CHAPTER IV DISCERNING LIFE: THE PRESENCE OF GOD

The chapters on discerning God and evil in life have been intentionally located after the chapter on suffering and death, for it is in the context of struggle with such issues that our understanding of the transcendent constituents of life must be defined. Spiritual Formation speaks of our being formed by the Transcendent and discerning in life the presence of the Transcendent and its components. Such discernment not only enables our openness and surrender to God as a reality but also assists our distinguishing between God and the forces/dynamics of life to which we should not surrender. Thus we know better how to live and have the peace which comes from understanding, for life is grasped in its entirety.

This attempt to explain the signs of the Transcendent cannot be merely a rationalization of God's seeming absence or a thinking within the systems of Biblical and theological traditions, as if thinking from what is assumed to be true makes something true or creates its own reality. It is not enough to say that God was once present in history, in the Exodus and prophets in the Old Testament and in the Christ event and Spirit in the New Testament, but now God cannot really be experienced except in the rites and practices of the community which celebrates God's past and expected future presence. Then we must speak of the departure or absence of God in the present, as did some of the "God is dead" theologians of the 1960s.

We must ask ourselves whether anything can be observed in the world and history which indicates the presence of the Transcendent. Unfortunately in experience one often encounters paradox. There is order and beauty in nature, but also disorder and horrible suffering. There is meaning and significance in some of history and personal experience, and yet at other moments there seems to be no meaning, only chaos -- as if creation had not fully emerged from its primal and chaotic darkness. In the last 200 years we have learned to desacralize nature, so that the power of its events and its orderedness do not usually indicate a Transcendent power, but only natural cause and effect.

We must ask ourselves whether anything can be observed in our personal experience and the potentialities of human life which would indicate the presence of the Transcendent. Are there unexpected elements and possibilities beyond the merely human or natural?

Then we must have some understanding of the limitations of our knowing the Transcendent and the process by which knowing might be approached, thus explaining the difficulties and facilitating the possibility of knowledge. We would also need to develop some theory as to why the world and life are the way they are and how God impinges on life.

In the process of our analysis we must be careful. It is possible that the analysis of the presence of God may produce explanations but lose us the presence. It is a risk those must take who are responsible for understanding such matters. But beyond our thought and reflections we must come back again to a second naivete, a presence to the Transcendent reality which may disclose itself to intuition and contemplation rather than reason. And we must remind ourselves of that beatitude: Blessed are those who *simply know* God is there and who daily live from God and in responsibility to God.

Two Perceptions: Arthur Miller and Vincent Van Gogh

I would like first to present two persons who have wrestled with the presence of the Transcendent and found different answers. Why does one continue to believe and another surrender belief in the face of life's realities?

Arthur Miller's *After The Fall*

A good gauge of the spirit of the times is its literature. Following the second World War there was a great deal of literature which saw the world in the shadow of the war and God as essentially absent. One such is Arthur Miller's autobiographical play *After the Fall*.[158] In it Quentin, the central character, reflects back on his life and its failures in order to see what he can bring to a new marriage he is contemplating: two failed marriages, a friend's suicide, and failed family relationships. Most of the play really takes place in his mind. Those who have played roles in his life are located on various levels of the stage and they come to life as he remembers them. The title, *After the Fall*, represents his conclusion that one must live after the Fall, without God, not in some Garden of Eden which is a lie. One must live in the world as it is and accept the reality of oneself with all that that involves.

At the beginning of the play while Quentin is waiting at the airport for Holga to arrive (the German girl he is thinking of marrying), he speaks of the disappearance of God from life and the problems this poses in dealing with the despair and pointlessness of life.

> You know, more and more I think that for many years I looked at life like a case at law, a series of proofs. When you're young you prove how brave you are, or smart; then what a good lover; then, a good father; finally, how wise, or powerful or what-the-hell-ever. But underlying it all, I see now, there was a presumption. That I was moving on an upward path toward some elevation, where - God knows what - I would be justified, or even condemned - a verdict anyway. I think now that my disaster really began when I looked up one day - and the bench was empty. No judge in sight. And all that remained was the endless argument with oneself - this pointless litigation of existence before an empty bench. Which, of course, is another way of saying - despair. And, of course, despair can be a way of life; but you have to believe in it, pick it up, take it to heart, and move on again. Instead, I seem to be hung up.[159]

In such a world it becomes clear that one is on one's own:

> I've lost the sense of some absolute necessity. Whether I open a book or think of marrying again, it's so damned clear I'm choosing what I do - and it cuts the strings between my hands and heaven. It sounds foolish, but I feel ... unblessed. .... And I keep looking back to when there seemed to be some duty in the sky.[160]

> How few the days are that hold the mind in place; like a tapestry hung on four or five hooks. Especially the day you stop becoming; the day you merely are. I suppose it's when the principles dissolve, and instead of the general gray of what ought to be you begin to see what is.[161]

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158. Arthur Miller, *After The Fall*, NY: Bantam Books, 1965.
159. Ibid., pp. 4-5.
160. Ibid., p. 31.
161. Ibid., p. 59.

In Quentin's rehearsal of his various failures, that with Maggie, the play's Marilyn Monroe who was Miller's wife, is central. He had hoped to save her from herself, but had to separate himself from her to survive. During her attempted suicide he knows he wanted her death. He is reminded of his visit to a German concentration camp:

> Who can be innocent again on this mountain of skulls? I tell you what I know! My brothers died here - but my brothers built this place; our hearts have cut these stones![162]

It is in the story of Maggie that the metaphor of the resurrection of Lazarus, John 11, emerges. Maggie is drunk.

> Maggie: Quentin, what's Lazarus? Quentin? Quen?
> Quentin: Jesus raised him from the dead. In the Bible. Go to sleep now.
> Maggie: Wha's 'at suppose to prove?
> Quentin: The power of faith.
> Maggie: What about those who have no faith?
> Quentin: They only have the will.
> Maggie: But how you get the will?
> Quentin: You have faith.
> Maggie: Some apples.[163]

At stake in the play is whether there is any *blessing*. Felice, a young woman whom Quentin advises to change her nose by plastic surgery, becomes the satirical symbol of blessing, appearing after the remembrance of life episodes and raising her arms in blessing. On one occasion Felice says: "I'll always bless you!" and Quentin remarks:

> When she left ... I did a stupid thing. I don't understand it. There are two light fixtures on the wall of my hotel room .... I noticed for the first time that they're ... a curious distance apart. And I suddenly saw that if you stood between them (he spreads out his arms) you could reach out and rest your arms.

Maggie enters and to his obvious gesturing of the cross cries out "Liar! Judge!"[164]

The play concludes with Holga's arrival at the airport, and of her Quentin comments that she hopes, for she knows that one must eventually "take one's life in one's arms" and kiss it though it bear the face of an idiot.[165]

> That woman hopes!
>
> Or is that exactly why she hopes, because she knows? What burning cities taught her and the death of love taught me: that we are very dangerous! And that, that's why I wake each morning like a boy - even now, even now! I swear to you, I could love the world again! Is the knowing all? To know, and even happily, that we meet unblessed; not in some garden of wax fruit and painted trees, that lie of Eden, but after, after the Fall, after many, many deaths. Is the knowing

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162. Ibid., p. 162.
163. Ibid., p. 150.
164. Ibid., p. 15.
165. Ibid., pp. 30-31.

> all? And the wish to kill is never killed, but with some gift of courage one may look into its face when it appears, and with a stroke of love - as to an idiot in the house - forgive it; again and again ... forever?[166]

Vincent Van Gogh

Van Gogh was an artist of the last century, dying at his own hand in 1890. Though he does not reflect the pessimism of our era, the tragedies of his own life caused him to reflect deeply. The first great Dutch artist since Rembrant, he participated in the turn to Expressionism.

His father was a preacher and there were preachers and artists in the family. His family tried to influence him to become an art dealer, but his melancholy because of an unhappy love affair caused the firm for which he worked to fire him. Moved by deep religious sentiments, he determined to study for the ministry, but failed the educational requirements. For a while he was a lay missionary to mine workers in Belgium, so identifying himself with their condition that the missionary society discharged him for excessive zeal. Finally, ten years before his death, he determined to follow his artistic inclinations and do through art what he could not do through preaching. After three tragic love affairs, one with a drunken prostitute, and the onset of mental illness, he gradually gave up the institutional aspects of his Christian faith. He turned from the church, calling himself "no friend of present Christianity"[167], criticizing the Bible as "that saddening Bible which arouses our despair and our indignation -- which distresses us once and for all because we are so outraged by its pettiness and contagious folly." Christ remained his spiritual rootage and "the consolation of that saddening Bible,"[168] because Christ pointed to the spiritual dimension of existence.

> Christ alone - of all the philosophers, Magi, etc. - has affirmed, as a principal certainty, eternal life, the infinity of time, the nothingness of death, the necessity and the raison d'etre of serenity and devotion. He lived serenely, *as a greater artist than all other artists*; despising marble and clay as well as color, working in living flesh. That is to say, this matchless artist, hardly to be conceived of by the obtuse instrument of our modern, nervous, stupefied brains, made neither statues nor pictures nor books; he loudly proclaimed that he made ... *living men*, immortals. ....
>
> (Men have come to see that the world is not flat.) But notwithstanding this they persist nowadays in believing that life is flat and runs from birth to death. However, life too is probably round, and very superior in expanse and capacity to the hemisphere we know at present.
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> Future generations will probably enlighten us on this so very interesting subject; and they maybe Science itself will arrive - willy-nilly - at conclusions more or less parallel to the sayings of Christ with reference to the other half of our existence.[169]

One cannot judge the spiritual dimensions of existence by this world.

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166. Ibid., pp. 162-163.
167. *The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*, 3 vols., Greenwich, CN: New York Graphic Society, nd, (autumn 1884, #378), vol. 3, p. 309.
168. Ibid., [June 1888, B 8 (11)], vol. 3, p. 495.
169. Ibid.,[June 1888, B 8 (11)], vol. 3, pp. 495-6.

> I feel more and more that we must not judge God on this world, it is just a study that did not come off. What can you do, in a study that has gone wrong, if you are fond of the artist - you do not find much to criticize - you hold your tongue. But you have a right to ask for something better. We should have to see other works by the same hand though; this world is evidently botched up in a hurry on one of his bad days when the artist didn't know what he was doing or didn't have his wits about him. All the same, according to what the legend says, the good old God took a terrible lot of trouble over this world-study of his.
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> I am inclined to think that legend is right, but then the study is ruined in so many ways. It is only a master who can make such a muddle and perhaps that is the best consolation we have out of it, since in that case we have a right to hope that we will see the same creative hand get even with itself and this life of ours, so much criticized, and for such good exalted reasons, we must not take for anything but what it is and go on hoping that in some other life we will see a better thing than this.[170]

In the year of his suicide Van Gogh copied a Rembrant portrayal of the resurrection of Lazarus. The red-bearded face of Lazarus looks strikingly like Van Gogh's own in his self-portrait. The only other two figures in the painting, besides Lazarus, are his two sisters. Above the scene hovers a bright yellow sun, likely symbolizing Jesus' words in John 11:9: "If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world." The crushing weight of his existence did not rob him of the awareness that "life too is probably round, and very superior in expanse and capacity to the hemisphere we know at present."[171] He seems to have known experientially what the circumstances of his life would seem to deny.

Some Theological and Biblical Studies

Three books, amongst others, have provided extended and significant treatments of the presence and experience of God, also indicating the elusiveness of God's presence. In as much as possible, I will try to let each author speak for himself and pose the issues which he sees central. Following this will be a treatment of several mystics, those who have intentionally dealt with their experience of God in a reflective and somewhat systematic fashion, and then a discussion of the trinitarian nature of the Christian experience.

Samuel Terrien's *The Elusive Presence*

Samuel Terrien entitles his book *The Elusive Presence*.[172] This book is his contribution towards a new biblical theology embodying a principle of canonical continuity, while respecting diversity, including both Testaments. He sees this as the basis on which to build an ecumenical theology. In his preface he states:

> The reality of the presence of God stands at the center of biblical faith. This presence, however, is always elusive. "Verily, verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself!" The Deity of the Hebrew-Christian Scriptures escapes man's grasp and manipulation, but man is aware of the presence of that Deity in such a powerful way that he finds through it a purpose in the

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170. Ibid., (Spring 1988, 490), vol. 2, p. 572..
171. See above.
172. Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, NY: Harper and Row, 1978.

> universe; he confers upon his own existence a historical meaning; and he attunes his selfhood to an ultimate destiny.[173]

However, the theme of the "Presence of God" is not a mystical strain understood apart from life and service:

> ... Judaism and Christianity fulfill their respective functions only to the extent that they inform the aesthetics of the mystical eye with the demands of the ethical ear. One cannot be divorced from the other. The mystical eye discerns the presence of God through the theological symbol of "glory". The ethical ear responds to the same presence through the theological symbol of "name." When the eye and the ear are separated, the former tends to foment an ethnic, esoteric, sectarian, and even racial exclusivity which promotes a static religion and a "closed" morality. The latter without the former tends to degenerate into a secular activism and an amorphous humanism which in the long run may abandon their proponents to their unfulfilling philosophies of the existential absurd.[174]

Both in the Old and New Testaments Terrien sees an understanding of God's presence which speaks of manifestation in the past, a coming manifestation in the future, but for the majority the Presence of God is experienced in the present in the cultus, through faith, wherein the past and the future manifestations are embodied. Terrien says of the Old Testament:

> In the celebration of her festivals, Israel commemorated the intervention of the Deity in her past, and she anticipated his manifestation in her future, at the end of history. Standing ceremonially between sacred protology and sacred eschatology, she summoned the beginning and the end of time into a liturgical present, but she could remember only a handful of ancestors, prophets, and poets who had actually perceived the immediacy of God. The rank and file of her people experience divine closeness by cultic procuration. Nevertheless, Israel's cultus produced a mode of communion which appears to have been unparalleled in the religions of the ancient world, for it implied a religious reality of a special character, which became semantically associated with the word "faith."[175]

He sees the same thing happening with the early church. In its preaching, tradition (Scriptures), and in the Eucharist, it looked back to the manifestation of God in Jesus' life and looked forward to his coming in the future. In the cultus his Presence was experienced in faith. Terrien also sees the evangelists presenting "an original interpretation of the Hebraic theology of presence" in their treatment of Jesus, focusing on "three pivotal moments": the annunciation (John the Baptist and the Infancy narratives), the Transfiguration (which is the center of the Synoptics), and the stories of the resurrection. [176]

While in no way denying the rich value of Terrien's mature scholarship and reflection, the weakness of the book is that the present experience of the Presence of God is understood primarily in terms of cultus and liturgy. For example, in the section on the New Testament there are, according to the Index, two pages on which the Spirit phenomenon is mentioned, and one is these is connected with the Matthaean baptismal formula. It is true that the past and future presence of God is experienced as present in cultus and liturgy,

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173. Ibid., p. xxvii.
174. Ibid., p. xxviii.
175. Ibid., pp. 1-2.
176. Ibid., pp. 410-411.

but this is a deceptive presence if it has no reference points in experience outside the cultus. Here and there Terrien seems to imply something more which does not quite satisfy the issue:

> When God no longer overwhelmed the senses of perception and concealed himself behind the adversity of historical existence, those who accepted the promise were still aware of God's nearness in the very veil of his seeming absence. For them, the center of life was a *Deus absconditus atque praesens*.[177]

Kenneth Leech, *Experiencing God*

Another book is Kenneth Leech's *Experiencing God*.[178] In the opening chapter, "What has happened to God", he deals extensively with the loss of the experience of God in the West which began following the second World War, but had its antecedents in the Enlightenment. He quotes Bultmann at the end of the chapter:

> If a man must say that he cannot find God in the reality of his own present life, and if he would compensate for this by the thought that God is nevertheless the final cause of all that happens, then his belief in God will be a theoretical speculation or a dogma; and however great the force with which he clings to this belief, it will not be true faith, for faith can only be the recognition of the activity of God in his own life.[179]

Quoting Chesterton, he indicates that when people cease to believe in God, they do not believe in nothing, but in anything: a description that would seem to characterize the spiritual trends of the 1980s. And those who would believe think they must eliminate doubt. To the contrary, Leech says:

> ...true faith can only grow and mature if it includes the elements of paradox and creative doubt. Hence the insistence of orthodoxy that God cannot be known by the mind, but is known in the obscurity of faith, in the way of ignorance, in the darkness. Such doubt is not the enemy of faith but an essential element within it. For faith in God does not bring the false peace of answered questions and resolved paradoxes. Rather, it can be seen as a process of 'unceasing interrogation.' Alan Ecclestone has expressed its character well. The spirit enters into our lives and puts disturbing questions. Without such creative doubt, religion becomes hard and cruel, degenerating into the spurious security which breeds intolerance and persecution. Without doubt, there is a loss of inner reality and of inspirational power to religious language. The whole of spiritual life must suffer from, and be seriously harmed by, the repression of doubt.[180]

In the second chapter, "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", he roots Israel's religious experience in the wilderness or desert period: an experience that was personal as well as of a God of holiness and justice, whose name is revealed and who is present in spirit and word. Here Leech sets the tone for the rest of his work. "We need to rediscover the Old Testament as *Christian* Scripture, and the Christian God as a *Jewish* God."[181] And so in his treatment of New Testament themes of the experience of God he says, "In the

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177. Ibid., p. 470.
178. Kenneth Leech, *Experiencing God: Theology as Spirituality*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985. This book is the completion of his trilogy on spirituality, which includes also *Soul Friend* (1977) and *True Prayer* (1980).
179. Ibid., p. 26, from Bultmann's *Jesus and the Word*..
180. Ibid., p. 25.
181. Ibid., p. 71.

Jesus event, so Christians insist, the God of the wilderness, the holy and just one, the God who revealed himself at Sinai, and who, through this Spirit, empowered and guided Israel, took flesh and tabernacled among us."[182] The remainder of his work consists of the biblical and theological elaboration of such significant themes as are summarized in his "Manifesto: Towards a Renewed Spirituality" at the end of the book. I would like to quote it. It is impossible to abbreviate without loss.

> 1. A renewed Christian spirituality will be concerned with the recovery of the vision of God in the contemporary world. It will seek to speak of God and the deep things of the spirit in ways which are meaningful in the present climate. It will seek, humbly and carefully, to take account of the insights presented by Marxism, by depth psychology, and by the secular quest for enriched consciousness, while seeking also to remain faithful to the Christian spiritual tradition.
> 2. It will be a spirituality which is rooted in the experience of God in the life of the Jewish people. In the study of the Old Testament, it will bear witness to the revelation of God in the desert to a people of pilgrimage. It will speak of God's holiness and of God's justice, and will seek holiness and justice in personal and social life.
> 3. It will be a spirituality which finds its centre in Jesus Christ, seeking in him the fullness of the Godhead dwelling bodily. It will seek to be faithful to his proclamation of the Kingdom of God. It will see in Jesus both God incarnate and a human comrade, the divine revealed and the human raised up.
> 4. It will be a spirituality which looks to the faith of the Apostolic Church as exhibited in the New Testament: the faith in God who brings unity to the human race, and who has wrought salvation and reconciliation through Christ; a God of life and love; a God whose Spirit brings freedom; a God who nourishes and builds up the Body of Christ. In the New Testament, as in the Old, it will seek to deepen knowledge of the living and true God.
> 5. It will be a spirituality of the desert. From the desert experience it will cherish and seek to strengthen the contemplative life of the Church. It will seek both solitude and communion as equally important aspects of the life of the spirit.
> 6. It will be a spirituality of cloud and darkness. It will bear witness to the mystery at the heart of God, and to the mystery at the heart of the human encounter with the divine. It will seek to lead people away from a religion of easy answers into the dark night of faith. It will be a contemplative spirituality.
> 7. It will be a spirituality of water and of fire, of cleansing and purifying, or renewal and spiritual warmth. In the symbols of the water of baptism and the fire of the Spirit, it will see the call to continual rebirth and the daily challenge of the God whose nature is consuming fire. It will be a charismatic spirituality.
> 8. It will be a spirituality rooted in the Word made flesh. It will hold to the truth of God incarnate, and will seek to find and serve God in the flesh and blood of God's children. It will rejoice in the divine gifts of matter and of sexuality, seeing in the human the gateway to the divine. It will be a materialistic spirituality.
> 9. It will be a eucharistic spirituality. At its heart will be the celebration of the Eucharist, the sacrament of Christ's body and blood. It will recognize Christ both in the Eucharist and in those who share his nature. It will seek to manifest the eucharistic life of sharing and equality in the world. It will therefore be a spirituality of the common life, of holy communion.
> 10. It will be a spirituality of pain, seeing in the passion and death of Jesus the heart of the

182. Ibid., p. 72.

> gospel. It will preach Jesus crucified and will seek to follow the way of the cross.
> 11. It will learn from the mystical writers to see God as the ground of all reality and of our own beings. It will seek to recover and promote a true Christian mysticism as an integral element in Christian theology. It will seek to discover and promote the ministry of spiritual guidance and deepening of the inner life and to hold together the mystical and political dimensions of the life of faith.
> 12. It will be a spirituality which will take seriously the experience of God in women's history; the feminine namings of God in Scripture and tradition; and the forgotten or neglected insights of writers who have experienced and described God in a feminine way. It will seek also to listen to, and learn from, the critique of Christian tradition offered by the contemporary women's movement.
> 13. It will be a spirituality of justice and of peace. It will seek to know and follow God in the pursuit of justice for all people, in the struggle against racism and other forms of domination, in the movement for world peace and nuclear disarmament, and in the campaign against poverty and inequality. In the struggles for a more human world, a renewed spirituality will come to discern the face of God, the holy and just One, and to share in the peace of God which passes all understanding.[183]

Diogenes Allen, *Traces of God*

Diogenes Allen's book, *The Traces of God in a Frequently Hostile World*, is a treatment of the redemptive possibility of human suffering and the discovery of God's presence even in "affliction", Simone Weil's term for the most extreme form of human suffering, a suffering which takes possession of the soul and separates one from God. He gives extensive attention to Weil, French mystic and social activist who will be discussed later, and to Julia de Beausobre, a Russian writer imprisoned under Stalin. It is in extremes that one often finds the truth, and it is in the most extreme forms of suffering that the truth of God must be tested. Thus indirectly the book is a study of the presence of God.[184]

In the Introduction Allen gives specific treatment to the interrelationship of God with the world as it is. He begins:

> Christianity claims that life can be wonderful, and we all certainly want it to be. Yet so often it isn't.[185]

The Introduction is subtitled "The Intersection of Two Realms". In a description which is similar to Weil he says:

> Although God is beyond the world, he makes contact with us in and through the world he created, and "touches" both the world and us at many points. My intention is to describe the various ways we can be aware of this presence and experience it. For God comes to us not in spite of our dissatisfaction with our daily lives, but precisely because of it - we can find his love not only in what is lovely, pleasant, and good, but also what is upsetting, frightening, and painful.[186]

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183. Ibid., pp. 421-422.
184. Diogenes Allen, *The Traces of God In A Frequently Hostile World*, Cowley, 1981.
185. Ibid., p. 1.
186. Ibid., p. 2.

He describes how this can happen as follows:

> First, God is different from all that is earthly, and therefore he is in a dimension that is utterly inaccessible to us; second, we are able to have contact with him. Now these two aspects of a single idea seem to be contradictory, but we can come to understand how this is possible by an analogy. Imagine a flat surface, which a geometer would call a plane, and assume that everything we can experience is on that plane - the human plane, so to speak. Now if there is a divine reality, we could have no experience of it unless its plane touched or intersected our own. In that case most of it would still not be on our plane, but only that small part of it which crossed the human plane; most of the divine reality would remain outside and be still unknown. The point of intersection would occupy only a small part of the human plane, so most of human experience would not have any apparent contact with divine reality. .... The place of intersection of two planes is a straight line, and that straight line is simultaneously part of, and on, *both* planes.[187]

Thus God is a mystery which is known, not fully, but at the points of the intersection. Yet God remains a mystery even at the very places where God has crossed over and "we become open to the presence of another reality in but not of the world."[188] Because God is known only at the intersections, we must be prepared to recognize this other dimension in our world, to which preparation Allen devotes part I of his book.

According to Allen preparation begins with an *act of renunciation*, withholding ourselves, refusing to give ourselves to anything, realizing that nothing in this world can satisfy us in spite of our desires. If the resulting *emptiness* is endured, God comes in secret and plants the seed of God's kingdom, presence, Spirit. Secondly, "we must *endure with patience* the period of time when the seed is growing but has not achieved sufficient growth to be felt."[189] This seed creates in us a *desire* or *love* for God, a desire the world cannot give us.

Following the renunciation of the world and enduring of the emptiness, *another renunciation must be made: that of the unjust use of force, coercion and power, which is the way of humility*. To do so helps us to identify the presence of God on the human plane and keeps God from being identified with events of the human plane. God's presence is to be found in the realm of goodness, in acts of humility, not in power.[190] This humility of God, described according to the ideas of Simone Weil, is the *grace* of God by which God holds Godself back in creation and allows its reality to exist, to function on its own according to what Weil calls *gravity*. Allen then says:

> God has created us so that we can be connected to him, and he seeks that we, his creatures, love him and love one another. We can receive divine love, and through it allow our actions to be directed by his will and empowered by his grace. We can thus restrain our gravity from running its natural course, and rise above our limitations. Our natural powers thus become rightly directed and strengthened when connected to God's grace. ....

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187. Ibid., p. 4, pp. 5-6.
188. Ibid., p. 8.
189. Ibid., p. 17, italics mine.
190. Ibid., pp. 21ff.

> Then we are to wait, to suffer and endure that emptiness until God comes in secret and plants his seed. To wait is to allow grace its entrance, when a new principle is at work within us. Self-restraining grace is present and at work within the world, resident in our being. Love itself has entered a creation made from love. It finds its lodging in a creature, because that creature has restrained its desire for self-expression and endured the emptiness which results. The action of its gravity, which apart from Gods's presence is at best limited and at worst destructive, is now capable of being redeemed, directed, and elevated by God's love.[191]

As creation is God's renunciation of Godself, so the cross is Jesus' renunciation of himself as he becomes subject to the forces of gravity. Here Jesus remains obedient to the realm of grace.

> Not everyone can make this response, however, because not everyone has been prepared for it in advance by the performance of certain actions. They have not renounced the world as a source of fullness, or they have not renounced power as a means of obtaining this fullness, and thereby discovered a goodness which they can recognize in Jesus' life and death. So the portrayal of Jesus as divine love does not enhance a goodness and a love they have previously known, nor draw from them a response.[192]

After dealing with "Suffering At The Hands of Nature" and "Suffering Human Cruelty", the last section of the book focuses on "Our Behavior". In a chapter on "Ethics and Forgiveness," Allen points out that knowledge of our humility, poverty, must precede ethics and all strivings that lead to the ethical life; it is to "live by our Father's love."[193] "Christian Action" is action which "meets human affliction with reverence," and perhaps "awakens in its recipient a capacity for saying 'yes' or 'no' to a gracious presence."[194] And "Christian Worship" is intended to be the place where, having renounced the illusion that by our activity we can find the one who alone feeds our hunger for life,

> In this act of yielding our entire nature to divine love, the earthly and the divine realms meet, intersect and become one.[195]

The Mystics

Many Christians are amazed to find that Christianity has a mystical tradition. Few Protestants are acquainted with this tradition because it is often seen as particularly Catholic, though there were also Protestant mystics. Many contemporary Christians are looking to the East for guidance in meditation and contemplation without the realization that their own tradition has much to contribute. Protestants might read Frank C. Senn, ed., *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*.[196] Several important older works are William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*.[197] Very helpful among the many new works are the *Westminister Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* ed. by Wakefield Gordon and the Paulist Press series on the *Classics of Western Spirituality*.[198] What follows will not be a

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191. Ibid., pp. 40-41.
192. Ibid. p. 43, typo corrected.
193. Ibid., p. 86.
194. Ibid., p. 94.
195. Ibid., p. 99-110.
196. Frank C. Senn, ed., *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, Paulist Press, 1986.
197. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, NY: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, London: Methuen & Co., 1911.
198. *Westminister Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* ed. by Wakefield Gordon, Westminster Press, 1983

systematic presentation of the views and contributions of each mystic, but of the essence of their approach and, from the perspective of this author, their special contributions to dealing with religious experience.

Usually mysticism portrays a process of the spiritual journey which begins with purgation and purification (essentially separating oneself and being separated from attachment to the world), resulting in illumination which grants insight and experience into the reality of God and culminates in spiritual union, sometimes talked about as "spiritual marriage." There are, of course, many variations. One intriguing insight is that of the Moravian Bishop and theologian of the 18th century Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf. Because of the influence of Luther on the nature of his theology, and because of his own experience, he saw union or the spiritual marriage with Christ as occurring at the beginning of Christian experience as a gift of God and not dependent on human detachment from the world or development in holiness. Zinzendorf makes an important point:

> This Deification as it were which was necessary to make us a Bride of Jesus Christ, and without which no one can be a Bride of God, is not, as supposed in the *Mystics* Scheme of Salvation, to be looked upon as some last Degree of Perfection, (extending itself a little beyond what is in Eternity) but on the contrary, here our Soul *began*. Our true *Father*, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has begotten us of incorruptible Seed; the only *Mother* hath borne us out of her Womb; and the God (that out of a Clod of Earth had formed us into human Figures, and breathed the Breath of Life in this Statue, to make us natural Men, propagating themselves bodily, but not spiritually) who so lovingly redeemed us again after the Fall, who became a holy Man for our sake, that we might be made holy, that the Holy Ghost might be purchased for us; the same is our Bridgegroom, our future Husband.[199]

An important modification of the negative attitude towards the world inherent in much of traditional mysticism is to be found in Meister Eckart, Matthew Fox's "creation spirituality", feminine spirituality, and liberation spirituality.[200]

Simone Weil

Simone Weil, French mystic and social activist whose ideas Diogenes Allen has helped to become familiar to American readers in *Traces of God* and *Three Outsiders*, was born in 1909 into a Jewish family. Her father was a physician. Trained in philosophy, she secured various jobs teaching, but her social involvements identified her with Marxism and the trade union movement. She even for a time took factory jobs and briefly involved herself in the Spanish Civil War. Religious interests in Christianity develop and on a visit to the twelfth century chapel of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Assisi, she kneels for the first time in her life, drawn by "something stronger than I." At the following Easter, in the Benedictine Abbey of Solesmes, she experiences a mystical revelation, and from this point on her writings show strong religious concerns. She eventually comes to the United States, but desiring to take part in the French Resistance movement, she travels to London. Her radical identification with the people of occupied France causes her to refuse food and medical help, aggravating her long-term health problems and leading to her death.

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199. Nicholas L. von Zinzendorf, *Twenty One Discourses or Dissertations Upon the Augsburg Confession*, transl. by F. Okeley, London: W. Bowyer, 1753. pp. 28-29. The term "Mother" Zinzendorf frequently used for the Spirit. He understood religion as experiential and sought for experiential terms.

200. These receive treatment elsewhere in this book.

As indicated in Allen's work, for Weil the human being is dependent on God's revelation, for "We cannot take a single step toward heaven. It is not in our power to travel in a vertical direction. If, however, we look heavenward for a long time, God comes and takes us up. He raises us easily."[201] Thus the way to experience God is "waiting" and "patience", with the cultivation of "attention". One collection of essays by Weil is called *Waiting For God*.[202] In her essay "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God" she comments:

> The key to a Christian conception of studies is the realization that prayer consists of attention. It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God. The quality of the attention counts for much in the quality of the prayer.[203]

Attention is what one can contribute, one must wait to know. How important the theme of waiting is for Weil is illustrated by the following:

> God waits patiently until at last I am willing to consent to love him.
>
> God waits like a beggar who stands motionless and silent before someone who will perhaps give him a piece of bread. Time is that waiting. .... By waiting humbly we are made similar to God. .... Art is waiting. Inspiration is waiting. He shall bear fruit in patience. .... God and humanity are like two lovers who have missed their rendezvous. Each is there before the time, but each at a different place, and they wait and wait and wait. He stands motionless, nailed to the spot for the whole of time. She is distraught and impatient. But alas for her if she gets tired and goes away. For the two places where they are waiting are at the same point in the fourth dimension... [204]

The experience of God did come. She memorized George Herbert's poem "Love".

> Often, at the culminating point of a violent headache, I make myself say it over, concentrating all my attention upon it and clinging with all my soul to the tenderness it enshrines. I used to think I was merely reciting it as a beautiful poem but without my knowing it the recitation had the virtue of a prayer. It was during one of these recitations that, as I told you. Christ himself came down and took possession of me.[205]

Weil indicates that for her the ultimate witness to the reality of the soul's contact with God is the quality of the person's life.

> The soul's attitude towards God is not a thing that can be verified, even by the soul itself, because God is elsewhere, in heaven, in secret. If one thinks to have verified it, there is really some earthly thing masquerading under the label of God. One can only verify whether the behaviors of the soul as regards this world bears the mark of an experience of God.
>
> It is not the way a man talks about God, but the way he talks about things of the world that best shows whether his soul has passed through the fire of the love of God. In this matter no

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201. George A. Pancichas, ed., *The Simon Weil Reader*, NY: David McKay Co., 1977, p. xxviii.
202. Simone Weil, *Waiting For God*, transl. by Emma Craufurd, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1951.
203. Ibid., p. 105.
204. George Panichas,ed., *The Simon Weil Reader*, pp. 424-425.
205. Ibid., pp. 15-16.

> deception is possible. There are false imitations of the love of God, but not of the transformation it effects in the soul, because one has no idea of this transformation except by passing through it oneself.
>
> When a man's way of behaving towards things and men, or simply his way of regarding them, reveals supernatural virtues, one know that his soul is no longer virgin, it has slept with God; perhaps even without knowing it, like a girl violated in her sleep. That has no importance, it is only the fact that matters.[206]

There are also aspects of life and the world which testify to the reality of God. One is that of friendship where each refuses to use and dominate the other. "It is impossible for two human beings to be one while scrupulously respecting the distance that separates them, unless God is present in each of them. The point at which parallels meet is infinity."[207] Beauty is also a manifestation of God. "In everything which gives us the pure authentic feeling of beauty there is really the presence of God. There is, as it were, an incarnation of God in the world. .... Beauty captivates the flesh in order to obtain permission to pass right to the soul."[208]

Thus one finds within the world *"Metaxu"* or "bridges." "This world is the closed door. It is a barrier. And at the same time it is the way through." "Two prisoners whose cells adjoin communicate with each other by knocking on the wall. The wall is the thing which separates them but it is also their means of communication. It is the same with us and God. Every separation is a link."[209]

Even affliction can be such a *Metaxu*.

> God's mercy is manifest in affliction as in joy, by the same right, more perhaps, because under this form it has no human analogy. Man's mercy is only shown in giving joy, or maybe in inflicting pain with a view to outward results, bodily healing or education. But it is not the outward results of affliction that bear witness to divine mercy. The outward results of true affliction are nearly always bad. We lie when we try to disguise this. It is in affliction itself that the splendor of God's mercy shines, from its very depths, in the heart of its unconsolable bitterness. If still persevering in our love, we fall to the point where the soul cannot keep back the cry "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" If we remain at this point without ceasing to love, we end by touching something that is not affliction, not joy, something that is the central essence, necessary and pure, something not of the senses, common to joy and sorrow: the very love of God.
>
> We know then that joy is the sweetness of contact with the love of God, that affliction is the wound of this same contact when it is painful, and that only the contact matters, not the manner of it."[210]

She understands the presence of God as a presence of *grace* in the midst of the way the world is. The functioning of the world it not to be identified with God in an immediate sense. God in his love created the world and then gave it its freedom. It now functions by its own laws, by necessity, by what she calls

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206. Ibid., pp. 428-429.
207. Ibid., p. 372.
208. Ibid., pp. 377-379.
209. Ibid., p. 363.
210. Ibid., p. 107.

gravity. God can then penetrate the world by grace and may be discovered in what one finds in it (as its creator), but is not to be identified with it. The same natural law which blesses also destroys. Thus the world reflects God and it does not reflect God. It is God's, but God is not to be identified with it. Weil's ideas about evil in the world do not seem clear to me, for at times it is not of God, and then again it is and all things come from God. Perhaps it will help to note here her idea of "decreation". Man is made a creature, but can only find "his" destiny if "decreated" (defined as "to make something pass into the uncreated").

> The presence of God. This should be understood in two ways. As Creator, God is present in everything that exists as soon as it exists. The presence for which God needs the co-operation of the creature is the presence of God not as Creator but as Spirit. The first presence is the presence of creation. The second is the presence of de-creation. (He who created us without our help will not save us without our consent. St. Augustine.) ....
>
> Being and having. Being does not belong to man, only having. The being of man is situated behind the curtain, on the supernatural side. What he can know of himself is only what is lent him by circumstances. My "I" is hidden for me (and for others); it is on the side of God, it is in God, it is God. .... The curtain is human misery: there was a curtain even for Christ.[211]

Thus the nature of creation, functioning by gravity, presses upon us the nature of our existence and "decreates" us as does grace when it confronts us. Perhaps in this way the reality of the world is reconciled with the reality of God.

The Cloud of Unknowing

The Cloud of Unknowing, by an anonymous 14th century English mystic, was written to help a young man who was considering becoming a contemplative. The author speaks of a darkness, a "cloud of unknowing" between us and God

> ... and because of it you can neither see Him clearly with your reason in the light of understanding, nor can you feel Him with your affection in the sweetness of love. Be prepared, therefore, to remain in this darkness as long as must be, crying evermore for Him whom you love. For if you are ever to feel Him or to see Him, it will necessarily be within this cloud and within this darkness.[212]

He believes that to human knowledge God is incomprehensible. Only love and the will may direct the soul to Him. He even advises against the use of the imagination and any focusing on created things which draw attention away from God. Thus he recommends a "cloud of forgetting" besides recognizing the "cloud of unknowing":

> And if ever you come to this cloud to dwell in it and work in it as I bid you, then just as this could of unknowing is above you and between you and your God, it will be necessary for you to put in the same way a cloud of forgetting beneath you, between you and all the creatures that have ever been made.[213]

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211. Ibid., p. 355.
212. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Introductory Commentary and Translation by Ira Progoff, New York: Julian Press, 1957, III,5.
213. Ibid., V,1.

He then goes on to say in chapter VI:

> 1. But now you put a question to me asking, 'How shall I think about Him and what is He?' And to this I can only answer you, 'I do not know.'
> 2. With your question you have brought me into that same darkness and into that same cloud of unknowing into which I would wish you to be in yourself. Through grace a man can have great knowledge of all other creatures and their works, and even of the works of God Himself, and he can think of them all; but of God Himself no man can think. I would therefore leave all those things of which I can think and choose for my love that thing of which I cannot think.
> 3. And why is this so? He may be well loved, but he may not be thought of. He may be reached and held close by means of love, but by means of thought never. And therefore, even though it is good occasionally to think of the kindness and great worth of God in particular aspects, and even though it is a joy that is a proper part of contemplation, nevertheless in this work it should be cast down and covered with a cloud of forgetting.
> 4. You are to step above it with great courage and with determination, and with a devout and pleasant stirring of love, and you are to try to pierce that darkness which is above you. You are to strike that thick cloud of unknowing with a sharp dart of longing love; and you are not to retreat no matter what comes to pass.[214]

The Spanish Mystics: Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross

It is interesting to speculate on the personality differences which caused these two great mystics to express themselves differently. John's style of spirituality was a more aggressive male approach which involved "ascent" as a metaphor and extensive purgation, even to bodily abuse. Teresa's metaphor was that of the journey into the interior castle of the soul, in the center of which God dwelt. It was a gentler approach which showed far greater respect for the dignity of the human soul as the house of God. John's particular contribution was in his analyses of the "dark nights" of spiritual experience, and these will receive some treatment later.

John was very clear that the way to God was the way of unknowing, the *via negativa*, an approach something like the *Cloud of Unknowing*. This meant that God was beyond all concepts and feelings, and that in the strange world that was devoid of concepts and images, there was another way of knowing. As he expresses it in one of his poems:

> I entered -where - I did not know,
> Yet when I found that I was there,
> Though where I was I did not know,
> Profound and subtle things I learned;
> Nor can I say what I discerned,
> For I remained uncomprehending,
> All knowledge transcending. ....
>
> And if you wish to hear,
> This highest knowledge is conceived
> In a sense, sublime and clear
> Of the essence of the Deity;

214. Ibid., VI, 1-4.

It is an act of His great Clemency
That keeps us there uncomprehending,
All knowledge transcending.[215]

The spirit of Teresa is well expressed in a sonnet by an unknown author, but sometimes ascribed to her:

I am not moved, my God, to love Thee so,
By that fair Heaven which Thou has promised me;
Nor am I moved to fear offending Thee
By terror of that dreaded Hell below;

Thou movest me, my Lord; my heart does glow
To see Thee nailed upon that shameful tree;
To see thy body wounded piteously,
To see Thee die, with agonizing throe;

Thy love, in sooth, doth move me in such wise,
That if there were no Heaven, my love would burn
And, if there were no Hell, my will would bow;

I love Thee not for hopes beyond the skies,
For did my every hope to nothing turn,
I'd love Thee still, as I do love Thee now.[216]

Teresa lived during one of the great periods of upheaval in Christianity. Her dates are 1515 to 1582. Her life time saw Humanism and the Reformation, both of which challenged churchly authority while the latter divided the church. In the Council of Trent (1545) the Catholic Church sought to react to the Reformation and to reassert its authority, resulting in the Inquisition which in Spain was most severe, affecting both Teresa and John of the Cross.

St. Teresa and her pupil and associate St. John of the Cross sought to restore the more primitive rule of the Carmelite order. The regular Carmelites were called "Calced" and her reform was called "Discalced" because they went about either barefoot or in rope-soled shoes while the unreformed wore leather shoes. Between 1562 and 1582 Teresa founded fourteen monasteries.

Teresa's concern for contemplative prayer developed not only out of the Carmelite tradition, but out of her own religious experiences. Though in her earlier life she struggled with both physical illness and the reality of God in her life, she began to become aware of the presence of God and in 1556 had her first experience of "rapture." Several years later she began to speak of an "intellectual vision" in which she became aware of the presence of Christ in her life, but without internal or external image. Then came visions of Christ in which Christ gradually showed himself to her in his resurrection body. In 1571 an "intellectual vision" of the Trinity occurred and in 1572 she experienced spiritual marriage with Christ.

One of the intriguing things about Spanish mysticism is that Teresa and John make an attempt to reflect on and explain the nature of mystical experience. Not only this, but Teresa definitely intends with the description of her own methods to help those who have difficulty with concentration in prayer, those with

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215. Gerald Brenan, *St. John of the Cross: His Life and Poetry*, Cambridge at the University Press, 1973.
216. Helmut A. Hatzfeld, *Santa Teresa de Avila*, Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1969.

"souls and minds so scattered that they are like wild horses no one can stop." This she does both by her description of her own experiences and the suggestion of the use of vocal prayer for those who have trouble with concentration. Vocal prayer assists recollection, and should especially make use of the Our Father. When the prayer is recited vocally, the gaze, the attention, should be fixed in a simple loving way on Christ, in whom the mystery of God is expressed. One need not buy into the asceticism which is part of the Carmelite tradition nor try to apply literally Teresa's description of the mystical experience. Yet her experience is a valid witness and helpful guide into the relationship with God and Christ. What she describes should be paralleled with other descriptions and modern insight into the psyche so that the culturally conditioned elements may be separated from her lasting contributions. Such a parallel has been provided by John Welch in his *Spiritual Pilgrims: Carl Jung and Teresa of Avila*.[217]

In 1577 her confessor, Fr. Gratian, asked her to describe her experience and this initiated the writing of *The Interior Castle*.[218] Ten years earlier she had done something similar in her *Life*, but this was now in the hands of the Inquisition and was not available to others. She undertook the task amidst many other responsibilities and so describes in somewhat unsystematic and rambling fashion what she herself wondered if it was possible to describe. This work is filled with many gems, but at first reading seems somewhat unclear because of the manner in which it is written. It describes the journey to the center of the soul where God dwells, using imagery of journeying into the various rooms of a castle. There are seven rooms or "dwellings". The first three are attained through a more active approach to prayer, but in the journey to the last four God becomes more actively involved and the process depends more on God. God is affectionately and respectfully called "His Majesty" and prayer is viewed as "nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us."[219]

Her wholesome optimism and respect for the soul becomes clear in the introductory comments.

> It is that we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places. For in reflecting upon it carefully, Sisters, we realize that the soul of the just person is nothing else but a paradise where the Lord says He finds His delight. So then, what do you think that abode will be like where a King so powerful, so wise, so pure, so full of all good things takes His delight? I don't find anything comparable to the magnificent beauty of a soul and its marvelous capacity. Indeed, our intellects, however, keen, can hardly comprehend it, just as they cannot comprehend God; but He Himself says that He created us in His own image and likeness.[220]

As one journeys into the first dwelling places the devil uses his wiles to keep us absorbed in the world, and we are afflicted by snakes and poisonous creatures (our sins). Here the only solution is to be gentle with oneself and in humility keep looking at God. The change from the Third to the Fourth Dwelling Places marks a change from spirituality initiated by human responsibility and action to what is often called "infused" spirituality. Having moved closer to the center the power and action of God begins to

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217. John Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrims: Carl Jung and Teresa of Avila*, NY: Paulist Press, 1982.
218. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, transl. and Introduction by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, *Classics of Western Spirituality*, NY: Paulist Press, 1979.
219. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, p. 13.
220. Ibid., Chpt. 1, 1.

assume a major role.[221] In the Fourth Dwelling Places supernatural experiences begin and help is needed to explain them. "Spiritual delights" is the term used for experiences which begin in God, though enjoyed in our human nature. "Consolations" is the term for good feelings which come from our own efforts. To illustrate this Teresa uses the analogy of two founts with two water troughs. She says that nothing is more appropriate to explain spiritual experiences than water. The two troughs fill in different ways. With the one the water comes through aqueducts and the use of ingenuity, with the other the "source of water is right there, and the trough fills without any noise." The latter is filled by a spring which, if abundant, overflows the trough. There is no need of skill to get water from the spring.[222]

In the Fifth Dwelling Places the soul experiences "union", "an uprooting from the soul of all operations the latter can have while being in the body."[223] Here Teresa provides the analogy of the silkworm. We are the worm. We begin to benefit when by the heat of the Spirit and the remedies of the church we are helped. When the worm is grown, it builds the house in which it will die. Our house is Christ and our life is hidden in Christ. When the soul is dead to the world, a white butterfly comes forth (sometimes she uses the metaphor of a dove), and now it can only find rest and pleasure in God. What is required as one moves towards union is not perfection, but to be one with God in will and love God and neighbor. Union here is a "getting acquainted" process, different from what she later calls betrothal or marriage. The use of the language of experiences leading to marriage provides important metaphors.

The relationship progresses. In the Sixth Dwelling Places the soul is "wounded with love" "in the most delightful way."

> I do know that it seems this pain reaches to the soul's very depths and that when He who wounds it draws out the arrow, it indeed seems in accord with the deep love the soul feels that God is drawing these very depths after Him. I was thinking now that it's as though from this fire enkindled in the brazier that is my God a spark leapt forth and so struck the soul that the flaming fire was felt by it. And since the spark was not enough to set the soul on fire, and the fire is so delightful, the soul is left with that pain; but the spark merely by touching the soul produces that effect. ... just as the fire is about to start, the spark goes out and the soul is left with the desire to suffer again that loving pain the spark causes.[224]

Teresa then discusses various trials and spiritual phenomena such as hearing things which the Lord might say (locutions); intellectual visions (an extended sense of Jesus being near without seeing any images or hearing words, known by its effects); raptures where the spirit leaves the body; imaginative visions, a brief experience where Jesus gives himself to be seen; and an experience in which the soul "sees" secrets in God (such as God is fond of humility). It is important to remember that all these phenomena are not

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221. Arraj in his book on Jung and St. John presents an argument that John of the Cross viewed all contemplation as infused, that is, as the result of God's action on the soul, while what came to be called acquired contemplation (through one's own efforts) is not really contemplation. This would seem to be different from what Teresa says here, unless one wants to regard the first three Dwelling Places as not contemplation. Arraj mentions Dalbiez who seeks to solve this problem psychologically: Metaphysically, there is but one contemplation, which is infused. Psychologically, there are two contemplations, one whose infused character is conscious for the subject, and one whose infused character is unconscious for the subject.
James Arraj, *Christian Mysticism In the Light Of Jungian Psychology: St. John of the Cross and Dr. C.G. Jung*, Chiloquin, OR: Inner Growth Books, 1986, see p. 167.
222. Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*., The Fourth Dwelling Places, chpt. 2, 2-4.
223. Ibid., The Fifth Dwelling Places, chpt. 1,3.
224. Ibid., Sixth Dwelling Places, chpt. 2,4.

imaginary or the result of research of religious phenomena, but were part of Teresa's experience and that she is speaking out of her refined and tested experience.

Of special interest is her struggle with the continuing role of Christ and the sacraments in religious experience once one has moved on to contemplation. She says that she had for a time neglected the role of Jesus, but learned that one can never leave behind "the mysteries of the most sacred humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ."

> The mistake it seemed to me I was making wasn't so extreme; rather it consisted of not delighting so much in the thought of our Lord Jesus Christ but in going long in that absorption, waiting for that enjoyment. And I realized clearly that I was proceeding badly. Since it wasn't possible for me to experience the absorption always, the mind wandered here and there. My soul, it seems to me, was like a bird flying about that doesn't know where to light; and it was losing a lot of time and not making progress in virtue or improving in prayer. I didn't understand the reason, nor would I have understood it, in my opinion, because it seemed to me that what I was doing was very correct, until a person with whom I was discussing my prayer, who was a servant of God, warned me.[225]

Still the "little dove or butterfly" of the soul can't find rest. Its desire for the Lord increases with experiences and from this its suffering increases -- because of its awareness of its distance from God. What often happens to a soul that experiences these sufferings from deep longing for the Lord is that "a blow is felt from elsewhere (the soul doesn't understand from where or how). The blow comes often through a sudden word or thought about death's delay. Or the Soul will feel pierced by a fiery arrow." Teresa then points out that "blow" and "arrow" are metaphors. But there is a "sharp wound" felt "in the very deep and intimate part of the soul, where this sudden flash of lightening reduces to dust everything it finds in this earthly nature of ours" and our faculties are bound. "...the soul sees that it is like a person hanging, who cannot support himself on any earthly thing; nor can it ascend to heaven. On fire with this thirst, it cannot get to the water; and the thirst is not one that is endurable but already at such a point that nothing will take it away. Nor does the soul desire that the thirst be taken away save by the water of which our Lord spoke to the Samaritan woman." [226]

In the Seventh Dwelling Places "His Majesty is pleased to grant the soul this divine marriage..." Though raptures may also be regarded as unions, here the union is different. Where a soul may lose all faculties in a rapture, "Our good God now desires to remove the scales from the soul's eyes and let it see and understand, although in a strange way, something of the favor He grants it. When the soul is brought into that dwelling place, the Most Blessed Trinity, all three Persons, through an intellectual vision, is revealed to it through a certain representation of the truth. ....these Persons never seem to leave it any more, ... they are with it. In the extreme interior, in some place very deep within itself, the nature of which it doesn't know how to explain, because of a lack of learning, it perceives this divine company." In a sense this is the relating of the bride to the bridegroom's family. The soul does not become totally absorbed in this experience, but is also occupied with service of God. Here Teresa discovers the *Mary* and *Martha* parts of her soul.[227] In trials her Martha part complained of the Mary part that was "there always

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225. Ibid., The Sixth Dwelling Places, chpt. 7.
226. Ibid., The Sixth Dwelling Places, chpt. 11.
227. See Luke 10:38-42.

enjoying that quietude at its own pleasure while leaving her in the midst of so many trials and occupations that she could not keep it company."[228]

Then comes the divine betrothal in which Christ first gives the soul "an imaginative vision of his sacred humanity so that the soul will understand." In spiritual betrothal the two may still separate; the union is different because even though a joining takes place, in the end the two can be separate and remain by themselves. In spiritual marriage, "The soul always remains with its God in that center." "In the spiritual marriage the union is like what we have when rain falls from the sky into a river or fount; all is water, for the rain that fell from heaven cannot be divided or separated from the water of the river." The butterfly has now died, but the soul is reborn. Mary and Martha now join in service of the Lord and others.

> In sum, my Sisters, what I conclude with is that we shouldn't build castles in the air. The Lord doesn't look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love with which they are done. ... His Majesty will join it (what we offer) with that which He offered on the cross to the Father for us. Thus even though our works are small they will have the value our love for Him would have merited had they been great.[229]

St. John of the Cross was born into a poor family and after his father died he was eventually placed in an orphanage. As a boy he nearly drowned in a pond and had a vision of a beautiful lady he later interpreted as the Virgin Mary. As a teenager he worked in a hospital which treated people in the last stages of syphilis and ultimately was given permission to study with the Jesuits. He later joined the Carmelites and continued his studies in Salamanca at the Carmelite House, though he was dissatisfied with their lack of strictness. When John and Teresa met he was in the mid-twenties and she was 52. They found themselves in spiritual agreement, though their temperaments were quite different. Teresa once remarked regarding John: "God deliver us from people who are so spiritual that they want to turn everything into perfect contemplation."[230] John became an instrument of Teresa's reform, though a very independent one. John has left us both the heritage of his poetry and his commentaries upon them. The poetry seems to arise out of his mystical experience while his commentaries struggle to express the richness of the poetry.

One of the valuable contributions of John is his analysis of the "dark nights" of spiritual experience. All have experience of spiritual aridity. When this happens it is crucial to ask the question of whether this means something is lost or gained, whether the "dark night" is a sign of advance and development or failure and loss. John's first dark night is the "dark night of the senses:"

> When they are going about these spiritual exercises with the greatest delight and pleasure, and when they believe that the sun of Divine favour is shining most brightly upon them, God turns all this light of theirs into darkness, and shuts against them the door and the source of the sweet spiritual water which they were tasting in God whensoever and for as long as they desired.[231]

What John is saying is that God has turned off the light which enabled us to have religious satisfaction through our senses. God has then called us to mortification of the senses and to a higher way, to move from meditation to contemplation, to relating to God in silence, darkness, and openness. This is

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228. Ibid., The Seventh Dwelling Places, chpt. 1.
229. Ibid., The Seventh Dwelling Places.
230. James Arraj, *Christian Mysticism In the Light of Jungian Psychology: St. John of the Cross and Dr. C.G. Jung*, Chiloquin, OR: Inner Growth Books, 1986, p. 113. This book contains a helpful psychological study of John and a comparison with Teresa, pp. 103ff.
231. Ibid., p. 136.

preparation for the second dark night, "*the* dark night", the "dark night of the soul". Here one encounters the darkness due to the ontological difference between God and humanity:

> The brighter the light, the more the owl is blinded; and the more one looks at the brilliant sun, the more the sun darkens the faculty of sight, deprives it and overwhelms it in its weakness. Hence when the divine light of contemplation strikes a soul not yet entirely illumined, it causes spiritual darkness, for it not only surpasses the act of natural understanding but it also deprives the soul of this act and darkens it.[232]

This dark night is agonizing, it may feel like depression, but it is clearly to be distinguished from depression.[233] It is similar to the "cloud" in *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

John's discussion of the "dark night" then indicates to us that the loss of religious experience and satisfaction may not be because we have somehow lost religion or God, but may be a natural or God-induced part of our development to lead us beyond what is more limited to what is more ultimate, i.e., in the end, God's Self. The "dark night of the soul" helps us to understand that in relation to God as God, not in terms or words or images, we enter what has been called darkness, emptiness, the void, because nothing fits our previous ways of perception and God exists in another dimension. And yet in the silence and emptiness and darkness, there is God. And if we continue to be attentive, we will start to "sense" this, remaining open and attentive to God's uniting us to Godself.

New Testament Mysticism

Many of the N.T. traditions deal with Christianity not only in terms of *understanding* of God and *ethics/behavior*, but also in terms of *experience* of God, including *experienced relationship* with God. The Gospel of Matthew is perhaps the only great New Testament tradition which does not see experience as a normative constituent of the Christian faith. The Pauline, Lukan (Luke, Acts) and Johannine (John; I, II John and Revelation) traditions all speak of the experience of the resurrected Christ, the experience of the Spirit of God, and various manifestations of this experience in terms of spiritual gifts,[234] and finding spiritual guidance.[235] All of these traditions which deal with experience were careful to balance the subjectivity of experience with various objective elements by which the truth of subjective experience might be "discerned".[236] These included:

1. loyalty to God's revelation in the historical Jesus and recognition of the historical Jesus as Lord;[237]

2. manifestation of a quality of life and ethical action which would be produced by God's Spirit (here "love", the ability of a person to go beyond self-interest in relationship with others, was considered the primary "sign");[238]

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232. *The Collected Works of John of St. John of the Cross*, transl. and compiled by Kieren Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, NY: Doubleday, 1964, p. 335.
233. James Arraj, *Christian Mysticism In the Light of Jungian Psychology: St. John of the Cross and Dr. C.G. Jung*, pp. 168ff.
234. E.g. I Cor. 12.
235. Speaking in tongues and prophecy - I Cor. 14, and visions and dreams - e.g. Revelation).
236. "Discernment" has become a technical term in Christianity for this.
237. See I Cor. 12:1-3, I John 4:1-3.
238. I John 4:7-12, I Cor. 13.

3. manifestation of "spiritual gifts" which contributed to the mission and good of Christ's body, the church;[239]

4. and subjection of individual feelings and insights to the "discernment" of the Christian community.[240]

It is important to recognize the variety of religious experience which one can find in some of the N.T. writers. *Paul* is a good example. Whereas as a Pharisee he would have viewed religion primarily from the perspective of his traditions and institutions - the Law, Temple and Synagogue - his conversion experience introduced him to the possibility of religious experience. He then came to understand that this experience fulfilled his traditions, though he of course reinterpreted Jewish traditions. In Galatians 3:14 Paul says that the giving of the Spirit, which means the Christian experience, is the fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham. The variety of Paul's experiences included:

1. *Conversion experience* - Acts 9, 22, 26; Gal. 1:11-17, Phil. 3:7-11; I Cor. 15:8.

2. *Nature and creation*- Rom. 1:20. Paul only mentions this, but does not say that this meant much to him since Jews argued God's reality from historical experience rather than creation. This is really an accommodation to his Greco-Roman readers. In what he says, Paul does not seem to reflect an aesthetic appreciation of creation.

3. *Conscience*- Rom. 2:14-16. Again, Paul only mentions this as an accommodation to his Greco-Roman readers. Judaism believed that there were various expressions of God's basic law in the Gentile world. They often expressed this in terms of covenants with Adam and Noah. For the Jew God's giving of the Law overshadowed all this.

[Both nos. 1 and 2 are what one might call "indirect" experiences of God through what God has created. It is quite likely that they were not so important to Paul because he emphasized a more direct experience of God's revelation.]

4. *"Visions and revelations of the Lord*". These receive special treatment in II Cor. 12:1-10. Here Paul speaks of an "abundance of revelations" (vs. 7) and an experience when he was caught up to the third heaven (people in those days talked about a series of heavens) in which he did not know whether this occurred "inside" him or whether he was "out of the body." He seems to regard these as important but not for public discussion as he does not give any detail about them, something like speaking in tongues which he also says is primarily for one's private relationship with God -- not for public worship. (Paul does not speak of God speaking through "*dreams*," but we do know that some in the early church believed in this- Matt. 1-2).

5. *Speaking in prophecy* (which he prefers) *and tongues* (which he also does). His description in I Cor. 14 is about a Christian community gathered to seek God's will for them and to be open to God's presence among them. Prophecy expressed what they felt God was saying to them in an understandable form while tongues was a spontaneous expression of the

239. E.g. I Cor. 12.
240. E.g. I Cor. 14:26-33.

experience with God which did not come out in an understandable language. It is important to note that besides speaking in tongues, praying and singing in tongues is also mentioned.

6. *Resource for ethical action*- In Gal. 5:16-25 Christian life is the fruit of the Spirit. Paul also sees love as the primary gift of the Spirit in I Cor. 13.

7. *Dynamic of personal growth* - In II Cor. 3-5 Paul describes his understanding of the process of Christian spiritual development. Important here is II Cor. 3:17-18.

8. *Experience of personal relationship with God*. This seems to be most important for Paul and underlies many of the other types of experience of God that he describes. "The Spirit" was a term used by both Jews and Christians which described the presence of God in life. Paul says that the giving of God's Spirit, i.e. God's giving of Godself, is the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham which enables us to be God's children (Gal. 3:14, 4:4-7). And that the Spirit of God's Son (Jesus) in our hearts helps us to be aware of this relationship and give it expression in the word which Jesus used to begin his prayer: "Abba, Father." (Gal. 4:6) Paul expresses similar ideas in Rom. 8:14-17. Background for this is to be found in the sayings of Jesus in Luke 11 where Jesus gives the "Lord's Prayer" and then says that God as a good father gives his children the Spirit.

9. Understanding his experience of God in life by doing a "*spiritual autobiography*", describing the story of his life and how God has participated in it. We don't know whether Paul kept a diary or journal. We do know that he frequently cited material out of his life experience to show how God worked in his life and how he came to understand what God was doing. A very significant passage is Gal. 1-2 where he describes his conversion experience and his contacts with others as he sought to understand it. Another significant passage is II Cor. 11-12. Some of the information on Paul's activities in Acts may also have come to Luke (the author) from Paul. Doing a spiritual autobiography and *journaling* have become significant ways today to understand and reflect on what God is doing in our lives.

10. *Guidance*. Paul certainly experienced the guidance of God in various life situations. Paul's letters are full of reference to prayer and Acts indicates how the guidance of God was experienced as Paul conducted his mission activity. When he gave practical advice to his churches he sought God's guidance, but was also aware of how difficult it is to be absolutely sure of what God is telling one. Significant examples are his advice to the Corinthians in I Cor. 7, after which he says, "And I *think* that I have the spirit of God"; and in Rom. 11:33-36 where, after developing a strategy for his mission activity based on how he thinks God is carrying out his plans for the world, Paul essentially says, "Who knows God's mind and to whom does God owe an explanation? God's ways are unsearchable."

11. God acting in life through *persons*. Paul would imply this in what he says about the church as an expression ("body") of Christ and the way the Spirit works in persons in I Cor. 12. Many experience God through the way the love, concern and action of other persons affect their lives.

All of the above experiences of Paul are indicated as possibilities for others. Yet people are different and some persons because of their preferences and the differing nature of their life experience will stress some of the above and not others. Paul's treatment of the variety of spiritual gifts in Rom. 12 and I Cor. 12 clearly indicates his appreciation of variety and the contribution of differing experiences to the total life of the church. And there

is equality, not distinctions, in gifts, however individuals may estimate them: no one is better than another and all are for the common good.

Paul disidentifies religious experience with feelings, regarding it as having an objectivity. In I Cor. 12:2 he indicates that to be "moved" is not enough and in I Cor. 13:8-12 and Gal. 4:9 points out that the certainty of God's presence comes from God's action toward us rather than the clarity of our perception and feelings. What ultimately counts is the way God is aware of us and not the extent to which we are aware of God.

Paul is also aware that the experience of God is not to be identified with the overcoming of our human problems. Though it is the experience of many that God transforms lives and resolves some human problems, God does not resolve all problems and save humanity from living life within normal human limitations. Paul makes several important comments about this. In II Cor. 12:7 he indicates that along with his abundance of "revelations" God gave him a thorn in the flesh, to keep him from being too elated. Though this has often been interpreted as meaning an illness, it is best interpreted as Paul becoming aware of the struggles and limitations of his humanity (i.e. his "flesh"). His growing spiritual life made him more aware of his human limitations, and there was no escape from this. This is witnessed to by most of the mystics.

In II Cor. 4:6-12 Paul says that though the creative glory of God shines in our lives, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels (our bodies), to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us." In Rom. 8:28-39 Paul describes how God works in all the difficult circumstances of life, in a created world subjected to futility and groaning towards new birth, affirming that none of these continuing realities can separate us from God's love.

The Trinitarian Nature of Christian Experience

Language About God

The Christian understanding and experience of God came to be defined in Trinitarian terms: Father, Son and Spirit. To describe God in this way was faithful to the church's experience of God as Father/Creator, the presence of God in Jesus Christ, and the new presence of God in the Spirit. Within the New Testament one finds the earliest church reflecting upon and seeking to explain its threefold experience of God, the raw materials out of which the doctrine of the Trinity was later to be developed.

The primary concern in early Christian theology was to define the Son , the Spirit being given less definition, consigned to the third paragraph of the Apostles' Creed along with other matters. The Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople in the fourth century and Chalcedon in the fifth sought to define the relationship of the Father and the Son in terms of affirming the Son to be *truly* God and of *one substance* with the Father. Christ was:

> ... the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father ...[241]

The Council of Constantinople added to the earlier Creed of Nicaea further definition of the Spirit:

> ... the Lord and Giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, Who spoke by the prophets.[242]

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241. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 further defined Christ as both true God and true man.

While the Trinitarian language of earliest Christianity is less a description of the *nature* of God than of the *experience of God and God's action*, as the church moved into the Greco-Roman world and the Councils sought to define the faith, there was need to describe and define in terms of the questions raised by contemporary philosophical assumptions. And so they spoke of Christ's substance and nature. Yet in Judaism and earliest Christianity the description of God does not deal with God's nature, but God's *character* (loving and faithful) and *action*, and the *human experience of this*. It was recognized that God's nature could not be described. It was also recognized that language about God was more metaphorical than precisely descriptive. Paul, our earliest Christian theologian, in I Cor. 13:8ff and 8:1-3 clearly speaks about the limitations of theological language and knowledge of God.

The metaphorical nature of the earlier Christian descriptions of the Trinity is also indicated by the fact that most of the language used was borrowed from the religious traditions of Judaism, and later of the Hellenistic world, whose religious languages and terminologies were available to describe the Christian experience, without intending precision.[243] An interesting example of this is the Christian use of Jewish language, describing Wisdom as God's agent in creation and history, to express the meaning of Jesus in John 1 and Col. 1.[244] Does this really intend to describe Jesus' actual historical involvement in creation? Or is it a way of saying that the meaning of creation is to be found in the meaning of Jesus and the Christ-event?

While appreciating the work of the Councils in formulating the Christian faith so that it made sense to their contemporaries, the humility of the New Testament descriptions of the persons of the Trinity has much to say to us. It introduces us to the earliest Christians' experience of God and their attempts to define this within the limitations of thought and language they themselves recognized.

The Hidden God

God, God's self, cannot really be examined or understood by our limited human capabilities. Thus Christians have often described God as existing within a cloud or a mystery, as hidden. This hiddenness is expressed in the biblical admonition against the making of images.[245] Though God reveals God's self in a burning bush, a pillar of fire, on a mountain, God is not to be described and God's face cannot be seen. Eventually in Judaism God's name is not even to be pronounced. The mystical vision of Judaism is the "throne vision," such as one finds in Isaiah 6, where God is only seen in heaven and only God's glory is described. The approach to God in the Bible is very much that described by the anonymous 14th century English mystic, author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, who saw God as living within a cloud, representing God's inaccessibility to our senses:

> ... and because of it (the cloud) you can neither see Him clearly with your reason in the light of understanding, nor can you feel Him with your affection in the sweetness of love. Be

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242. The Christian East and West came to argue over whether the Spirit proceeded from the Father only, or from the Father and the Son.

243. Such use of language borrows available language to describe an event or experience without trying to refine the language and make it precisely correspond to the reality it describes. In attempts to define religious experience, one must question as to whether language is ever adequate, no matter how much one tries to refine it.

244. In Jewish Wisdom literature, Wisdom was a personified extension of God (usually described in feminine terms), and was agent in creation of the world, and God's agent of action in the world throughout history. Proverbs 8 describes Wisdom as agent in creation, and Wisdom's participation in history was further developed in two books that are part of the Old Testament Apocrypha: The Wisdom of Solomon and the Wisdom of Sirach.

245. Deuteronomy 5:8.

> prepared, therefore, to remain in this darkness as long as must be, crying evermore for Him whom you love. For if you are ever to feel Him or to see Him, it will necessarily be within this cloud and within this darkness.[246]

The author of the *Cloud* also calls for a "cloud of forgetting," an intentional laying aside of the images and names, which both represent and hide God, in order to relate directly to God and God's mystery. It is helpful to name and represent God, but God is not equivalent to the names and representations. Only God is God.

Rainer Maria Rilke expresses this in one of his poems in "The Book of Hours":

> You neighbor God, ...
>
> Only a slender wall lies between us,
> through fate; for there could be
> a call from your mouth, or mine --
> and it would shatter,
> with scarcely a sound.
>
> Out of your images is it built. ....
>
> And my senses, which quickly grow lame,
> find nowhere to go, separated from you.[247]

Christ Jesus

It is then amazing that God makes of God's self an image in a person: the Word, "Wisdom," become flesh in Jesus, or he is described as the one in whom God's Spirit uniquely dwells.[248] However, one must be careful about pushing the "visibility" of God too far. When the Spirit dwells in Jesus one still sees the Jesus in whom the Spirit dwells. Even the *incarnation* of God must be seen as a translation, a transformation into a historic mode of expression which both reveals and veils. Even where this is described in John 1:1-18, the mystery remains. It is *only the Son* who has seen God and who makes him known; we have seen the Son's glory, not the Father's.

Whatever the mystery of the revelation of God in Jesus, that it occurred is decisive and this has affected in some way all Christian reflection about God, providing concreteness for description of what God is like. This is what the Moravian leader Count Zinzendorf expresses in his poem "Allegegenwart," describing the human search for God and its resolution:

> (The Soul)
> 1. All-Present-One! I must confess
> You inexpressibly the deep height
> Fill without being seen.

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246. *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Introductory Commentary and Translation by Ira Progoff, New York: Julian Press, 1957, III,5.
247. My translation. Babette Deutsch, *Poems from the Book of Hours, "Das Stundenbuch"*, Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1941, p. 12.
248. John 1:14 speaks of the Word/Wisdom having become flesh in Jesus while the Synoptics stress the coming of the Spirit of God on Jesus in his Baptism and its presence in his ministry.

Yet everywhere I go and stand
The trace of your almighty path,
Never to be fathomed,
Still over-all is found,
As far as mind can wander.

2. So can it not be otherwise,
Because I note you everywhere.
So with earnestness I venture,
The greatness of your might and power
Your blinding bright majesty
Before which the dark deeps shrink,
To grasp with a song
That which surpasses all song. .....

Divine Answer
8. Cease to seek what is so far,
Cease to seek what flees you;
You have the Kernel which matters,
Don't trouble with externals.
Torment not your soul's light
To reach what is eternal.
You might capture darkness
And still find me nowhere.

9. Why, thou foolish child,
Will you fetch me from the depths?
Where do you think I can be found?
Do you seek me at heaven's poles?
Do you seek me in the creature?
My nature, which no eye can see,
Has built itself a body
And still you miss my presence.

10. O! Come here and see
The concealed abyss
The hidden majesty
In Jesus, the humble child, see
Whether humanity in grace is free,
See whether He your praise deserves!
Whose heart with love for Him is filled,
Who believes, from all care becomes free.

The Soul
11. O Eternity! Beauteous Light!
Reflection of the glorius king.
O love, which pierces heaven
To dwell in my small inn,
Here I find myself, here I lay hold.

Of course I have not seen you,
Yet that will one day be.
Now I love you, believe and rest.[249]

Though the mystery of God has been revealed in the person of Christ, to know the mystery is *not so much a matter of knowledge, but of relationship*. God offers God's self to be known in relationship. One may know God relationally without knowing all about God. This is important, for the variety of New Testament descriptions of Christ as revealer of God make uniformity in description difficult. In different sources there are *differences in foci*. These differences had to do not only with different religious traditions and perspectives that Jesus' followers brought to the experience of and reflection on him, but central questions had to be satisfied from the presumptions of each tradition. Primary was: *What in the Jesus' tradition makes relationship with God possible and removes the barriers to it?* Among the varied *foci,* one encounters the following as central to the possibility of relationship with God:

- in Matthew, knowing Jesus' teaching and obeying it;
- in Luke, accepting Jesus as provider of the Spirit and prophet for social transformation;
- in Mark, accepting Jesus as proclaimer of an understanding of the Kingdom (presence of God) which should be seen as the mystery of God's generous presence to all, calling for a mission to the Gentiles;[250]
- in John, accepting the life and knowledge of God experienced through Christ, unknowable otherwise;
- in Paul, accepting the implications of Jesus' death and resurrection which provided experience of transformation of one's nature and status, enabling relationship with God and others;
- in most of the Gospels, following the pattern of the Gospel story which also describes the life of believer.[251]

One then finds that the early Church saw in the totality of the Christ-event a wealth of dimensions, episodes, teachings, and implications from which Christians could draw what was necessary to enable and receive God's relationship and to remove the barriers to such relationship. What were the perspectives of the believer, and the barriers that needed to be dealt with, affected what was chosen from the tradition. But *it was always the relationship with God which saves and into which one was saved,* not some particular aspect of the Christ-event. Where relationship with Christ was a central saving element, it always saved one into a relationship with God.

Regarding the barriers to relationship which needed to be removed, different cultures and traditions had different needs, and some within the early church were consciously aware of this.[252]

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249. *Graf Ludwigs von Zinzendorf Teutscher Gedichte*, Erster Theil, Herrnhuth:, 1735, pp. 106-108.

250. This was over against other understandings which saw God's kingdom as a call for political revolution. Such debate on the nature of the Kingdom was not only significant within the life-time of Jesus, but the Gospel of Mark was written about the time the Jewish War with Rome began, posing again political questions..

251. : Most of the events described in Mark have direct relationship to issues in the life of the believer, even outlining the development of the Christian life. In John the events of Jesus' ministry are described as "signs," events of significance, and are arranged in an order related to their significance (i.e. a theological rather than a chronological order).

252. Though I would like here to cite Paul, I believe that it is legitimate to conclude, from the different forms and implications of the varied sayings of Jesus, that Jesus also may have consciously spoken differently to different audiences. Thus some "disagreements" within the Jesus' tradition in the Gospels are due to Jesus speaking contextually.

Paul, in I Corinthians 9:19-23, says that in telling the Gospel he became at times as one "under the Law" (a Jew) and at other times as one "outside the law" (a Gentile). He even mentions that he became as "the weak" (those with limited knowledge of the implications of the Gospel, as in I Cor. 8:7-13). The first two distinctions were cultural, and this would mean that Paul addressed the Gospel to cultural needs. The Jew needed to come to terms with the requirements of Law, taken seriously as *God's* gift, and had to deal with the problem of sin as perceived in Post-Exilic Judaism. This is exactly what one finds in Galatians 3, a letter addressed to Christians either Jewish in background or struggling with their relationship with Judaism.[253] Here the Law is removed only by Christ bearing upon himself in his death the curse pronounced upon those who disobey the Law. This is the significance of the cross in Galatians 3.

Now in Colossians, written for a Christian community largely Gentile, in chapters 1-2 Christ is the cosmic redeemer in whom the fullness of the deity dwells. In Col. 2:8-15, Christ cancels the bond of slavery to sin and flesh by nailing this bond to the cross and leading the conquered cosmic powers in triumphal procession like a victorious emperor. For the Greco-Roman the issue was their sense of being determined, beyond their control, by the cosmic powers and being imprisoned within their fleshly humanity. There is no treatment of Christ's death as a means to be freed from the Law. The Law was a non-issue for the Gentile.

Sometimes the treatment of Christ's death is affected by the *analogy* that is chosen. In Romans 3:21-26 the analogy is the Jewish festival of the Day of Atonement (as in Hebrews), the major sacrificial ritual dealing with intentional sin. Now God sets forth Christ *publicly* as an expiation for sin, while on the Day of Atonement the high priest took the blood of the sin offering secretly into the Holy of Holies, an offering no one actually ever saw. One must ask here how far the analogy should be pushed. Should one make of Christ's death an actual sin offering? In I Peter the ransoming of Christians from "foolish ways" is effected by Christ's death, described as that of a sacrificial lamb, without blemish or spot (I Peter 1:18-19). Does this then mean that Christ's death was actually a sacrifice, and that in order to be an adequate sacrifice he was really "without blemish or spot," i.e., separated from what it means to be truly human?

In Acts, Luke's Greek perspective neglects the death of Jesus and its meaning, rather calling for a focus on the resurrection of Christ and the action of the Spirit. In Acts 2:23 Peter says that Jesus' death occurred at the hands of lawless men and no saving significance is mentioned. It is in the resurrection that God acts in a saving way. Even in the sermons of Paul in Acts the death of Jesus has no significance, other than that it happened -- which has caused scholars to ponder whether Paul's message was being fairly described by Luke.

Thus it seems that the early church drew upon the richness of the Christ event to indicate how God has drawn near for relationship, and how all of the obstacles, in whatever way perceived in one's cultural heritage, have been dealt with. In our dealing with the Christ event we must do the same. We are mistaken if we seek to present to Christians today the need to receive Christ's death as a sacrifice for sin, providing freedom from the Law, -- unless the recipients of such a message have been acculturated to assume these needs (as have many traditional Christians). It would also seem to be backwards to try to preach a perception of the problems (e.g., sin) before proclaiming the goal to which the problems' resolution was to lead: namely, reconciliation with God. We should start with the goal first and then explore the barriers

253. Galatians, so I believe, is a letter which contains within it an earlier Pauline statement on Jewish Christian theology, beginning at 2:15, and can be reconstructed by eliminating inserts added when this statement was used as a basis for the letter to the Galatians.

which need to be stripped away.[254] *As we draw upon the Christ-event to free persons for God, let us at least know the issues with which persons today actually struggle. We must know how to draw upon this deep well of the Christ-event and be as culture specific as was the early church. The needs within the many cultures of our world may not be the same, but the well is adequate.*

The Spirit

The appearance of the phenomenon of the Spirit, after the very short period of Jesus' life, ministry, and resurrection appearances, confronted the church with another manifestation of God's presence. *The church was just discovering how to describe the presence of God in Jesus when it had to learn to describe the Spirit. This was to mean that it could not fully describe its experience of God without saying: Father, Son, and Spirit.*

One might say that the Spirit is the experience of new possibilities of relationship with God in the post-Jesus period, but in some way dependent upon and related to the Jesus, his life, and his mission. This same Spirit had come upon Jesus in his baptism and ministry, and Jesus was described by John the Baptist as one who would baptize with the Spirit. In the departure discourses of John, chapters 14-16, Jesus says that it was necessary that he go away in order that the Spirit come, probably indicating that the presence of God was not to be tied to the location of his ministry, but universally available. In Luke 11:1-14 Jesus promises the giving of the Spirit by the God who is a good "Father," and in Luke 24:49 and Acts 1:4-5 tells his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the Spirit to come after his departure. However, much of the New Testament stresses that the receiving of the Spirit after the time of Jesus is somehow connected with what Jesus had done and the symbolic acceptance of what Jesus had done in baptism.[255]

Luke's treatment of the Spirit deserves special consideration because of its importance in his writings. He uses the Spirit to describe how God lives in the world through persons and engages the world in transformation. The Kingdom of God is not primarily coming, in the future, but is *within*, and by being within is also *in our midst*.[256]

In the Infancy narrative of Luke, after the announcement of the coming birth, Mary replies, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" and the angel says:

> The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.[257]

The word "overshadow" is very important in understanding what Luke is saying by this story. It comes from the narrative about the presence of God at the tabernacle (sacred tent), the temporary place of worship for Jews during the journey out of Egypt (Ex. 40:34-38). A cloud, indicating God's presence,

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254. Zinzendorf, the major Moravian theologian of the 18th century, said that all in the Christian life should be approached from the joyous redemption and reconciliation that God provided in Christ. One should never start with an analysis of all the problems people have. Because God has offered such a great redemption, one can assume that there are problems and then leave it at that. Dwell joyously on the redemption. Thus Moravians were called "happy pietists" in contrast with the pietists at the University of Halle which believed in careful introspection of one's sinfulness.

255. Note how the coming of the Spirit and baptism are connected in Acts and the relationship of receiving the Spirit and putting on Christ in baptism in Galatians 3:6-4:7.

256. Luke 17:21 may be translated as indicating that the Kingdom is both "within" and "in your midst." The demands of Lukan theology make it necessary to see Luke as intending that we take seriously this double meaning.

257. Luke 1:35.

covered the tent and the glory of God dwelled within. The words of the angel mean that the presence of God (the Holy Spirit) will come upon Mary and the glory of God will dwell within her. *Her womb will become the temple of God, and the child to be born will be holy, will belong to God* (which is what "holy" means).

This event is not only significant to Mary. The angel had implied that it would continue to be significant to all of God's people. Luke places it in the first chapter of his Gospel as an introduction to all that he is to say. The clue to how this event was to be significant to all is to be found in Luke's understanding of the Spirit, the presence of God, throughout both the Gospel and its companion volume, Acts.

The Spirit comes upon Mary (1:35); Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist, was filled with the Holy Spirit (1:41); the Spirit comes upon old Simeon in the Temple who announces that God's salvation has now appeared in the infant Jesus (2:25-27); the Spirit descends upon Jesus in his baptism (2:22); Jesus begins his ministry full of the Spirit (4:1,14); in the Nazareth synagogue Jesus announces that "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (4:18). Jesus then promises the coming of the Spirit (24:49, Acts 1:8), and the Spirit comes upon the Church in Acts 2, the experience of Pentecost. From the perspective of Luke, the history of the early church, as written in Acts, is the story of the Spirit.

The coming of the Spirit upon Mary and the birth of her child then becomes the model, the paradigm, of the Christian life. *It is not merely the story of Mary, but the story of how God comes to us and what God may birth within us. It is the birth which produces many children.* What happened in Mary was unique, but not intended only for her. It was intended to be the pattern for all. Jesus was born by God's presence within the temple of Mary's womb. Luke intends to say that there is such a womb within us all, female or male, within which God can dwell, out of which may be birthed God's life.

Now it is important to look carefully at what is often a misunderstanding of the Spirit. Though the experience of the Spirit in Acts seems to be regarded as one of *power*, releasing the phenomena of Pentecost described in Acts 2, a careful reading of the New Testament will reveal that this is not often so. Luke's theology at the time he wrote Acts seemed to assume that all manifestations of the Spirit would be powerful.[258] Even in Paul's connection of the Spirit with the various spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12), not all the gifts result in powerful phenomena. *The connection of the Spirit with power has perhaps caused many to look for the Spirit to come, when it is already present.* It must be realized that when one is speaking of the Spirit's presence, one is really speaking of the same thing as the presence of God, the presence of Christ, or even of the nature of the Kingdom of God and the power of the Gospel. Thus one cannot speak of the *strong* power of the Spirit while forgetting what Jesus said about the mysterious presence of God's Kingdom (Mark 4:11) which was small as a mustard seed (Mark 4:31), or the strange weak power of the Gospel (the message of the cross), which was a stumbling block to those who wanted a sign of power and foolishness to those who wanted wisdom (I Cor. 1:18-25). Nor can we forget how the treasure we have from God is contained in our earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us (II Cor. 4:7). Thus we learn that the power of God finds it possibilities in our weaknesses (II Cor. 12:8-10). Luke's paradigmatic Mary is a real flesh and blood woman, partaker of our humanity.[259] However the power of God may be defined, it is God's power, not ours. Zinzendorf, in the Moravian

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258. Acts represents an early stage in Luke's theology which was naively optimistic and portrayed the Spirit as always powerful. After the deaths of Peter and Paul and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE, he came to see life and religious experience more realistically and modified his perspective in the later version of the Gospel, our present Luke.

259. The elevation of Mary in Roman Catholic theology loses her as a paradigm for us, for she is no longer like us.

tradition, with his belief that the cross is the key to understanding God, indicated that in the cross God forever renounced the use of coercive power and affirmed gentleness.[260]

Rather than speaking of the Spirit as power it would seem best to speak of the *Spirit as relationship*. In Galatians 3-4 the Spirit represents the giving of relationship, the giving of God's self, which enables us to be God's children and to express this by saying, "Abba, Father." It is out of this relationship that the Christian life grows (Gal. 5:16-25) and we are helped in our weakness (Rom. 8:26-27). This is the gift of God's self which is far beyond the giving of good things by an earthly father (Luke 11:13).

Though present history is the time of the Spirit, Christ also has a role which is variously described. In I Cor. 15:24, Phil. 2:9-10 and elsewhere the Christ ascends into the cosmos to subject all its powers to himself: thus he continues his Messianic mission in the heavens. In Rev. 1 the ascended Christ, like "a son of man," stands in the midst of his churches, caring for them on earth. In Gal. 4:6 the *Spirit of the Son* does what he did historically, helps persons to speak of God as "Abba, Father".[261] Though the Spirit is usually seen as the giver of spiritual gifts in the life of the church, in Ephesians 4:8ff Christ is the giver of spiritual gifts.[262] Even though in John it is said that Jesus had to go away for the Spirit to come, Jesus does not seem to be away since there is talk of abiding in him (e.g. John 15:1-11) and the pattern of Johannine spirituality is to come to Jesus, see him, and stay with him (John 1:25-29). It is clear from Gal. 1:12 that Paul's decisive religious experience on the Damascus Road was a "revelation of Jesus Christ," an experience of Christ after his Ascension.[263] Thus for many Christ continued to play an active role in their experience after the giving of the Spirit *and even in the Spirit*. However, the author of Hebrews understood that Christ after his ascension ceased his activity: having ascended, he sits down at the right hand of God and waits for someone else to subject the cosmic powers (God ?), *while the Spirit bears witness to what Christ has done* (10:12-18). Thus Hebrews clearly distinguishes the time of the Spirit from the time of the Son, a distinction not clear in other New Testament literature.

All of this indicates the variety of early Christian experience of the presence of God and the varied language used to express it. In analyzing the language of the New Testament one is brought to say: *Yes, the period following the ascension of Christ was the time of the experience of God in the Spirit, but at times the experience of the resurrected Christ was mediated through the Spirit (or apart from it).*

The struggle of the church to define its spiritual experience after the time of Jesus did not have clear results. "Spirit" seems to have been used for the ongoing activity of both the Father and the Son, and, in some New Testament traditions, almost to have been treated as a third person of the Godhead. Like the use of "Wisdom" as an personified expression of God in Judaism, we are not clear how far to take this personification. The later church was also more concerned to define the "Son" than the "Spirit," which was placed in the third paragraph of the Apostles and Nicene creeds, along with other articles of belief. It was not given a separate paragraph as was the "Father" and the "Son." The very term "Spirit" seems to indicate its more nebulous nature.

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260. Nicholas Ludwig Count von Zinzendorf, *Vier und dreissig Homilien über die Wunden-Litaney der Brüder, gehalten auf dem Herrnhaag in den Sommer-Monathen 1747*, n.d., (5/14/47), pp. 60f.

261. It is a central element of Jesus' teaching that God can be addressed as *Abba*, Aramaic for *Father*, a familiar form of address. This is equivalent in the New Testament to the revelation of God's name to Moses in the Old Testament.

262. In Rom. 12 the giver is unclear. In I Peter 4:10-11 God gives spiritual gifts.

263. It must be remembered, however, that in I Cor. 15:8 Paul joins his Damascus Road experience of Christ to those of the early disciples which occurred immediately after the resurrection, but for him was "as to one untimely born." Thus the revelation of Christ to him "apostled" him (Gal. 1:1) and, even though later, belonged to those experiences which apostled others, but which were primarily limited to the period immediately after the resurrection and before the giving of the Spirit.

Though the early Church knew the life- and gift-giving qualities of the Spirit, it recognized that, as in all religious experience, *discernment* was needed to define what was being experienced in one's religious experience.[264] This essentially involved being able to see within the experience *continuity with Jesus*, a manifestation of *love*, and *responsibility to the Christian community*.

The Nature of the Post-Resurrection Experience of Christ in the New Testament

I would like to point up that the New Testament language about the experience of Christ may be understood in three ways, two of which are implied above. *The first is that it refers to an actual, objective experience of the resurrected Christ.* When one analyzes the description of Paul's Damascus road experience in his own literature and in Acts, it seems clear that it could not be understood in the two other ways I will suggest. It was an experience of One who encountered him unexpectedly, objectively, and which (according to his own description) did not have antecedents in a psychological process.[265] Such experience of the resurrected Christ continues to be part of the experience of Christians. Even though the Johannine community in the Gospel has Jesus speak of the other Comforter, the Spirit, who comes to re-present him, it is clear from the style of spirituality advocated in John, and the handling of the Jesus tradition, that Christians are still to come to him and abide in and with him.

Secondly, experience of Christ may be understood as an appropriation of the meaning and understanding embodied in the historical Christ event which expresses the Christian's self-understanding "in Christ.". Wherever baptism is discussed in the New Testament it becomes clear that the baptized, in the dramatic process of the baptismal experience, took to her/himself the dying and rising of Christ, finding identity in being "in Christ" or "putting on Christ." Such an appropriation of the meaning of Christ can be a very powerful experience. Because baptism for many is now in infancy, Confirmation and Eucharist (Holy Communion) should provide the same type of occasion for appropriating the Christian self-understanding. Certainly the Eucharist functioned in this way in the New Testament Church. Paul, who gives us our earliest account of Jesus' "Last Supper" with his disciples, indicates that the elements were taken "in memory" of Jesus. Jesus was memorialized by the telling of the story of his last days, much as in Judaism the Passover was memorialized by the telling of its story. Such remembrance enabled the participant to enter the history of Jesus, be present there, and the history of Jesus to define identity. [266] Such presence of the believer within Jesus' history became also a "real presence" of Jesus to the believer.

The third way in which the experience of Christ may be understood is as a psychic introject, the person of God who is taken into us in a concrete form. Of the persons of the Trinity, it is largely Christ who has the concreteness through his historic life and the sacraments to form the basis for an introject. Modern psychology has made clear how this happens with the introjection of significant others in childhood. I believe that this process continues throughout life wherever we are provided with experiences and materials significant enough to become a part of us. In leading meditations on Scripture I have frequently encountered religious introjects which appear in the meditative exercise. In fact, such introjection is really an intent of religion, that what is brought to us from outside of us in our religious tradition may be

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264. In I Cor. 12 and I John 4 it is made clear that spiritual experience may be deceptive and that one must discern its legitimacy: whether it is the Spirit of God or is something else.

265. Paul says this clearly in Gal. 1:12. In Philippians 3:3-6 he describes his clear satisfaction, before conversion, in his Jewish heritage and his obedience to the Law. Rom. 7, which describes Paul's struggle with the Law and with his inner life, is now understood by many not as a description of his inner struggle as a Jew, but of his struggle with the Law as a Christian as he became aware of the call of Christ to purity of inward life as well as external obedience.

266. Form Critics indicate that the reason the passion story of Jesus' last days occupies one-third of the Gospels is that this material was assembled even before the writing of the Gospels to serve as narrative at the Eucharist.

interiorized. Here *our religious traditions bear a great responsibility as to the quality and nature of what becomes introjected*. The difficulty regarding introjecting Christ is that defining Christ is no simple matter. We have four Gospels and the presentation of Jesus in Paul, not to mention other New Testament literature. The understanding of Jesus which we transmit is the result of a selective and critical appraisal of these varied sources. This is work that the church should do for its members. Hopefully, what is introjected, if appropriate, will contribute creatively to the life of the person and become linked with the action of God, the Spirit and the resurrected Christ (external to us) within our lives. Carl Jung also suggests that the person of Christ provides an appropriate image to activate the structures built into our psyche to lead us to wholeness.[267]

Although the introjection of Christ is important for our spiritual lives, it is not appropriate for all. There are some for whom Christ does not play a significant experiential role. But more important, we must be aware that those persons who have a history of abuse are not going to let another someone from outside them invade their psyche. Thus it is important to recognize that there are many ways to describe the relationship of Christ to life. We need to offer persons a sufficient variety so that they can identify with some. Christ may be in us, but we may be in Christ. Christ is coming to us from the future, and so impinges on our present. Christ becomes part of our past, our identity. Christ is our companion in the present. We communally represent Christ to the world, and so are the body of Christ (I Cor. 12). We set our minds on the things above, where Christ is (Col. 3:2). We imitate Christ (I Thess. 1:6). Christ is the original Human (Man/Adam) after whom life may be patterned and by whom life may be restored (Phil. 2:5-11). Christ is our Lord, to whom we give obedience.

Christocentrism

One of the major issues in the Trinitarian nature of the Christian experience of God is Christocentrism. Can legitimate experience of God and "salvation" be said to occur *only through Christ*? Paul Knitter, in *No Other Name?*, pursues this as a contemporary question about the relationship of Christianity to other world religions.[268] In examining the New Testament it seems to be the case that Jesus is presented in Mark and Luke as being theocentric (God centered: proclaiming the "Kingdom of God") while the later Gospels, reflecting the apologetics of Christian communities and the struggles of Christianity with Judaism, moved in a Christocentric direction. This is clearly notable in the Gospel of John. [269]

It may be suggestive to hear the Pauline presentation of the role of Christ in I Corinthians, a letter accepted as genuinely Pauline by most. Here the church is the church of God, not Christ, and God is the source of the church's life. It is the Lord (God) of whom we should boast, and it is just as problematic to say that we belong to Christ (without recognizing the source of our life *in God*) as it is to say we belong to Paul, Cephas, or Apollos.(I Cor. 1) In I Cor. 15:20-28, Paul points out that while the resurrected Christ

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267. Jung speaks of the archetype of the *Self* which responds to religious symbols, such as Christ, almost as an image of God within the psyche. See John Welch, *Spiritual Pilgrims: Carl Jung and Teresa of Avila*, NY: Paulist Press, 1982, pp. 119ff.

268. Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985.

269. Though Jesus in the earlier Synoptics, Mark and Luke, preaches a message calling persons to the "Father" and God's Kingdom/Rule, there are ways in which his unique understanding of the Jewish tradition, his understanding of his relationship with God, his use of religious terminology (e.g. "son", "son of man"), and his personal connection with his message would have eventually placed him within the center of the later church's message. To indicate that Luke represents an early tradition assumes that the original version of the Gospel was written in the early 60s and then went through several revisions, eventuating in its present form. Mark is generally accepted as being written in the mid 60s. In John there is no salvation outside of Christ and one only comes to the Father through him.

plays a significant role in the interim before the End, in the End he will deliver over everything to the Father so that God may be all in all.

Romans implies similar ideas. In 1:1-7 the Gospel is the Gospel of God, concerning his Son, and the church is God's beloved. The Gospel is the power of God (1:17). In 3:21ff Paul indicates that what God did in Christ was to set forth *publicly* what he had been previously doing. In Gal. 4:6 it is the work of the Spirit *of the Son* (the resurrected Christ) to help persons to utter "Abba, Father," doing as he did historically when he taught his disciples to pray "Father."

The interesting thing is that Paul's treatment of Christ, mentioned above, seems to be an attempt to preserve Jewish monotheism, to preserve God as source of all, while assigning to Christ a unique role in this present age, a role which would be surrendered to God in the End. Paul's treatment of this shows a closer relationship to the presentation of Jesus in the earlier Synoptics where Jesus is one who preached the Kingdom of God and taught his disciples to pray to the Father.[270] His understanding of the role of Christ in this age draws upon the description of some of the earthly and heavenly "mediators" in Jewish religious literature: Messiah, Son of Man or Heavenly Man of Apocalyptic literature,[271] and possibly Wisdom as a personified extension of God.[272] As with all of the early church, much of Paul's Christological language is "borrowed" from his culture to express the meaning of the reality he encountered in Christ. One must always question how literally he would desire us to understand it: i.e. whether the language serves functional or ontological purposes (whether it describes what Christ *does* or what Christ *is*).

The several letters in which it is most difficult to see the Pauline perspective outlined above are Colossians and Ephesians. Here not only is the church Christ's body (as in I Cor. 12), but Christ is *head* of the church, the source of the church's life.(Eph. 4:15-16) Particularly striking is the great Christological hymn of Col. 1:15-20 where Christ, like Wisdom, is the origin of all. "He is the image of the invisible God." In Col. 2:9, it is said, "the whole fullness of deity dwells in him." [273] Yet is always the invisible God who is beyond him.

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270. That this should be so is not strange when one remembers that Paul is actually our earliest source of information about Jesus, antedating the Gospels. Thus he seems closer to our earlier Gospels (Mark and Luke) and differs in various ways from Matthew and John which represent later first century perspectives. Though this is not the place to argue evidence for Paul's interest in the historical Jesus, it is the writer's conviction that Paul saw himself as responsible to Jesus and in agreement with the Jerusalem Church. One has only to read Galatians to hear Paul's argument that he was in theological agreement with Jerusalem. The Judaizing antagonists, who came from Jerusalem and urged circumcision and obedience to the dietary law in Galatia, did not so much represent a different theological position, but a desire to avoid Jewish persecution of the Mother Christian Church in Jerusalem by asking submission to basic requirements of the Law (Gal. 6: 11-13). Thus Paul understands himself to be a responsible and reliable source of the perspectives of earliest Christianity.

271. The Apocalyptic "Man" or "Son of Man" (a periphrasis for "Man") was probably patterned after the "Man" of Gen. 1 who was made in the image of God. Gen. 2-3 was seen as being about the earthly "Man", patterned after the original "Man" of Gen. 1. We know that Philo interpreted the two creation narratives in Gen. 1-3 in this way.

272. Wisdom literature is crucial to understanding how a "high" Christology developed not merely in a Hellenistic context, but a Jewish one. Many of Paul's Christological ideas can be understood as coming from the earliest "Jewish period" of Christianity.

273. In contrast to Colossians and Ephesians, Paul in Phil. 2:5ff says that though Christ was in the form of God (probably alluding to the "Man" of Gen. 1 made in the image of God), he "did not count equality with God" something to be seized (as did Adam in Gen. 2-3). Because he emptied himself of his heavenly position and assumed the form of a servant, he was consequently exalted to a higher position. This later exaltation to a cosmic position does not quite fit with the presentation of Christ in Eph. and Col., but it can fit with the function of the ascended Christ in I Cor. 15.

These differences within the Pauline literature may indicate that Ephesians and Colossians may not have been by Paul (as some conclude), or they may represent a modification or development in Paul's views, or they may contain a different expression of the nature of Christ in the context of a different cultural situation where there was need for the cosmic Christ and less need to discuss Jesus in relationship to Jewish monotheism.

An Argument for Breadth

The conclusion of this presentation on the Trinitarian nature of the Christian experience of God is to argue for breadth in what is to be viewed as legitimate personal expression of God experience. The contemporary church must embrace as much variety in the expression of faith as one finds within the New Testament Canon. Everyone does not experience God the same way, nor does any individual experience God the same way at all times in life. To allow for individual experience and expression, within general responsibility to the biblical tradition, is to allow faith to be living and personal. Moreover, in the church's sacred task of preaching the Gospel to the world, persons are allowed to come to God as they are able (or as God enables them), rather than in a stereotypical pattern with constrictive faith formulas.

Christocentrism says a great deal about the meaning and significance of God's action in Christ. For some religious experience will be focused on the person of Christ. But I have known those whose religious experience is first of God (the Father) as the source and font of the Godhead, not of Christ.[274] Only later have some appreciated the meaning of Christ. Yet they could not deny that they had *first* come to the "Father" and have come to the Son by the "Father," rather than the other way around. Then there are those whose religious experience is centered in the Spirit.

Rather than trying to narrow the nature of religious experience through our definition of the Trinity, it would seem that the Trinity offers Christians a way of broadening their perception of the richness of religious experience as embodied in the Christian tradition, and legitimizing this variety for others. It also offers a way of viewing various dimensions which need to be preserved in our relationship with God: we need a sense of God's participation in life (the Spirit), we need a way in which God may become concrete and in this concreteness become an operating dynamic within our lives (the Christ), and we need to preserve the ultimate mystery and indescribability of God (the God above and beyond our experience and the historical and conceptual expressions of God). If we understand humans as created "in the image of God", such richness in God also helps us in exploring the mystery and richness of being human. Such an approach maintains an openness for feminine images which also play a role in the biblical tradition.[275]

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274. Christocentrism is often based upon an understanding that God is only to be known through revelation, with Christ as the epitome of this revelation. Accompanying this is the assumption that relationship with God is not possible without the atonement effected in Christ. Thus one can come to God only through Christ. Yet both some of the biblical materials and experience have long indicated that God does not confine Godself to one way of relating. See the previous discussion of Christocentrism.

275. Wisdom is a significant feminine image that early Christianity borrows from Judaism, which becomes a basis for the Christology of John 1, Col. 1, and Heb. 1. The birthing image is used in the New Testament in such places as John 3:1-15, I Peter 1:3,23, and Romans 8:18-25. As has been noticed by Zinzendorf within the Moravian tradition, the Holy Spirit functions as a Mother and so it can be called "Mother." Then there is the significant way in which Mary becomes the prototype of one who bears God's Spirit in the Lukan infancy narratives, while in Rev. 12 there is the heavenly Woman who bears a child who fulfills the expectations of Psalm 2.