is important in itself – the beautiful, the good – and subordinates himself to it, only he can become the bearer of moral values.

The capacity to grasp values, to affirm them, and to respond to them, is the foundation for realizing the moral values of man.

Now these marks can be found only in the man who possesses reverence. Reverence is the attitude which can be designated as the mother of all moral life, for in it man first takes a position toward the world which opens his spiritual eyes and enables him to grasp values. Consequently, in these chapters which deal with moral attitudes, i.e. attitudes which give a basis to the whole of moral life, and are presupposed for this life, we must first speak of this virtue.

The irreverent and impertinent man is the man incapable of any abandonment or subordination of self. He is either the slave of his pride, of that cramping egoism which makes him a prisoner of himself and blind to values, and leads him to ask repeatedly: Will my prestige be increased, will my own glory be augmented? Or he is a slave of concupiscence, one for whom everything in the world becomes only an occasion to serve his lust. The irreverent man can never remain inwardly silent. He never gives situations, things and persons a chance to unfold themselves in their proper character and value. He approaches everything in such an importunate and tactless way that he observes only himself, listens only to himself and ignores the rest of being. He does not preserve a reverent distance from the world.

Irreverence can be divided into two types, according to whether it is rooted in pride or in concupiscence. The first type is that of the man whose irreverence is a fruit of his pride, that of the impertinent person. He is the type of man who approaches everything with a presumptuous, sham superiority, and never makes any effort to understand a thing "from within." He is the "know-all," schoolmaster type who believes that he penetrates everything at first sight, and knows all things "ab ovo." He is the man for whom nothing could be greater than himself, who never sees beyond his own horizon, from whom the world of being hides no secret. He is the man Shakespeare has in mind in his "Hamlet":

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

He is the man possessed of a blighting incomprehension, without yearnings, like *Famulus* in Goethe's "Faust" who is completely filled by "how wondrously far he has gone." This man suspects nothing of the breadth and depth of the world, of the mysterious depths and the immeasurable fullness of values which are bespoken by every ray of the sun and every plant, and which are revealed in the innocent laughter of a child, as well as in the repentant tears of a sinner. The world is flattened before his impertinent and stupid gaze; it becomes limited to one dimension, shallow and mute. It is evident that such a man is blind to values. He passes through the world with a blighting incomprehension.

The other type of man who lacks reverence, the blunt, concupiscent man, is equally blind to values. He limits his interest to one thing only: whether something is agreeable to him or not, whether it offers him satisfaction, whether or not it can be of any use to him. He sees in all things only that segment which is related to his accidental,

immediate interest. Every being is, for him, but a means to his own selfish aim. He drags himself about eternally in the circle of his narrowness, and never succeeds in emerging from himself. Consequently, he also does not know the true and deep happiness which can only flow from abandonment to true values, out of contact with what is in itself good and beautiful. He does not approach being as does the first type in an impertinent way, but he is equally closed up within himself, and does not preserve that distance toward being required by reverence; he overlooks all things and seeks only that which is momentarily useful and expedient to him. Similarly, he can never be inwardly silent, or open his spiritual self to the influence of being and allow himself to receive the joy that values give. He is also, as it were, in a perpetual egospasm. His look falls on all things flatly, "from the outside," without comprehension for the true meaning and value of an object. He also is shortsighted, and comes too close to all things, so that he does not give them a chance to reveal their true essence. He fails to leave to any being the "space" which it needs to unfold itself fully and in its proper mode. This man also is blind to values, and to him again the world refuses to reveal its breadth, depth and height.

The man possessing reverence approaches the world in a completely different way. He is free from this egospasm, from pride and concupiscence. He does not fill the world with his own ego, but leaves to being the space which it needs in order to unfold itself. He understands the dignity and nobility of being as such, the value which it already possesses in its opposition to mere nothingness. Thus there is a value inherent in every stone, in a drop of water, in a blade of grass, precisely as being, as an entity which possesses its own being, which is such and not otherwise. In contradistinction to a fantasy or a sheer semblance, it is something independent of the person considering it, and is something withdrawn from his arbitrary will. Hence each of these things has the quite general value of existence.

Because of this autonomy, being is never a mere means for the reverent man and his accidental egoistic aims. It is never merely something which he can use, but he takes it seriously in itself; he leaves it the necessary space for its proper unfolding. Confronted with being, the reverent man remains silent in order to give it an opportunity to speak. The man who possesses reverence knows that the world of being is greater than he is, that he is not the Lord who can do with things as He likes, and that he must learn from being, not the other way around.

This responsive attitude to the value of being is pervaded by the disposition to recognize something superior to one's arbitrary pleasure and will, and to be ready to subordinate and abandon oneself. It enables the spiritual eye to see the deeper nature of every being. It leaves to being the possibility of unveiling its essence, and makes a man capable of grasping values. To whom will the sublime beauty of a sunset or a ninth symphony of Beethoven reveal itself, but to him who approaches it reverently and unlocks his heart to it? To whom will the mystery which lies in life and manifests itself in every plant reveal itself in its full splendor, but to him who contemplates it reverently? But he who sees in it only a means of subsistence or of earning money, i.e.

something which can be used or employed, will not discover the meaning, structure and significance of the world in its beauty and hidden dignity.

Reverence is the indispensable presupposition for all deep knowledge – above all, for the capacity to grasp values. All capacity to be made happy and uplifted by values, all sanctioned abandonment to values, all submission to their majesty, presupposes reverence. In reverence the person takes into account the sublimity of the world of values – in it is to be found that upward look toward that world, that respect for the objective and valid demands immanent to the values which, independently of the arbitrary will and wishes of men, call for an adequate response.

Reverence is the presupposition for every response to value, every abandonment to something important, and it is, at the same time, an essential element of such response to value. Each time one gives oneself to the good and beautiful, each time one conforms to the inner law of value, the basic attitude of reverence is implied. This can be verified by examining moral attitudes on the different levels of life.

The fundamental attitude of reverence is the basis for all moral conduct toward our fellowmen and toward ourselves. Only to the man possessing reverence is revealed the full grandeur and depth of the values which inhere in every man as a spiritual person. The spiritual person as a conscious, free being, as a being who alone, among all the entities known to us, is capable of knowing and grasping the rest of being, and of taking a meaningful position toward it, can only be comprehended by a reverent mind. A being who is able and destined to realize in himself a rich world of values, to become a vessel of goodness, purity, and humility – this is a person. How could one really love another person, how could he make sacrifices for him, if he senses nothing of the preciousness and plenitude which is potentially enclosed in man's soul, if he has no reverence for this being?

The basic attitude of reverence is the presupposition for every true love, above all, the love of neighbor, because it alone opens our eyes to the value of men as spiritual persons, and because, without this awareness, no love is possible. Reverence for the beloved one is also an essential element of every love. To give attention to the specific meaning and value of his individuality, to display consideration toward him, instead of forcing our wishes on him, is part of reverence. It is from reverence that there flows the willingness of a lover to grant the beloved the spiritual "space" needed to freely express his own individuality. All these elements of every true love flow from reverence. What would mother love be without reverence for the growing being, for all the possibilities of values which yet lie dormant, for the preciousness of the child's soul?

A similar reverence is evident in justice toward others, in consideration for the rights of another, for the liberty of another's decisions, in limiting one's own lust for power, and in all understanding of another's rights. Reverence for our neighbors is the basis for all true community life, for the right approach to marriage, the family, the nation, the state, humanity, for respect of legitimate authority, for the fulfillment of moral duties toward the community as a whole and toward the individual members of the community. The irreverent man splits apart and disintegrates the community.

But reverence is also the soul of the correct attitude in other domains, such as purity. Reverence for the mystery of the marital union, for the depth and tenderness and the decisive and lasting validity of this most intimate abandonment of self, are the presuppositions for purity. First of all, reverence assures an understanding of this sphere; it shows us how horrible is every illicit approach to this mysterious domain, since such an illicit approach desecrates us and involves so serious a debasement of our dignity and that of others. Reverence for the wonder of the coming into being of a new life out of the closest union of love of two people is the basis for the horror of every criminal, artificial and irreverent act destroying this mysterious bond which exists between love and the coming into being of new men.

Wherever we look, we see reverence to be the basis and at the same time an essential element of moral life and moral values. Without a fundamental attitude of reverence, no true love, no justice, no kindness, no self-development, no purity, no truthfulness, are possible; above all, without reverence, the dimension of depth is completely excluded. The irreverent person is himself flat and shallow, for he fails to understand the depth of being, since for him there is no world beyond and above that which is visibly palpable. Only to the man possessing reverence does the world of religion open itself; only to him will the world as a whole reveal its meaning and value. So reverence as a basic moral attitude stands at the beginning of all religion. It is the basis for the right attitude of men toward themselves, their neighbors, to every level of being, and above all to God.

## II. Knowing the Truth With Each Other in Dialogue

### *Caritas in Veritate* Pope Benedict XVI

*Pope Benedict's Caritas in Veritate is an encyclical on Catholic Social Thought. It begins on a reflection on the relationship of love and truth and how that relationship should ground our dialogues with others.*

1. Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by his earthly life and especially by his death and resurrection, is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity. Love – *caritas* – is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. It is a force that has its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth. Each person finds his good by adherence to God's plan for him, in order to realize it fully: in this plan, he finds his truth, and through adherence to this truth he becomes free (cf. Jn 8:32). To defend the truth, to articulate it with humility and conviction, and to bear witness to it in life are therefore exacting and indispensable forms of charity. Charity, in fact, “rejoices in the truth” (1 Cor 13:6). All people feel the interior impulse to love authentically: love and truth never abandon them completely, because these are the vocation planted by God in the heart and mind of every human person. The search for love and truth is purified and liberated by Jesus Christ from the impoverishment that our humanity brings to it, and he reveals to us in all its fullness the initiative of love and the plan for true life that God has prepared for us. In Christ, *charity in truth* becomes the Face of his Person, a vocation for us to love our brothers and sisters in the truth of his plan. Indeed, he himself is the Truth (cf. Jn 14:6).

2. Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelt out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22:36- 40). It gives real substance to the personal relationship with God and with neighbour; it is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)....

I am aware of the ways in which charity has been and continues to be misconstrued and emptied of meaning, with the consequent risk of being misinterpreted, detached from ethical living and, in any event, undervalued. In the social, juridical, cultural, political and economic fields – the contexts, in other words, that are most exposed to this danger – it is easily dismissed as irrelevant for interpreting and giving direction to moral responsibility. Hence the need to link charity with truth not only in the sequence, pointed out by Saint Paul, of *veritas in caritate* (Eph 4:15), but also in the inverse and complementary sequence of *caritas in veritate*. Truth needs to be sought, found and expressed within the “economy” of charity, but charity in its turn needs to be understood, confirmed and practised in the light of truth. In this way, not only do we



do a service to charity enlightened by truth, but we also help give credibility to truth, demonstrating its persuasive and authenticating power in the practical setting of social living. This is a matter of no small account today, in a social and cultural context which relativizes truth, often paying little heed to it and showing increasing reluctance to acknowledge its existence.

3. Through this close link with truth, charity can be recognized as an authentic expression of humanity and as an element of fundamental importance in human relations, including those of a public nature. *Only in truth does charity shine forth*, only in truth can charity be authentically lived. Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity. That light is both the light of reason and the light of faith, through which the intellect attains to the natural and supernatural truth of charity: it grasps its meaning as gift, acceptance, and communion. Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way. In a culture without truth, this is the fatal risk facing love. It falls prey to contingent subjective emotions and opinions, the word “love” is abused and distorted, to the point where it comes to mean the opposite. Truth frees charity from the constraints of an emotionalism that deprives it of relational and social content, and of a fideism that deprives it of human and universal breathing-space. In the truth, charity reflects the personal yet public dimension of faith in the God of the Bible, who is both *Agápe* and *Lógos*: Charity and Truth, Love and Word.

4. Because it is filled with truth, charity can be understood in the abundance of its values, it can be shared and communicated. *Truth*, in fact, is *lógos* which creates *diá-logos*, and hence communication and communion. Truth, by enabling men and women to let go of their subjective opinions and impressions, allows them to move beyond cultural and historical limitations and to come together in the assessment of the value and substance of things. Truth opens and unites our minds in the *lógos* of love: this is the Christian proclamation and testimony of charity. In the present social and cultural context, where there is a widespread tendency to relativize truth, practising charity in truth helps people to understand that adhering to the values of Christianity is not merely useful but essential for building a good society and for true integral human development. A Christianity of charity without truth would be more or less interchangeable with a pool of good sentiments, helpful for social cohesion, but of little relevance. In other words, there would no longer be any real place for God in the world. Without truth, charity is confined to a narrow field devoid of relations. It is excluded from the plans and processes of promoting human development of universal range, in dialogue between knowledge and praxis.

5. Charity is love received and given. It is “grace” (*cháris*). Its source is the wellspring of the Father's love for the Son, in the Holy Spirit. Love comes down to us from the Son. It is creative love, through which we have our being; it is redemptive love, through which we are recreated. Love is revealed and made present by Christ (cf. Jn 13:1) and “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5). As the objects of God's love, men

and women become subjects of charity, they are called to make themselves instruments of grace, so as to pour forth God's charity and to weave networks of charity.

This dynamic of charity received and given is what gives rise to the Church's social teaching, which is *caritas in veritate in re sociali*: the proclamation of the truth of Christ's love in society. This doctrine is a service to charity, but its locus is truth. Truth preserves and expresses charity's power to liberate in the ever-changing events of history. It is at the same time the truth of faith and of reason, both in the distinction and also in the convergence of those two cognitive fields. Development, social well-being, the search for a satisfactory solution to the grave socio-economic problems besetting humanity, all need this truth. What they need even more is that this truth should be loved and demonstrated. Without truth, without trust and love for what is true, there is no social conscience and responsibility, and social action ends up serving private interests and the logic of power, resulting in social fragmentation, especially in a globalized society at difficult times like the present.

6. "*Caritas in veritate*" is the principle around which the Church's social doctrine turns, a principle that takes on practical form in the criteria that govern moral action. I would like to consider two of these in particular, of special relevance to the commitment to development in an increasingly globalized society: *justice and the common good*.

First of all, justice. *Ubi societas, ibi ius*: every society draws up its own system of justice. *Charity goes beyond justice*, because to love is to give, to offer what is "mine" to the other; but it never lacks justice, which prompts us to give the other what is "his", what is due to him by reason of his being or his acting. I cannot "give" what is mine to the other, without first giving him what pertains to him in justice. If we love others with charity, then first of all we are just towards them. Not only is justice not extraneous to charity, not only is it not an alternative or parallel path to charity: justice is inseparable from charity[1], and intrinsic to it. Justice is the primary way of charity or, in Paul VI's words, "the minimum measure" of it[2], an integral part of the love "in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3:18), to which Saint John exhorts us. On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the *earthly city* according to law and justice. On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving[3]. The *earthly city* is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy and communion. Charity always manifests God's love in human relationships as well, it gives theological and salvific value to all commitment for justice in the world.

7. Another important consideration is the common good. To love someone is to desire that person's good and to take effective steps to secure it. Besides the good of the individual, there is a good that is linked to living in society: the common good. It is the good of "all of us", made up of individuals, families and intermediate groups who together constitute society[4]. It is a good that is sought not for its own sake, but for the

people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it. To desire the *common good* and strive towards it is a *requirement of justice and charity*. To take a stand for the common good is on the one hand to be solicitous for, and on the other hand to avail oneself of, that complex of institutions that give structure to the life of society, juridically, civilly, politically and culturally, making it the *pólis*, or “city”. The more we strive to secure a common good corresponding to the real needs of our neighbours, the more effectively we love them. Every Christian is called to practise this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation and according to the degree of influence he wields in the *pólis*. This is the institutional path – we might also call it the political path – of charity, no less excellent and effective than the kind of charity which encounters the neighbour directly, outside the institutional mediation of the *pólis*. When animated by charity, commitment to the common good has greater worth than a merely secular and political stand would have. Like all commitment to justice, it has a place within the testimony of divine charity that paves the way for eternity through temporal action. Man's earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to the building of the universal *city of God*, which is the goal of the history of the human family. In an increasingly globalized society, the common good and the effort to obtain it cannot fail to assume the dimensions of the whole human family, that is to say, the community of peoples and nations[5], in such a way as to shape the *earthly city* in unity and peace, rendering it to some degree an anticipation and a prefiguration of the undivided *city of God*...

## ***Fratelli Tutti Pope Francis***

*Pope Francis's 2020 encyclical sought to elaborate a life of community grounded in fraternity and friendship. Such fraternity and friendship necessitates a changed sense of human communication.*

### ***Information without wisdom***

47. True wisdom demands an encounter with reality. Today, however, everything can be created, disguised and altered. A direct encounter even with the fringes of reality can thus prove intolerable. A mechanism of selection then comes into play, whereby I can immediately separate likes from dislikes, what I consider attractive from what I deem distasteful. In the same way, we can choose the people with whom we wish to share our world. Persons or situations we find unpleasant or disagreeable are simply deleted in today's virtual networks; a virtual circle is then created, isolating us from the real world in which we are living.

48. The ability to sit down and listen to others, typical of interpersonal encounters, is paradigmatic of the welcoming attitude shown by those who transcend narcissism and accept others, caring for them and welcoming them into their lives. Yet "today's world is largely a deaf world... At times, the frantic pace of the modern world prevents us from listening attentively to what another person is saying. Halfway through, we interrupt him and want to contradict what he has not even finished saying. We must not lose our ability to listen". Saint Francis "heard the voice of God, he heard the voice of the poor, he heard the voice of the infirm and he heard the voice of nature. He made of them a way of life. My desire is that the seed that Saint Francis planted may grow in the hearts of many".[49]

49. As silence and careful listening disappear, replaced by a frenzy of texting, this basic structure of sage human communication is at risk. A new lifestyle is emerging, where we create only what we want and exclude all that we cannot control or know instantly and superficially. This process, by its intrinsic logic, blocks the kind of serene reflection that could lead us to a shared wisdom.

50. Together, we can seek the truth in dialogue, in relaxed conversation or in passionate debate. To do so calls for perseverance; it entails moments of silence and suffering, yet it can patiently embrace the broader experience of individuals and peoples. The flood of information at our fingertips does not make for greater wisdom. Wisdom is not born of quick searches on the internet nor is it a mass of unverified data. That is not the way to mature in the encounter with truth. Conversations revolve only around the latest data; they become merely horizontal and cumulative. We fail to keep our attention focused, to penetrate to the heart of matters, and to recognize what is essential to give meaning to our lives. Freedom thus becomes an illusion that we are peddled, easily confused with the ability to navigate the internet. The process of building fraternity, be it local or

universal, can only be undertaken by spirits that are free and open to authentic encounters.

## CHAPTER SIX: DIALOGUE AND FRIENDSHIP IN SOCIETY

198. Approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these things are summed up in the one word “dialogue”. If we want to encounter and help one another, we have to dialogue. There is no need for me to stress the benefits of dialogue. I have only to think of what our world would be like without the patient dialogue of the many generous persons who keep families and communities together. Unlike disagreement and conflict, persistent and courageous dialogue does not make headlines, but quietly helps the world to live much better than we imagine.

### SOCIAL DIALOGUE FOR A NEW CULTURE

199. Some people attempt to flee from reality, taking refuge in their own little world; others react to it with destructive violence. Yet “between selfish indifference and violent protest there is always another possible option: that of dialogue. Dialogue between generations; dialogue among our people, for we are that people; readiness to give and receive, while remaining open to the truth. A country flourishes when constructive dialogue occurs between its many rich cultural components: popular culture, university culture, youth culture, artistic culture, technological culture, economic culture, family culture and media culture”.[196]

200. Dialogue is often confused with something quite different: the feverish exchange of opinions on social networks, frequently based on media information that is not always reliable. These exchanges are merely parallel monologues. They may attract some attention by their sharp and aggressive tone. But monologues engage no one, and their content is frequently self-serving and contradictory.

201. Indeed, the media’s noisy potpourri of facts and opinions is often an obstacle to dialogue, since it lets everyone cling stubbornly to his or her own ideas, interests and choices, with the excuse that everyone else is wrong. It becomes easier to discredit and insult opponents from the outset than to open a respectful dialogue aimed at achieving agreement on a deeper level. Worse, this kind of language, usually drawn from media coverage of political campaigns, has become so widespread as to be part of daily conversation. Discussion is often manipulated by powerful special interests that seek to tilt public opinion unfairly in their favour. This kind of manipulation can be exercised not only by governments, but also in economics, politics, communications, religion and in other spheres. Attempts can be made to justify or excuse it when it tends to serve one’s own economic or ideological interests, but sooner or later it turns against those very interests.

202. Lack of dialogue means that in these individual sectors people are concerned not for the common good, but for the benefits of power or, at best, for ways to impose their own ideas. Round tables thus become mere negotiating sessions, in which individuals attempt to seize every possible advantage, rather than cooperating in the pursuit of the common good. The heroes of the future will be those who can break with this unhealthy mindset and determine respectfully to promote truthfulness, aside from personal interest. God willing, such heroes are quietly emerging, even now, in the midst of our society.

203. Authentic social dialogue involves the ability to respect the other's point of view and to admit that it may include legitimate convictions and concerns. Based on their identity and experience, others have a contribution to make, and it is desirable that they should articulate their positions for the sake of a more fruitful public debate. When individuals or groups are consistent in their thinking, defend their values and convictions, and develop their arguments, this surely benefits society. Yet, this can only occur to the extent that there is genuine dialogue and openness to others. Indeed, "in a true spirit of dialogue, we grow in our ability to grasp the significance of what others say and do, even if we cannot accept it as our own conviction. In this way, it becomes possible to be frank and open about our beliefs, while continuing to discuss, to seek points of contact, and above all, to work and struggle together".[197] Public discussion, if it truly makes room for everyone and does not manipulate or conceal information, is a constant stimulus to a better grasp of the truth, or at least its more effective expression. It keeps different sectors from becoming complacent and self-centred in their outlook and their limited concerns. Let us not forget that "differences are creative; they create tension and in the resolution of tension lies humanity's progress".[198]

204. There is a growing conviction that, together with specialized scientific advances, we are in need of greater interdisciplinary communication. Although reality is one, it can be approached from various angles and with different methodologies. There is a risk that a single scientific advance will be seen as the only possible lens for viewing a particular aspect of life, society and the world. Researchers who are expert in their own field, yet also familiar with the findings of other sciences and disciplines, are in a position to discern other aspects of the object of their study and thus to become open to a more comprehensive and integral knowledge of reality.

205. In today's globalized world, "the media can help us to feel closer to one another, creating a sense of the unity of the human family which in turn can inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all... The media can help us greatly in this, especially nowadays, when the networks of human communication have made unprecedented advances. The internet, in particular, offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God".[199] We need constantly to ensure that present-day forms of communication are in fact guiding us to generous encounter with others, to honest pursuit of the whole truth, to service, to closeness to the underprivileged and to the promotion of the common good. As the

Bishops of Australia have pointed out, we cannot accept “a digital world designed to exploit our weaknesses and bring out the worst in people”.[200]

206. The solution is not relativism. Under the guise of tolerance, relativism ultimately leaves the interpretation of moral values to those in power, to be defined as they see fit. “In the absence of objective truths or sound principles other than the satisfaction of our own desires and immediate needs... we should not think that political efforts or the force of law will be sufficient... When the culture itself is corrupt, and objective truth and universally valid principles are no longer upheld, then laws can only be seen as arbitrary impositions or obstacles to be avoided”.[201]

207. Is it possible to be concerned for truth, to seek the truth that responds to life’s deepest meaning? What is law without the conviction, born of age-old reflection and great wisdom, that each human being is sacred and inviolable? If society is to have a future, it must respect the truth of our human dignity and submit to that truth. Murder is not wrong simply because it is socially unacceptable and punished by law, but because of a deeper conviction. This is a non-negotiable truth attained by the use of reason and accepted in conscience. A society is noble and decent not least for its support of the pursuit of truth and its adherence to the most basic of truths.

208. We need to learn how to unmask the various ways that the truth is manipulated, distorted and concealed in public and private discourse. What we call “truth” is not only the reporting of facts and events, such as we find in the daily papers. It is primarily the search for the solid foundations sustaining our decisions and our laws. This calls for acknowledging that the human mind is capable of transcending immediate concerns and grasping certain truths that are unchanging, as true now as in the past. As it peers into human nature, reason discovers universal values derived from that same nature.

209. Otherwise, is it not conceivable that those fundamental human rights which we now consider unassailable will be denied by those in power, once they have gained the “consensus” of an apathetic or intimidated population? Nor would a mere consensus between different nations, itself equally open to manipulation, suffice to protect them. We have ample evidence of the great good of which we are capable, yet we also have to acknowledge our inherent destructiveness. Is not the indifference and the heartless individualism into which we have fallen also a result of our sloth in pursuing higher values, values that transcend our immediate needs? Relativism always brings the risk that some or other alleged truth will be imposed by the powerful or the clever. Yet, “when it is a matter of the moral norms prohibiting intrinsic evil, there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone. It makes no difference whether one is the master of the world or the ‘poorest of the poor’ on the face of the earth. Before the demands of morality we are all absolutely equal”.[202]

210. What is now happening, and drawing us into a perverse and barren way of thinking, is the reduction of ethics and politics to physics. Good and evil no longer exist

in themselves; there is only a calculus of benefits and burdens. As a result of the displacement of moral reasoning, the law is no longer seen as reflecting a fundamental notion of justice but as mirroring notions currently in vogue. Breakdown ensues: everything is “leveled down” by a superficial bartered consensus. In the end, the law of the strongest prevails.

### *Consensus and truth*

211. In a pluralistic society, dialogue is the best way to realize what ought always to be affirmed and respected apart from any ephemeral consensus. Such dialogue needs to be enriched and illumined by clear thinking, rational arguments, a variety of perspectives and the contribution of different fields of knowledge and points of view. Nor can it exclude the conviction that it is possible to arrive at certain fundamental truths always to be upheld. Acknowledging the existence of certain enduring values, however demanding it may be to discern them, makes for a robust and solid social ethics. Once those fundamental values are acknowledged and adopted through dialogue and consensus, we realize that they rise above consensus; they transcend our concrete situations and remain non-negotiable. Our understanding of their meaning and scope can increase – and in that respect, consensus is a dynamic reality – but in themselves, they are held to be enduring by virtue of their inherent meaning.

212. If something always serves the good functioning of society, is it not because, lying beyond it, there is an enduring truth accessible to the intellect? Inherent in the nature of human beings and society there exist certain basic structures to support our development and survival. Certain requirements thus ensue, and these can be discovered through dialogue, even though, strictly speaking, they are not created by consensus. The fact that certain rules are indispensable for the very life of society is a sign that they are good in and of themselves. There is no need, then, to oppose the interests of society, consensus and the reality of objective truth. These three realities can be harmonized whenever, through dialogue, people are unafraid to get to the heart of an issue.

213. The dignity of others is to be respected in all circumstances, not because that dignity is something we have invented or imagined, but because human beings possess an intrinsic worth superior to that of material objects and contingent situations. This requires that they be treated differently. That every human being possesses an inalienable dignity is a truth that corresponds to human nature apart from all cultural change. For this reason, human beings have the same inviolable dignity in every age of history and no one can consider himself or herself authorized by particular situations to deny this conviction or to act against it. The intellect can investigate the reality of things through reflection, experience and dialogue, and come to recognize in that reality, which transcends it, the basis of certain universal moral demands.



# BEING TRUE TO GOD

## Session Six

### Questions

- Why is the deepest meaning of our life being-true-to-God by conforming to God?
- Why is it important to see that we can both know God and yet also never fully know God?
- Can we prove God's existence? How do we reason towards God?
- Why is the knowledge of God in the beatific vision our highest end?

## **I. Conforming to God**

*To be true to reality, self, and others is fundamentally to conform to the Memory, Understanding, and Will of God. In these short selections we will consider our vocation to be true is a vocation to be shaped by the Triune God.*

### **Gospel of John**

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

-John 14:6

<sup>12</sup>“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants<sup>[d]</sup> any longer, because the servant<sup>[e]</sup> does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. <sup>17</sup>I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

-John 15:12-1

Everyone who is of the truth listens to My voice

-John 18:37

### **Plato**

Not man but God is the ‘measure of all things.

### **Augustine Exposition of Psalm 2**

All three of these opinions entail grave impiety, whether it is denial of God’s existence, or charging him with injustice, or doubting his governance of the world. Why does anyone hold such views? Because they are crooked of heart. God is straight and true, and therefore a crooked heart is not at peace with him.... if you lay a warped beam on a hard, level surface, it does not fit or square up properly or lie flat; it will always shake and wobble, not because the surface where it was placed is uneven, but because the beam itself is lopsided. So too as long as a heart remains crooked and twisted, it cannot be aligned with the rectitude of God.

### **Anselm On Truth**

*Teacher:* Say what you think truth is in that case.

*Student.* Nothing but rectitude. For if, so long as he wills what he ought, which is why he was given a will, he was in rectitude and in truth, and when he willed what he ought

not, he deserted rectitude and truth, such truth can only be understood as rectitude since both truth and rectitude of will were nothing other than to will what he ought....

*Teacher.* You will not deny that the highest truth is rectitude.

*Student.* There is nothing else that I can say it is.

*Teacher.* Consider that, since all the foregoing rectitudes are such because they are in things which are or do what they ought, but the highest truth is not rectitude because it owes anything. All other things owe him but he owes nothing to another, nor is there any other reason why he is than that he is.

*Student.* I understand.

*Teacher.* You will also see how this rectitude is the cause of all other truth and rectitude but nothing is the cause of it?

*Student.* I see and I note in others that some are only effects whereas some are both causes and effects – as when the truth that is in the things that exist is the effect of the highest truth, but it is also the cause of the truth which is in knowledge and of that which is in the statement, but these two truths are not the cause of any other truth.

### **Edith Stein from *The Science of the Cross***

The soul in which God dwells by grace is no impersonal scene of the divine life but is itself drawn into this life. The divine life is three-personal life: it is overflowing love, in which the Father generates the Son and gives him his Being, while the Son embraces this Being and returns it to the Father; it is the love in which the Father and Son are one, both breathing the Holy Spirit. By grace this Spirit is shed abroad in men's hearts. Thus the soul lives its life of grace through the Holy Spirit, in Him it loves the Father with the love of the Son and the Son with the love of the Father.

## II. Proofs for God's Existence

*The Church holds as an article of faith that God is known with certainty to exist by means of reason.*

### Canons of the First Vatican Council 1868

1. If anyone says that the one, true God, our creator and lord, cannot be known with certainty from the things that have been made, by the natural light of human reason: let him be anathema.
2. If anyone says that it is impossible, or not expedient, that human beings should be taught by means of divine revelation about God and the worship that should be shown him: let him be anathema.
3. If anyone says that a human being cannot be divinely elevated to a knowledge and perfection which exceeds the natural, but of himself can and must reach finally the possession of all truth and goodness by continual development: let him be anathema.

### Thomas Aquinas's Five Ways

*These are perhaps the most famous proofs for the existence of God. They step from a consideration of the nature of things and then move to the necessity of God's existence.*

#### Article 3. Whether God exists?

**I answer that,** The existence of God can be proved in five ways.

The first and more manifest way is the argument from motion. It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are in motion. Now whatever is in motion is put in motion by another, for nothing can be in motion except it is in potentiality to that towards which it is in motion; whereas a thing moves inasmuch as it is in act. For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality. Thus that which is actually hot, as fire, makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and thereby moves and changes it. Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at once in actuality and potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respects. For what is actually hot cannot simultaneously be potentially hot; but it is simultaneously potentially cold. It is therefore impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, i.e. that it should move itself. Therefore, whatever is in motion must be put in motion by another. If that by which it is put in motion be itself put in motion, then this also must needs be put in motion by another, and that by another again. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover; seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are put in motion by the first mover; as the staff moves only because it is put in motion by the hand.

Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or only one. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go on to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.

The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated, and to corrupt, and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence — which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something the existence of which is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore we cannot but postulate the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.

The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble and the like. But "more" and "less" are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which is uttermost being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as it is written in *Metaph. ii*. Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum heat, is the cause of all hot things. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.

The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their

acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.

### **Anselm's *Proslogion***

*This proof reasons from our interior encounter with God to the certainty that God must exist. Reasoning from what must be true of God (if God is God) it concludes that God exists and that it cannot be thought that God does not exist.*

2. Well then, Lord, You who give understanding to faith, grant me that I may understand, as much as You see fit, that You exist as we believe You to exist, and that You are what we believe You to be. Now we believe that You are something than which nothing greater can be thought. Or can it be that a thing of such a nature does not exist, since 'the Fool has said in his heart, there is no God' [Ps. 13: 1; 52: 1]? But surely, when this same Fool hears what I am speaking about, namely, 'something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought', he understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his mind, even if he does not understand that it actually exists. For it is one thing for an object to exist in the mind, and another thing to understand that an object actually exists. Thus, when a painter plans beforehand what he is going to execute, he has [the picture] in his mind, but he does not yet think that it actually exists because he has not yet executed it. However, when he has actually painted it, then he both has it in his mind and understands that it exists because he has now made it. Even the Fool, then, is forced to agree that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists in the mind, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood is in the mind. And surely that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot exist in the mind alone. For if it exists solely in the mind, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater. If then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in the mind alone, this same that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is that-than-which-a-greater-can-be-thought. But this is obviously impossible. Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists both in the mind and in reality.

### *3. That God cannot be thought not to exist*

And certainly this being so truly exists that it cannot be even thought not to exist. For something can be thought to exist that cannot be thought not to exist, and this is greater than that which can be thought not to exist. Hence, if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist, then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not the same as that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, which is absurd. Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists so truly then, that it cannot be even thought not to exist.

And You, Lord our God, are this being. You exist so truly, Lord my God, that You cannot even be thought not to exist. And this is as it should be, for if some intelligence could think of something better than You, the creature would be above its Creator and would judge its Creator – and that is completely absurd. In fact, everything else there is, except You alone, can be thought of as not existing. You alone, then, of all things most truly exist and therefore of all things possess existence to the highest degree; for anything else does not exist as truly, and so possesses existence to a lesser degree. Why then did 'the Fool say in his heart, there is no God' [Ps. 13: 1; 52: 1] when it is so evident to any rational mind that You of all things exist to the highest degree? Why indeed, unless because he was stupid and a fool?

### **Truth**

-Claude McKay

Lord, shall I find it in Thy Holy Church,  
Or must I give it up as something dead,  
Forever lost, no matter where I search,  
Like dinosaurs within their ancient bed?  
I found it not in years of Unbelief,  
In science stirring life like budding trees,  
In Revolution like a dazzling thief-  
Oh, shall I find it on my bended knees?

But what is Truth? So Pilate asked Thee, Lord,  
So long ago when Thou wert manifest,  
As the Eternal and Incarnate Word,  
Chosen of God and by Him singly blest:  
In this vast world of lies and hate and greed,  
Upon my knees, Oh Lord,  
for Truth I plead.

### III. Understanding the God Beyond Comprehension

*If faith and reason lead us to an understanding of God, that understanding is always limited. Whatever we can say of God is always exceeded by God. The apophatic tradition (sometimes called negative theology) is the tradition that sees that whatever we can say of God is inadequate, that we have to 'unsay' what we claim about God. This 'unsaying' leads to silent adoration and vocal praise.*

#### **Augustine**

*Si comprehendus, non est Deus* [If you understand it, it is not God.]

#### **Thomas Aquinas**

'We cannot know what God is, only what he is not. We must therefore consider the ways in which God does not exist rather than the ways in which he does'.

#### **St Anselm's Proslogion**

Lord, not only are You that than which a greater cannot be thought, but You are also something greater than can be thought. For since it is possible to think that there is such a one, then, if You are not this same being something greater than You could be thought – which cannot be.

#### **Fourth Lateran Council 1215**

between creator and creature there can be noted no similarity so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them.

#### **Rainer Maria Rilke's *Book of Hours: Love Poems to God***

I want to utter you. I want to portray you  
not with lapis or gold, but with colors made of  
applebark  
There is no image I could invent  
that your presence would not eclipse.



## IV. The Beatific Vision-Seeing God in Truth

### Psalm 27

- <sup>1</sup>The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?  
The LORD is the stronghold<sup>[a]</sup> of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?
- <sup>2</sup>When evildoers assail me  
to devour my flesh –  
my adversaries and foes –  
they shall stumble and fall.
- <sup>3</sup>Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear;  
though war rise up against me,  
yet I will be confident.
- <sup>4</sup>One thing I asked of the LORD,  
that will I seek after:  
to live in the house of the LORD  
all the days of my life,  
to behold the beauty of the LORD,  
and to inquire in his temple.
- <sup>5</sup>For he will hide me in his shelter  
in the day of trouble;  
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;  
he will set me high on a rock.
- <sup>6</sup>Now my head is lifted up  
above my enemies all around me,  
and I will offer in his tent  
sacrifices with shouts of joy;  
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.
- <sup>7</sup>Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,  
be gracious to me and answer me!
- <sup>8</sup>“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”  
Your face, LORD, do I seek.
- <sup>9</sup> Do not hide your face from me.  
Do not turn your servant away in anger,  
you who have been my help.  
Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,  
O God of my salvation!
- <sup>10</sup>If my father and mother forsake me,  
the LORD will take me up.
- <sup>11</sup>Teach me your way, O LORD,  
and lead me on a level path  
because of my enemies.

- 12 Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,  
for false witnesses have risen against me,  
and they are breathing out violence.
- 13 I believe that I shall see the goodness of the LORD  
in the land of the living.
- 14 Wait for the LORD;  
be strong, and let your heart take courage;  
wait for the LORD.

## **The Catechism of the Catholic Church**

*Our hearts are restless until they rest in God. This rest-the beatific vision-is the knowledge and love of God fully experienced in Heaven. This is the directionality of all truth.*

163 Faith makes us taste in advance the light of the beatific vision, the goal of our journey here below. Then we shall see God "face to face", "as he is".<sup>47</sup> So faith is already the beginning of eternal life: When we contemplate the blessings of faith even now, as if gazing at a reflection in a mirror, it is as if we already possessed the wonderful things which our faith assures us we shall one day enjoy.<sup>48</sup>

164 Now, however, "we walk by faith, not by sight";<sup>49</sup> we perceive God as "in a mirror, dimly" and only "in part".<sup>50</sup> Even though enlightened by him in whom it believes, faith is often lived in darkness and can be put to the test. The world we live in often seems very far from the one promised us by faith. Our experiences of evil and suffering, injustice and death, seem to contradict the Good News; they can shake our faith and become a temptation against it.

165 It is then we must turn to the witnesses of faith: to Abraham, who "in hope... believed against hope";<sup>51</sup> to the Virgin Mary, who, in "her pilgrimage of faith", walked into the "night of faith"<sup>52</sup> in sharing the darkness of her son's suffering and death; and to so many others: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."<sup>53</sup>

## **II. Heaven**

1023 Those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ. They are like God for ever, for they "see him as he is," face to face.<sup>596</sup>

By virtue of our apostolic authority, we define the following: According to the general disposition of God, the souls of all the saints . . . and other faithful who died after receiving Christ's holy Baptism (provided they were not in need of purification when they died, . . . or, if they then did need or will need some purification, when they have been purified after death, . . .) already before they take up their bodies again and before the general judgment - and this since the Ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into heaven - have been, are and

will be in heaven, in the heavenly Kingdom and celestial paradise with Christ, joined to the company of the holy angels. Since the Passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, these souls have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature.<sup>597</sup>

1024 This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity - this communion of life and love with the Trinity, with the Virgin Mary, the angels and all the blessed - is called "heaven." Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness.

1025 To live in heaven is "to be with Christ." the elect live "in Christ,"<sup>598</sup> but they retain, or rather find, their true identity, their own name.<sup>599</sup>

For life is to be with Christ; where Christ is, there is life, there is the kingdom.<sup>600</sup>

1026 By his death and Resurrection, Jesus Christ has "opened" heaven to us. the life of the blessed consists in the full and perfect possession of the fruits of the redemption accomplished by Christ. He makes partners in his heavenly glorification those who have believed in him and remained faithful to his will. Heaven is the blessed community of all who are perfectly incorporated into Christ.

1027 This mystery of blessed communion with God and all who are in Christ is beyond all understanding and description. Scripture speaks of it in images: life, light, peace, wedding feast, wine of the kingdom, the Father's house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise: "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him."<sup>601</sup>

1028 Because of his transcendence, God cannot be seen as he is, unless he himself opens up his mystery to man's immediate contemplation and gives him the capacity for it. the Church calls this contemplation of God in his heavenly glory "the beatific vision":

How great will your glory and happiness be, to be allowed to see God, to be honored with sharing the joy of salvation and eternal light with Christ your Lord and God, . . . to delight in the joy of immortality in the Kingdom of heaven with the righteous and God's friends.<sup>602</sup>

1029 In the glory of heaven the blessed continue joyfully to fulfill God's will in relation to other men and to all creation. Already they reign with Christ; with him "they shall reign for ever and ever."<sup>603</sup>