

The Solitaries
The Journeys
The Corporates

In Today's World

Context

At the end of October and the beginning of November 1999 at the Council of the Congregation of the Ursulines of Jesus in Turin, Italy I delivered these nine talks. In the morning after the community's prayers and before the start of the work of the day, the entire group gathered for a few minutes. The intention was to "open some windows" and offer new perspectives on familiar categories of the spirit life. Thus, you will find some new language, expressions and images combined with the more usual way of talking about these categories.

These talks were short, but took about twenty to twenty-five minutes to deliver in English and translate into French and Spanish. These talks are far from an exhaustive presentation of the work we did 25 years ago with these categories. However, I hope that they will stir the mind and cause reflection upon the religious life of the spirit.

I have taken these presentations from work done by a group some 25-30 years ago. As part of that original group, I am pleased that it might be of some help and use to the Congregation of the Ursulines of Jesus.

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Introduction

Today and in the next eight days, I want to talk about, and invite you to think about, the substance of what it means to be the religious in today's world. In a moment, I am going to lay out the categories we will be talking about and finally I want to deal with the first of them.

However before we start to look at all of this I want to share some reflections about what has happened to us as human beings at the end of the 20th century. In order to do that, I have to go back some five hundred years to when our ancestors began to invent the modern world. One of the great things they did was what scholars call 'The differentiation of the cultural value spheres.' This means that before the modern age, art, morals, religion, science were all together and generally under the authority of the Church. Previously, we fused these spheres; however, modernity differentiated them and let each proceed at its own pace, with its own dignity, using its own tools, following its own discoveries, unencumbered by intrusions from the other spheres.

This differentiation allowed each sphere to make profound discoveries that, if used wisely, could lead to such good results as democracy, the end of slavery, the rise of feminism and rapid advances in medical science. However, like any great advance in the human journey this one had a dark side. The differentiation went too far into actual dissociation, fragmentation, and alienation. This allowed a powerful and aggressive science to begin to invade and dominate the other spheres, crowding art and morals out of any serious consideration in approaching reality. Science became 'scientism'—scientific materialism and scientific imperialism—which soon became the official worldview of our modern world. Scientific materialism very soon pronounced the other value spheres to be worthless, not scientific, illusory or worse. Gone was mind and gone was soul and gone was spirit and its place, as the philosopher Whitehead famously lamented there was reality as "a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless—merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly."

Today scientific materialism holds imperial sway across the world. Its philosophy enthralls and dominates all societies. It is in the very air we breathe and controls our imaginations with almost total dominance. Particularly the life of the soul and spirit has been marginalized to the point where people who dare to think in or seek to explore these spheres are seen as, at best, foolish and misguided and, at worst, as strange and dangerous to the common good. All too often, we see the accumulated historical wisdom of the religious traditions as composed of unscientific myths, superstitions and fairy tales for children.

A hundred years ago, Nietzsche said that 'God is dead.' Since then many others have said this same thing. Of course, what they are really saying is that our idea of God is dead. The human formulations in words, symbols, signs, and rituals that we have created over the ages to hold our idea of God no longer communicate or speak to people in our time. God is not dead but our ideas about God are in sad shape.

There have been several responses to this reality. One is a retreat to defensive fundamentalism. The problem with this strategy is that it tends to defend and hold on to

the outward signs, symbols and rituals without grasping the interior reality for which these signs, symbols and rituals stand. Thus you have a kind of hollow grasping after something whose meaning you do not profoundly grasp. Secondly is the attempt to invent something new. From pop psychology to the various new age movements they all have a certain shallowness and a cut-off-ness from our historical roots which tends to make them the latest fad or fashion craze. People caught in this tend to spin from one idea or movement to another always seeking and never finding—the answer.

The task of the religious in today's world is not to defend God—as if one could—God needs no defence. Nor is it to attack science. You always have to fight upon science's terms and you always lose—as the Church has discovered in the last hundred years. Rather it is to rediscover and recapture the great and profound wisdom of the spirit deeps that our forebears forged out and re-articulate that for modern human beings. We must be willing to look to our forebears' wisdom and discover in our lives, what they experienced that gave birth to their insights and wisdom. An unknowing and blind repetition of past formulas does not do it. Often, it is that which turns people away from the religious life.

Twenty-five years ago, an Institute group did the research work I want to share with you. Our concern was to recapture the insight and wisdom of our forebears in the faith in such a way that it would speak with the same power and address the profound spiritual depths of human beings in today's world. In sharing this with you I do not want to communicate that, I think that I or we have the answers. Rather I want to share what we have learnt and invite you to continue the journey—to build your own understanding of what it means to be the profoundly religious in the closing days of the millennium.

I am going to talk about nine categories—all of them familiar to you. We divided them into three sets of three. The first set is what we call the solitaires. They are Meditation, Contemplation and Prayer. The second are the corporates. They are Poverty Chastity and Obedience. I will talk of these not as vows of the religious life but as interior states of being that are part of the life of the spirit. The third set is the journeys. They are Knowing, Being, and Doing. These are key to all the others. In a sense they do not exist except as they are intensifications of the other six. Knowing is an intensification of Meditation and Poverty. Being is an intensification of Chastity and Contemplation. Doing is an intensification of Obedience and Prayer.

Once when Jesus was asked who he was he answered, 'I myself am the way, and the truth, and the life. That is, to paraphrase, I am profound doing, I am profound knowing, and I am profound being. Look at me and you see all profound doing, all profound knowing and all profound being in itself. However, more of that later, today I want to talk about Meditation.

Meditation

I want to begin by asking each of you to write down the names of five or six people with whom you find yourself having a mental dialogue. These are the people, living or dead, fictional or real, ancient or modern, who speak to you on occasion or whom you check with as you move through your life.

Meditation has to do with knowing. Meditation is a journey into self-awareness that takes us deep into our understanding of whom we are and the shaping of our lives. At its most intense meditation is a radical consciousness of our being and the creation of that being. For most people this is an unconscious process, however, for the religious we are aware of it and indeed are able to participate in its creation.

Meditation is quite simply the interior community of people, things and images that speak to us and with which we often dialogue. The cartoon image of a person with the devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other, each telling them what to do is really just about meditation. It is a universal human experience. The only variation is that all of us have a very personal community in our minds with which we communicate. All people live with this community but most people are not aware of it or are often only dimly aware of the dialogue or influence this community has upon their thoughts, decisions and actions. People say, "My father was a great influence on my life," or "My high school history teacher really changed my life," or "My friend in university helped me to decide what to do with my life." All of these comments point to people who are part of what I would call the "Meditative Council" of these individuals. Historically, the Church called this the Communion of Saints. While we all do it, most people have no name for it and have no way to be intentional about it. For most people, people, things, images join or leave their meditative council in an unconscious manner with no intentional decision on the part of the person and the dialogue goes on with little or no direction.

In August of 1999, the International Herald Tribune had a half page article about meditation but they never mentioned the word, meditation. It was a story about a novel written in the 1960s that tells the story of two army officers. One was a character who cared for the men under his command and another officer who simply cared for himself and his career in the army. This book has become required reading in the United States military. It is studied at the military academies and many officers say it is the only book they take with them when they move. To quote from the article:

And the names of Sam Damon and Courtney Massengale have entered the language of the U.S. military as code words for the good officer who thinks first of the troops and the other one who thinks only of personal gain.

When Shelton (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) wants to exclude a candidate from a promotion, all he has to do is tell the board of review: "This is another Courtney Massengale."

"It is a household name and I've used it to say we shouldn't have an individual like that in the ranks--someone who is motivated for all the wrong reasons, someone you don't want leading the troops..."

"I've never been without a copy since college," said Colonel Gregg Fontenot, who was a battalion commander in Operation Desert Storm in the Middle East, served in the Bosnia peacekeeping operation and retired last year.

"Several times I've decided what to do after figuring out what Sam would do," Fontenot said. "At midcareer at the staff college at Fort Leavenworth, I agonized whether to go on for a second year of studies. It wasn't stylish in the army then. But Sam studied military history at night and I wanted to be like Sam. So I stayed."

Here was a military man basing an important decision about his future career on a character from a novel written over 30 years ago. Our meditative council is powerful. They shape and inform our life, our decisions and actions all the time. The exercise of meditation is about shaping and developing our consciousness of our meditative council and of enabling that council to enrich and enliven our lives.

This council performs four crucial dynamics. Each of these dynamics is, in a certain sense, a role or relationship that exists between participants in our meditative council and us. The members of our meditative council may change roles from time to time. They are not locked into just one relationship or role but are responsive to the particular situation in which we find ourselves.

The first dynamic or relationship is that of **Permission Giver**. This is that person on the council, who says, "Your life is approved. You do not have to live out of guilt or be ashamed of what you have been or done. You are accepted and received." The permission giver never tells us what to do. They pronounce a kind of absolution over our lives. They are the ones who remind us that nothing we do or be can separate us from the love of God. They are the ones who, when we experience our deepest despair and frustration remind us that we can live our life, just as it is, sure that we are loved and accepted.

The second dynamic has to do with accountability, the calling into question of our lives or with the placing of a demand upon our lives. It has to do with judgement. These are our **interior prompters**. They are the ones who say, "Remember you decided and now you have to act on your decision." Or "You said you would do this. Have you done it?" Or "You accepted this responsibility, now get busy and do your work."

They are the ones who do not let us escape into excuses and despair. They call us to get on with our lives and the living of them. Again, they do not tell us what to do or how to do it. Rather they call us to live the life we have been given and to live it fully and completely. They ask the hard questions and remind us of our previous decisions. They do not make the decisions for us but remind us of the freedom and responsibility that we have to decide for ourselves what is necessary at any particular moment of our lives. They are always there

calling us to be what we can be and what is necessary to live our lives. They call us to trust our knowledge and wisdom, to trust our intuitions, to have confidence in our own abilities and capacities. Finally, they call us to trust God.

The third one has to do with those who are **exemplars** in our lives. These are our own most personal "Saints". Not necessarily the "official Saints" of the Church but those whose lives are an example to us and who remind us of what we seek to do and be in our own lives. This is the category in the story about the army officer I read earlier. Remember he said, "But Sam studied military history at night and I wanted to be like Sam. So I stayed."

These are our revered heroes. They provide guidance and give us direction for what we are and do with our lives. They are like "guardian angels". If you ever find yourself thinking, "I wonder what _____ would do in this situation"—you have an exemplar in your life. Their lives deeply and profoundly address our own lives and they are constantly calling us to live beyond our own expectations and anticipations. Their lives challenge ours and call forth the greatness that is in all of us. In its most profound sense, this challenge is radical and total. These exemplars, these Saints, do not let us off lightly—they call us to unconditional expenditure of our lives.

Finally, there are those who are our **colleagues**. These are the ones with whom we experience a form of kinship. We deeply sense a link between their life and work and our life and work. That we are dependent on them and that they are dependent upon us. The meaning, significance and impact of their lives depend upon our life and work, just as the meaning and significance of our life depends upon them. At its most profound, this stretches back to our primordial ancestors but also into the future to our expectant descendants. Your predecessors in the congregation are dependent upon you to build and sustain the congregation today but those who come after you are also dependent upon you and your work today. They call us to our task today; they remind us of our calling and election. Just as we depend upon them and the lives they lead, the "Hosts of Heaven" are dependent on the living of our lives.

Meditation is about the "Communion of Saints" that all of us have. It is about those who are our Permission Givers, Interior Prompters, Sainly Exemplars and Colleagues in Mission. The practice of meditation is about our self-consciousness of this community. It is about how we grow and develop this Council, in order to profoundly enrich and enliven our spirit. It is about the deepening of the dialogue with this community and opening ourselves to its full potential and power.

Now look back at the list I asked you to make a few minutes ago. What role do these people play in your life? Are they **Permission Givers, Interior Prompters, Exemplars or Colleagues?** Who has some permission givers, who some interior prompters, who some exemplars and who some colleagues?

Prayer

Every human being prays. As a human dynamic, it happens in everyone's life. Before what and to what do they pray are the only questions. Prayer happens when human beings acknowledge some reality, outside of themselves, to which they attach significance and which gives meaning and direction to their life. Usually, seeking some sort of reward, they enter into a relationship with that reality and seek to enhance and build that relationship. We live in a pagan age where many temporal realities have been elevated to ultimate realities in people's lives. For some it is financial success (earning the first million dollars before your thirty), for others, it is sex or the perfect family or success at their job (President of the company before your forty). The problem with these and any other temporal reality is that they are just that--**temporal**--passing and unsustainable realities that disappear into history. In addition they have nothing of the ultimate in them and so even when we achieve them they prove to be empty. "So by the time you are twenty-eight years old you make a million dollars--What do you do with the rest of your life?" "So you are president of the company when you are 35--What's next?" I recently read an interview with one of the richest men in the world who said, "I don't go to work to make money. I go because I really enjoy what I am doing--it gives me a lot of satisfaction. Besides, when I die I'm giving all the money back to society." That man understands about temporal reality.

It is an age-old insight that the reality before which we live our lives shapes and governs the way we live our lives--Prayer has to do with our doing—with the living out of our lives. You hear people say "prayer in action," "living our prayers," or "acting out our prayers." Prayer is the act before the action. It is the declaration of our intentions. It is the declaring that before this reality I intend to go in this direction with my life. Now for you and I, who live our lives before a universal, eternal and ultimate reality, this has special significance. Prayer has to do with our freedom. It has to do with our freedom to choose our way, to shape and give direction to the living of our lives. God is not a dictator. We have free will. We must decide our path and we decide that path in freedom before the final reality of our lives. So it is that in prayer we stand before this ultimate reality, acknowledge that reality, and declare our intention about the acting out of our lives in the burning glare of that reality.

However, this is not a simple process. It requires a great deal of us and in prayer it is important to understand that the four dimensions or types of prayer have a sequence in our experience of them. There are four dimensions to prayer. These four dimensions are nothing new to you or to the church. They have helped to structure the worship and life of the religious in the church from the earliest days.

Our life in prayer begins by acknowledging the real condition of our lives. This is **Confession**. Prayers of confession have to do with perpetual repentance. They are about acknowledging that as we stand before an ultimate, universal and eternal reality, we are separated from that reality. The inescapable fact is that we are separated from the ultimate reality that is the focal point of our lives. Just because we are separated from the ground of our being, we are separated from ourselves, and our neighbours. We find ourselves

hating what we are, what we think and what we do and not being able to stand our colleagues and neighbours. It is only in acknowledging or confessing this fact that we open the possibility for this separation to be bridged not by our own efforts but by the Grace of God.

Once we acknowledge the reality of our lives, we are then called to give thanks for it. The second category is **Gratitude**. Gratitude has to do with the unconditional affirmation of the life that you have been given by the ultimate reality of your life. It has to do with the declaration of our dependence upon our ultimate reality. It is a declaration of the embracing of our lives in all of its pain and sorrow, in all of its wonder and joy. It is not just giving thanks for the good times but for all of our existence. It is an affirmation that "God did not make a mistake!" That what we are and have is exactly what we should have and what we should be at this moment in history and that we embrace this with joy. It is the unconditional affirmation of the broken and separated life we have on our hands at this moment. The prayer of gratitude is an affirmation that our lives are received and accepted, just as they are, by the final reality of our lives and that nothing we do or be can separate us from that love and affirmation.

Once we have acknowledged our broken and fragmented lives and given thanks for it, we can acknowledge our own inadequacy to live this life. The third category is **Petition**. The prayer of petition has to do with unlimited inadequacy. We surrender all our pretensions and posturing as self-sufficient human beings. We acknowledge our dependence upon the sustaining power of the final reality of our lives. We acknowledge that, before the overwhelming reality of our life and the world in which we live, we are totally inadequate.

The experience here is that, in acknowledging our own helplessness, we open our selves to an infusion of sustaining power and strength. This is St. Theresa's great prayer that ends, 'Solo Dios Basta' (Only God Suffices). There is an old gospel song, from the United States I think, which has a line that goes, 'Leaning on the every lasting arms.' This is perhaps the most difficult category to talk about and yet over and over again people throughout history have testified to its reality. This person does the impossible and says afterwards, "I can't believe I just did that!" This is Jesus in Gethsemane saying, "My Father, if it is possible let this cup pass from me--yet it must not be what I want, but what you want." This is acknowledging our own total and complete inadequacy and our confidence that even so, "we shall overcome." This is knowing that what is required of you is impossible for you and yet finding the strength not of our own making to move forward and accomplish it. God does not ask of us what he does not give us the strength to bear.

Finally, we are ready to give our broken but received and sustained life in expenditure. The fourth category is **Intercession**. This is perhaps the most common category of prayer and at the same time, the least understood. It is the prayer where we ask for something. It is where people say, "Give me this," or "make this happen," or "take care of this." What is not understood so well in the Christian context is that to pray a prayer of intercession is to put yourself on the spot. For a prayer of intercession is a prayer of obligation and of responsibility. When we stand before a final reality, which is eternal and universal, then

our obligation and responsibility are eternal and universal. Who is responsible for all of history and all of creation? We are! If you dare to pray for the poor of this world then you are saying that you obligate yourself to taking responsibility for all of the poor of this world. You are saying that all of your life will be expended in care of the poor of this world. So be careful what you ask the final reality of your life to intercede on behalf of, since you are saying that you yourself are committed to caring for and acting on behalf of what you have raised. To acknowledge God as the eternal and universal final reality of your life is to say that your responsibility is “history-long and world-wide”. To pray for peace is to become the peacemaker, to pray for justice in the world is to become the maker of justice, to pray for your neighbour is to become your neighbour’s keeper. This is what it means to be “God’s Instruments” and to seek intercession from that final reality.

Prayer is an act of passion. It is that which focuses our energy, our mind, our total being in one direction and for one reason. It is the act before the action that gives that action its power and passion. It is the act before the action that creates our interior resolve and fortitude. Be careful when you pray for--prayer is power unchained.

Contemplation

In the spring of this year, I spent a day with two friends visiting the Fields of Flanders, where, in the Great War of 1914-18, many hundred of thousands of people were killed. One of the first places we visited was the famous gate in the city of Ypre. It is a large stone and brick structure with a busy street running through it. Inscribed on it are the names of over 55.000 people from the British Empire who died in the battles around Ypre and whose bodies were never found or never identified. At first, I just read names and they meant little to me. Then I saw a person's name that was the same as mine—a man named James Campbell from Australia. So I then started looking for Campbells. I found over forty before I stopped counting and suggested to my friends that it was time to move on. We did--to the largest British war cemetery in the world--thousands of white crosses with only "Known only unto to God" inscribed on them. Then a German cemetery with most of the graves marked "unknown." It was all too much--I was overwhelmed by the mystery of it all. I was in a state of awe that was greater than I care to think about even today.

Today we want to talk about contemplation. Contemplation is about being and is a gate way into the centre of the chart--into being itself. Contemplation has to do with our relation to, understanding of, and journey into the **mystery** of existence and being. It is the act of thinking about and focusing our attention on the reality of mystery in our lives.

Most of the time, most people do not think about the mystery to be found in life. Usually it is only on those rare occasions when something extraordinary happens that we find ourselves thinking about or coming face-to-face with the mystery of life. For the religious the challenge is to stand present to this mystery in every situation--to experience the wonder and awe of that mystery in every event and in every encounter. The exercise or practice of contemplation is preparing us for the possibility of seeing the mystery in all of our existence.

I want to explain a little about our experience of mystery. Usually people talk about **awe** when they speak of mystery in their lives. Rudolf Otto, a German Theologian and Philosopher wrote a book at the beginning of the twentieth century called, in English, *The Idea of the Holy*. In it, he examines a person's experience of mystery and the nature of awe in that experience. The experience of awe is always two fold. Awe is both fear and fascination at the same time. Fear of the unknown and at the same time fascination with it.

The experience of mystery always fills us with awe and our experience of awe is always one of both fear and fascination.

The first category of contemplation I want to talk about has to do with the **other** in our lives. This is perhaps the most common encounter that engenders in us a sense of the mystery in our lives. Whenever we encounter that which is totally and completely "not I" then we are discovering the OTHER! Whether it is a rock or another human being, a flower or an animal, the ocean or a tree we are destined to be eternally DIFFERENT from that reality. There is fear of that which is unknowable and "not I" in any profound sense. Yet there is fascination--for we sense that part of the mystery of that other is that we are

bound to it and that we can never really escape from it. That it is part of our universe and of us in strange and unknowable ways. That its existence is dependent upon our existence just as our existence is dependent upon it. That deep in the mystery, that is life, its being and our being participate in a shared reality. We are eternally bound to it and this calls forth in us a sense of honour for the other. Ultimately, our being and the being of all creation are one—**I am being all the other**. In our encounters with the other, we sense this and stand in the awesome mystery of it all.

In 1974, I was living in Kenya. A friend who had attended some of our training programmes invited me to accompany him on a visit to a Masii community. He was the pastor of a number of Masii communities and often when on a circuit to visit them. The Masii live in small communities made up of extended families. I was delighted to be invited and accepted the invitation. We were going on a two-day trip to visit just one of the communities. Therefore, one morning we set out. The Masii are still nomadic people and the challenge he faces on every circuit is to find the communities he wants to visit. After asking for directions--the Masii have their own ways of knowing where everyone is--we finally arrived at the community we were seeking. From the very first moment, I was in awe. This community was like no other community I had ever experienced. There was nothing to tell me what was expected. The houses, the clothes, the manners, the actions of the adults and children were all different from anything I had experienced before. I did not even know where to go to the toilet. There were no doors marked WC and it is important where you go in the bush to go to the toilet. We were with them for about 24 hours and the whole time I was in awe--I was up against the mystery of the totally other. When we finally left, it took a while for the awe to fade but I can still remember that feeling of being in sheer mystery.

Another way in which we encounter the mystery has to do with the **past**. We all experience those moments when we find ourselves thinking about what it has taken to bring us to this moment in our lives. Even more than that, think about all the decisions of people over the ages that worked to bring us into life at this time and in this place. We experience a kind of wonder-filled fate that all of history has conspired to bring us here to this place, at this time. We experience that our lives, however we have lived them, are gone, never to be lived again and that we can do nothing to change what has been. At the same time, we sense that we are eternally bound to history. That all people in all the ages of the past are bound to us and that they are dependent upon us. The value and meaning of their existence is dependent upon our actions and how we chose to live out our lives. It is, as if, we suddenly sense that we are all of history and that it is dependent upon us. That we are, **“all that ever was!”** That we are part of a vast, history long league of people, who depend on us to continue the journey. This was my experience in the Fields of Flanders—that these young men and women died for me and that the value of their life and death depends upon me. I experienced the same thing in your congregational cemetery at the Mother House last summer. I would go for walks in the garden and time after time I would find myself in the cemetery (I do not want you to think I spend all my time visiting cemeteries) but that is a powerful place—a place of mystery and awe for me.

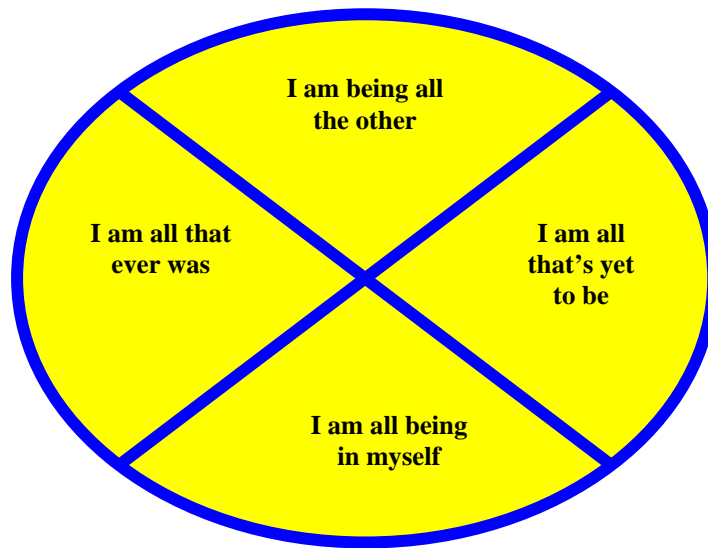
The third way we encounter the mystery in our lives has to do with the **future**. While we may plan and anticipate the future, it is finally unknowable and completely unpredictable. The famous question, “Does any person know the moment and manner of their death?” points to this reality. Some use this as an excuse for “eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die!” Others sink into resignation and despair while others simply carry on living their mundane lives. I suppose we fear the burden of the future because it is filled with frightful possibility. Just because it is unknown and not pre-determined, it is ours to create. All is possible--all we have to do is decide and create it. In addition, future generations are dependent upon us. Their existence depends upon what we decide and do today. Just as we sense ourselves as part of a vast league of people from the past, that league continues into the future. Unborn millions of human beings depend upon our decisions and actions today. Just as we are “**all that ever was**”, we are also “**all that’s yet to be**.”

Finally, we contemplate the mystery of life when we contemplate the **depth of our own being**. “Who am I” is the eternal question that every self-conscious person has struggled with since the dawn of history. Where have I come from? Where am I going? Why am I? Who I am? All these are finally unanswerable questions. We dare to plunge into our own depths of consciousness and spirit and discover that there is no bottom, no final answers, no sure resting place, no place where we can stand and say, “this is it, I have found the answer.” It is all mystery. We experience our unexplainable thereness and irreplaceable uniqueness as an ever-deepening mystery, which fills us with fear for what we might discover. Yet we enter these depths with fascination. There is a passion to know ourselves-- to explore our being.

Stephen Crane wrote:

In the desert
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
Who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands,
And ate of it.
I said, “Is it good, friend?”
“It is bitter--bitter,” he answered;
“But I like it
Because it is bitter,
And because it is my heart.”

Finally, we come to know that being itself depends upon us. Just as **I am being All the other**, and **All that ever was**, and **All that’s yet to be**, we are, each and every one of us, containers for all of being. We hold “**All Being in myself**.” In contemplating the mystery of existence, we contemplate the mystery of Being itself and know ourselves to be nothing less than the key to the human journey.



Poverty

Today and for the next two days, I am going to talk about what I have called The Corporates—Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. I do not want to talk about them as vows but rather as the inward and internal realities for which the vows are outward and external signs. Poverty has to do with disengagement, Obedience with engagement and Chastity with the intensification of the two.

The English writer, D.H. Lawrence wrote a small poem that speaks to me of poverty. It is called, “Search for Love:”

*Those that go searching for love
Only make manifest their own lovelessness.
And the loveless never find love,
Only the loving find love,
And they never have to seek for it*

Poverty is about disengagement but it is not, simply not being engaged, not caring, not loving something or somebody, or not being rich. It has to do with our relation to the meaning and significance we attach to everything in our lives. It is not, about not having things or relations but about the meaning and significance, we give these things and relations in our life. It is not being disinterested or sinking into unfeeling indifference or cutting off your emotions. It is about not allowing anything or anybody to hold you captive or to become the meaning of your existence. It is the disengagement, which frees us to be passionately engaged. And to do so without turning over our existence to that with which we are engaged.

First, I want to talk about **The Goods of this Earth**. I suppose that this is the most familiar category of detachment when it comes to poverty. It is usually what people think about when they speak of poverty in an interior sense. Obviously, Poverty does not mean not having what you need to live an adequate life. It does mean not making the goods of this earth your goal and purpose, the meaning of your life. The problem of trying to wrap up the meaning of your life in the goods of the earth is that they are “of this earth.” They are temporal and we are temporal. They will not last and we will not last. The old saying about “not being able to take it with you” is true. In Luke, Jesus tells this story:

Once upon a time, a rich man’s farmland produced large crops. So he said to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have no room to store this harvest of mine?’ The he said, ‘I know what I’ll do. I’ll pull down my barns and build bigger ones where I can store all my grain and my goods and I can say to my soul, Soul, you have plenty of good things stored up there for years to come. Relax! Eat, drink and have a good time!’ But God said to him, ‘You fool, this very night you will be asked for your soul!’

Detachment, relative to the goods of this earth, **does** mean taking care of what you have and rejoicing in what you have but not making the securing of these things the purpose and meaning of your life. In today’s consumer societies this dimension of poverty is usually paid lip service even as people go on and on consuming and possessing much more than

they need for an adequate life. The power that this sort of detachment gives us is that we know ourselves to have wealth untold--all it takes to really live our real lives has been given to us—we are the lilies of the field.

Secondly, we must talk about disengagement from our **work**. This is difficult for many people since their work is their identity. Most people will respond to the question, “Who are you?” by telling you what they do. Poverty here means not attaching the meaning of your life to what you do. It means living beyond success or failure in your work. It means moving beyond the sense of accomplishment or prestige you have from your work. It means not looking to validate your existence by what you do. When we are able to do this, we can then begin to realise our true vocation. When the meaning of our life is no longer dependent upon our doing then we can engage in our historical vocation. Do you know the story of Brother Lawrence? He was a young man who joined a religious community. His assignment, from the beginning, was to wash the dishes and keep the kitchen clean. He did this for his entire life. From the beginning he was always on time and did everything he could to keep the kitchen clean and neat. He worked long hours and often was the last to leave and the first to arrive. He did it all with a smile and a helpful attitude. He was never heard to say ‘no’ to any request. Brother Lawrence’s secret was that he knew that his vocation was not as a dishwasher. His vocation was as a servant of God. His work had no more or less significance than that of the Abbot’s—they were both servants of God. I do not know anything about her—not even her name, but the little sister who waits on us at table strikes me as this place’s Brother Lawrence.

The third category is **Relations**. This is perhaps the most difficult for people to grasp. For most people their relations are the centre of their lives. Their wives, husbands, their children, their parents, etc. are the “be all and end all” of their life. However, like all things of human creation these too will pass away. They are temporal just as we are. This does not mean that you do not engage in relations or that you do not have friends and love your family, etc. It simply means that you are clear about their place in your life and that they are not what makes your life significant.

A number of years ago there was a movie called, *Ordinary People*. It told the story of a ‘perfect family—a wife, a husband and two sons’. They lived in a beautiful home in a beautiful suburb of Chicago. He was a successful lawyer, she a wonderful housekeeper, mother and wife. The sons were good students, athletes--they had it all. The movie begins with the two sons going out in a boat on the lake—a storm comes, the boat turns over and the oldest son drowns. The rest of the movie is about the fact that the total meaning of these people’s life had been the family. Now that it was no longer, what it had been, they could not cope. The mother comes to hate both her husband and her son. The son blames himself for his brother’s death and his mother’s pain. The husband just cannot figure out what to do. Their lives are destroyed. When you make a temporal reality the meaning of your life—God has a way of saying no to you.

Finally, we come to the last category. This is **Spiritual poverty**. St. Teresa de Avila in her book “Interior Castles” talks about this. In the fourth mansion, she talks about “the humble way” and says that you can never occasion spiritual consolation by any striving

after it. The state comes only by humility; that is by detachment from it. God is in no sense obliged. He alone determines who will receive this favour. The water flows: it is not piped in by our efforts. This is the realisation that only by giving up the search for God will we have a chance to know God. To paraphrase the poem I read in the beginning:

*Those that go searching for God
Only make manifest their own Godlessness.
And the Godless never find God,
Only the Godly find God,
And they never have to seek for Him.*

If you live your life striving for God you will never find him. However, you live your life always open, ready and in expectation of his coming. There is a song, which goes

*Watch ye therefore,
You know not the day
When the Lord shall take your soul away.*

In addition, is this not what Jesus meant when he said, "*For the man who wants to save his life will lose it; but the man who loses his life for my sake will find it. For what good is it for a man to gain the whole world at the price of his real life? What could a man offer to buy back that life once he has lost it?*" This is spiritual poverty.

Poverty is **disengagement** for the sake of **radical engagement** with the final, ultimate, eternal reality of our life. Poverty is an interior reality that allows us:

- To care for the goods of this earth
- To do our work
- To participate in loving and caring relationships
- To look after our spiritual well-being.

While none of these become the purpose and meaning of our lives—**without becoming worshipers of a lesser god.**

Poverty is about death—death to the things of this world, death to our work and relations, even death to our spiritual well-being. I used to think that the song and quote from the Bible I just read referred to physical death. I do not think so anymore. And in the death that is poverty, is the promise of resurrection and new life.

This is poverty.

Obedience

Today I want to talk about obedience. I want to talk about it as an interior state of being. In these days, it is difficult to talk about this category. I think it has to do with our particular moment in history. We live in a time where expressions like, *the me generation*, *personal fulfilment*, *numero uno*, *having it all—now*, are used to describe how people live their lives and what is important to them. Obedience is about obligation but for most people the only obligation they acknowledge is to themselves.

Obedience is about our doing—the Way of our life. It is the other side of poverty, of radical disengagement. Obedience is about the profound engagement of our lives. This engagement transforms the everyday doing of our lives. This is about the coming together of our being and our doing. How is it that everything we do is an embodiment of our being as a human being? This sort of engagement is possible only on the other side of the disengagement we spoke of yesterday—only after the things of this world, your work and relations and even your spirit are no longer the defining purposes of your life can you truly engage in the life you have on your hands. Our ancestors talked about pouring spirit into everything we do—that is obedience.

Obedience implies that there is somebody or something to which we are being obedient. For the religious this is the final, ultimate, eternal reality of their lives—God. What does it mean to obligate our lives to God—the God of all creation and all history? Simply put it means that our obligation is to all creation and all history.

However, this is an abstraction—the real question is what do I do in my daily life in my little corner of the globe? What does this obedience look like for you today at the end of the 20th century?

First, the religious in obedience to God makes manifest **Peace**. This peace is not just the absence of conflict but the peace that transforms every situation. Peace that brings a profound respect for even those things and people that we do not like, do not approve of, and do not understand. This peace recognises no enemies. Our ancestors talked about this as, *the peace that passes understanding*. It is peace as a state of being not an act of our will. It is the embodiment of love for all creation.

Do you find the meaning of your life in your work? If you are getting the significance of your life out of your work then you will never know this peace. When our work is no longer what signifies our lives then we can engage in it in a profound sense. This peace is possible only when you no longer have to defend yourself and the job you are doing. Only when you know that whatever happens in your work it does not make your life any less or more significant and meaningful. You hear a lot about stress and ‘burn out’ these days. Stress and burn out happen when people have invested the meaning of their life in their work. They are trying to secure this meaning and of course, it is impossible. Thus the stress and burn out. People do not need stress balls they need a new way to understand the role of work in their lives. They need to understand that they do not earn the meaning and significance of their lives through their work. This does not mean that you do not

invest all your energy and time into your work—it just means that you know the source of meaning in your life is not found in the job you do.

Secondly, this obedience has to do with **Equity**. This is Gandhi. This is Martin Luther King. These seekers of human justice stand before the powers of this world and say *NO MORE* or *I have a Dream!* It is not just the great historical figures but also the people who work to enable every person to participate in and enjoy the benefits of their society. People like the women who gathered year after year in Buenos Aires to seek justice for those who had disappeared; or the lawyers who seek to defend the rights of refugees and those seeking asylum from persecution; or those people who took in Jews during the Nazi years in Europe. There is a great book, called *Las Mariposas* (in English the Butterflies). It tells the story of three sisters who lived during the reign of Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. They came from an ordinary family living in a small rural town. They were not wealthy but they got an education and looked forward to things like teaching, getting married, and raising a family. In other words, they were just normal young women. But then a series of events convinced them that they had to become involved in the resistance to the dictatorship. They became the carriers of information from one group to another in the resistance. Their code name was the butterflies—Las Mariposas. Eventually they were arrested and put in prison—through international pressure, they were released but by this time, they were famous and were a symbol of the resistance movement to Trujillo. They were told to go to a town in the interior of the country for an interview. On the way home, their car mysteriously went off the road and over a cliff. All three died while their driver lived and disappeared. What actually happened is still unknown. They were just ordinary women who decided that the injustice in their country could not continue to kill the spirit of their people and they decided to do something about it. The people who do these sorts of things find the courage for action because they know that whatever happens nothing can destroy the meaning and significance of their lives. They live beyond pain, torture, and prison—the final meaning of their life is not in their success or failure but is elsewhere. They expend their life in the cause of human justice but that is not the end purpose of their lives.

Thirdly is the area of **Charity**. This is the assuming responsibility for the *innocent human suffering* of this world. Here we become one with the suffering of this world. It is not just doing good deeds. It is engaging with the human suffering of this world and participating in that suffering for the sake of changing the human situation that allows that suffering to continue. I usually offend people working in development when I do training programmes with them because I say ‘*you can’t really do development work from 9 to 5, five days a week. You cannot go to the village, spend the day, and then return to your nice home with servants. You have to live in the problem if you are going to be part of the solution.*’ Here we embody a passionate concern for our fellow human beings. I remember a colleague of mine who lived in the inner-city neighbourhood I was working in Chicago. He once said to a visiting group from the suburbs. ‘*We don’t want you feeling sorry for us; we want your lives on the line with us in order to really change this situation.*’ Here we know that compassion without the engagement of our whole being is empty and will change nothing. Feeling sorry never changed anything only engagement changes the human situation. I like to tell people that repeatedly in Africa and Latin America I would get to the end of the

road and find a group of religious—caring for the human situation there. However, it is important to remember what we said about disengagement. We can never allow our passion for the innocent human suffering of this world to become the be all and end all of our lives. We are totally engaged but we are, at the same time, free of attachment to the situation. This is the source of our power to endure year after year the slow and demanding process of changing the human situation. We profoundly know that what we do defines neither who we are nor the meaning of our life.

Finally, there is **Service**. This has to do with spiritual care. It is caring for our fellow human beings beyond their physical well-being. This is a profound love for and engagement with the human condition no matter how noble or how low. It is the awareness that you alone are responsible for saving the world, even when it does not want to be saved. For proclaiming, the Good News that people can pick up their lives, that they are loved and received—just as they are, that nothing separates them from the love of their creator. Our ancestors talked about this as, ‘Building the Kingdom of God on Earth.’ It is knowing yourself as one with the world—just as it is, for only then can you begin the life long task of bringing change. However, this is only possible when you give up your concern for your own well-being. When you are detached from securing your own spiritual comfort. This is St. Paul saying, *‘We have nothing to bless ourselves with yet we bless may others with true riches. We are penniless, and yet we possess everything.*

Obedience to God as a state of being is: **To Be Peace, to Be Human Justice, to Be Profound Social Concern and to Be Spiritual Care**. Not just with your doing but with your whole being.

Obedience to God is not a negation of our freedom. God does not need slaves to care for creation. When we truly decide that God’s will is our own will then our obedience is transformed and we truly know ourselves as free in obedience.

Paul wrote to the Church in Galatia, *Plant your feet firmly therefore within the freedom that Christ has won for us, and do not let yourselves be caught again in the shackles of slavery...It is to freedom that you have been called.*

Alternatively, as one of the great sentences of 20th century theology, written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, puts it, *‘The obligation that alone gives freedom and gives entire freedom is the obligation to God and our neighbour as they confront us in Jesus Christ.*

Alternatively, St. Augustine wrote, *‘Love God, and do as you please!’*

This is obedience!

Chastity

For you and me to come to chastity we have to pass through poverty and obedience. Chastity is the radical intensification of these two and both have to be there.

Some of my colleagues in the past have said that chastity does not really exist. I think that it is like a small town you quickly pass through and miss if you blink. Chastity is on the road between poverty and obedience. You come out of poverty leaving 'an evil and passing generation' (like it says in the Bible) and you go to obedience where you are beginning the impossible task of building a new more human world. When you are travelling between the two you pass through a place called chastity. Or maybe it is like Moses and Joshua standing at the river Jordan. They spent forty years getting Egypt worked out of their souls there in the wilderness. Forty years of poverty and now they are poverty-stricken men standing before the task of obedience, of moving into the Promised Land and building a new society. At that moment, as Moses looks over into the Promised Land and dies, and as Joshua looks over into the Promised Land and leads, you get a glimpse of chastity.

In poverty you are talking about a voice that comes to you cutting across all your life and says, 'Forget about getting your life and creativity into history, forget about the life and creativity you have already got into history.' Then you hear obedience saying, 'Get your creativity into history, right here, right now! Assume responsibility for creating history; history is waiting for you, wants you, wants you here, and wants you now!' Then chastity holds the paradox and says to you, 'Your home is not in history or this world and yet, in history, in this world is the only place you have a home.' Chastity is knowing yourself as *in but not of* all of human history. This is chastity as poverty.

It is also 'To will one thing.' You all know this story:

Now as they were on their way, and entered a village, a woman named Martha received them into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But, Martha was distracted with much serving, so she went to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister left me to serve alone? Tell her to come help me!' But the Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. One thing is needed. Mary has chosen the good, which shall not be taken from her.'

Mary's good was a concern that you could live in for a thousand lifetimes and it would not wear out. Food comes and goes; children grow up and move away, but Mary, having chosen the good, will not lose it. This is the glorious whole heartedness to be able to will one thing with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul and with all your strength for a whole lifetime.

All the many, many concerns of life are filled with anxieties because we want them to be finished, or we want them to be out of the way, or want them to give us the proper credit. 'Martha, Martha you are anxious and troubled about many things. One thing is needed.' You want to cry out, 'Oh for the glorious tranquillity of willing one thing, with all my heart, with all my mind, all my soul. Soren Kierkegaard was so clear that no finite thing, nothing in the

world and nothing about you could ever fill that need. Every concern for self and every concern for the world ends up in contradiction and duplicity, in a paralysing situation where you are literally torn in two. This is enough to drive a person crazy unless you know how to will one thing, with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul and with all your strength.

Now this one thing is not some particular thing along side of other particular things. That is just an attempt at idolatry. It is the Good, like the good that Mary chose. Or to put it another way it is the willing of the Kingdom of God. And when you are willing the Kingdom of God, then you are the Kingdom of God. You participate now; the Kingdom of God has come.

What does that mean, 'the Kingdom of God has come?' One way to talk about it is to talk about inventing humanness. Whenever we perform the chaste act, we create humanness. We bring new life into being.

St. Teresa of Avila paints a picture of Jesus on the Cross. She pictures him there in great grief of soul. She goes on to explain what he is in grief about. He is not in grief about his painful death that he has to die. He has already died to his death. He passed through poverty in the garden several nights before. He is in grief over the inhumanity that hung him on the cross. Those people out there, before the cross, are violating humanness, they are offending God, they are rejecting the possibility of being the only thing worth being. And so he prays a prayer, 'Father, care for them for they know not what they are doing.' They do not know that they are rejecting the only hope, the only humanness, the only possibility to live. That was his grief. And as Rouault said beneath one of his paintings, Jesus will be in grief until the end of time. And there is just one grief—that people do not love God with all their hearts, all of their minds, all of their souls, and all of their strength; and therefore that they do not love one another either. This is the one grief; that men are not chaste. It is as if Jesus is saying on the cross, 'I will be crucified a thousand times a day forever, if only I see men healed of this great horror.' This is chastity as willing one thing. This is chastity as obedience.

Now I want to come back and talk about chastity and the Kingdom of God. This has to do with the four categories you have on your chart. St. Augustine talks about two cities. One was the celestial city and the other one was the earthly city. Both of these cities are real and exist in history. The earthly city is the one where the concern is for security, health, education, status, etc. The celestial city lives out of the one love of God. The celestial city, while in the midst of history, is on a pilgrimage through history. Every earthly city has cultural, political and economic structures. The celestial city also has economic, political and cultural life. Cultural life is made up of images, symbols and styles, so the celestial city has its images, symbols and styles. It has a very real practice, a very real existence in history. I suppose you could call what I am about to talk about as living in celestial culture.

Some of the questions we have to ask ourselves here are; do your images and symbols hold for you the final reality of your existence? Do your images and symbols hold for you your vision of a new heaven and a new earth? Do your images and symbols hold for you your decision to be the elected one you are? Do your images and symbols hold for you your having been chosen by God? Do you portray the destinal meaning of your life in your style? Do

your images, symbols and style hold for you the final reality? Do they hold you before the really real of your life?

The function of our images and symbols is to enable you to hold on to the fact that you have been seized by God and not lose your grip on that fact. It is as if God gives you his being—that is he breaks open your life to the fullness of being itself and then you have to decide to hold on to this—to hold on to God. But this is not easy—a million things of this world try to pull you free from God. It is the discipline of recreating and re-appropriating the symbols that hold Being for you.

Finally the question is real simple—How do your images and symbols hold you in being by staying filled with being and how does your style, the way you live your life, stay filled with being.

Disciplined obedience in symbols, images and style is what it takes to live the life of chastity. You hold on to the symbols that have sustained you. Some days they are full of power and other days they are not. There are peaks and valleys in the life of the spirit. Chastity is hanging on through the valleys and peaks.

Human beings have understood this for a long time. This is why our ancestors in the faith created religious communities. What else is a religious community except a group of people who live *in but not of* the world, who *will one thing* and have the discipline to keep and forge those symbols, images and style that hold them in their election. If you want to see the Kingdom of God in being, look around this room. If you want to see people building the Kingdom of God in this world watch us work on all these proposals—why else would we do it?

This is about the being and doing of the celestial city in history. Chastity is manifesting the Kingdom of God, the celestial city in history. When I see you I see Chastity in being, I see the celestial city made flesh in history.

This is chastity!

Knowing

*As every blossom fades and all youth sinks
Into old age, so every life's design,
Each flower of wisdom, every good, attains
Its prime and cannot last forever.
At life's each call the heart must be prepared
To take its leave and to commence afresh
Courageously and with no hint of grief
Submit itself to other, newer ties.
A magic dwells in each beginning and
Protecting us it tells us how to live.
High-purposed we must traverse realm on realm,
Cleaving to none as to a home. The world
Of spirit wishes not to fetter us
But raise us higher, further, step by step.
Scarce in some safe, accustomed sphere of life
Have we established house, than we grow lax;
He only who is ready to expand
And journey forth can throw old habits off.
Maybe death's hour too will send us out
New-born toward undreamed of lands, maybe
Life's call to us will never find an end...
Courage my heart, take leave and fare thee well!*

That was a poem by Herman Hesse the German author.

Today I want to talk about Knowing, tomorrow is Doing and Thursday is Being. For several days now, I have thought that perhaps I would just read poetry to you for these three days. But that would be impossible for the translators and not much help to you. However, I find it hard to talk about these categories. In a sense, you cannot talk about them for they are *The Way, The Truth and The Life*. They are about the knowing, doing and being not of this temporal, passing world. They are about the knowing, the doing and the being of the world of the spirit the only really real world that we have. However, down through history people have tried to speak about this really real world and to help us understand it.

Like everything in this temporal world, our knowing of this world is temporal. Our understanding and ideas about this world pass away. Our understanding of the universe is not what people understood three hundred years ago. However the knowing of the really real world—the world of spirit—is not temporal simply because the really real world is not temporal. When we enter this really real world, we enter the sphere of eternal being and its knowing is true, yesterday, today, and tomorrow forever.

There are four key dimensions to knowing in the really real world. These are the categories on your chart—Self, World, Word, and Mystery.

First is the **Self**. When you and I enter into this really real world, we set out on a journey of discovery. A journey lasts for our whole lifetime. Hesse says in the poem,

*High-purposed we must traverse realm on realm
Cleaving to none as to a home. The world
Of spirit wishes not to fetter us
But raise us higher, further, step by step...
Maybe life's call to us will never find an end...*

And so it is we embark upon the greatest journey that any person can take—the journey to discover the really real world. The journey of discovery relative to the self has to do with lucidity about ourselves. We are illusion-making beings—we seek to escape the reality of our existence in both this world and the really real world. The journey of discovery in the really real world has to do with finding the real me. It has to do with stripping off—in pain and agony often—our fondest illusions about ourselves. We come face to face with the horror of our own sin—the total separation of our being from God, our neighbour and ourselves in this world. We see the brokenness and pettiness of our lives. We know our lack of compassion and care, our concern for the things of this world and not for those of the really real world. We know the truth of Paul's words that I mentioned earlier, '*I do not do the good that I desire, but the evil that dwells in me.*' We know the truth of the saying '*There is something in each of us that does not grieve at our best friend's misfortune.*' We know the truth of that old saying, 'There but for the grace of God, go I!' Moreover, we rejoice that we escaped this time. The journey of discovery of the self is never easy and many give up before its trials and tribulations. Like all dimensions of the journey into the really real world, this one never ends. We always have new illusions that must be broken and new realities to face—we are very good at hiding from God and when we decide to hide no longer, it takes a lot to undo the damage.

Finally, we know that this is about the dying of our self. That we must put off the self of this world in order to know our really real self in the really real world. To use the language of Ken Wilbur, the transpersonal psychologist and philosopher we have to transcend our ego that is our self. Now the strange thing that happens when we die to our self, when we transcend our ego, is that we discover a new self. This new self is one that lives not for its self but for *the self of all creation*. A self that not only lives for *the self of all creation* it is *one with the self of all creation*.

Thus it is that we discover ourselves being like that other great being that put off his self, his ego and knew himself as one with the self of all creation—the Christ. We discover all being in ourselves and live that all being on behalf of all creation.

The next category is the **World**. Here we begin the journey with the reality of this world. This world is finite—I do not know how to say this strongly enough. From the vantage point of the really real world, this whole universe—everything and everybody in it—are just doing one thing—passing away. That is the givenness of life in this world. Nothing

lasts, all passes away, all is transitory, and all is doomed from the moment of creation. As Hesse said:

*As every blossom fades and all youth sinks
Into old age, so every life's design,
Each flower of wisdom, every good, attains
Its prime and cannot last forever.*

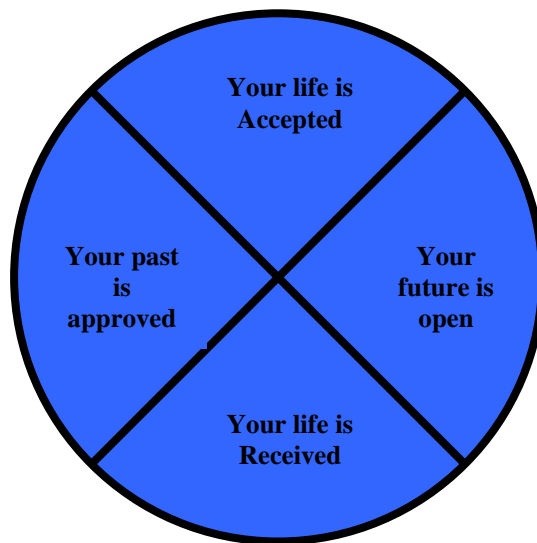
This, then, is the fundamental lucidity that we discover in our journey in the really real world. It is the stark givenness of this world—we live in a doomed world.

Yet we discover a greater truth in the really real world—that this world is the creation of Being Itself. That is, God is the source of all life and death in this world. And as I said in another talk—God did not make a mistake. Do you know these lines from an old hymn?

*This is my father's world
And to my listening ears
All nature sings and round me
Rings the music of the spheres.*

Thus, we come to understand that it is not enough just to join all the rest of this broken and doomed world in dying. This is the call to die our death on behalf of all creation. Our intentional decision to die our death creates the possibility for this broken world to know its humanness and hope—to know that all are Sons and Daughters of God. Here we know ourselves to be one with Jesus in dying on behalf of all—that all humanity, forever, might have the possibility of knowing the love of God.

Now we come to the **Word**. In this area of the journey of discovery into the really real world, we become lucid about one great objective fact of existence. This is a fact that is eternally true for our lives and for all life. It is an objective fact that overwhelms our awareness and leaves us quaking in our shoes. It is a fact that ever has been, is now, and ever shall be. This fact has four dimensions to it. Put simply they are—**Your life is accepted, Your life is received, Your past is approved and Your future is open.** This is true in spite of your broken and separated life. This is true in spite of all your attempts to hide from God. This is true whether you want it or not. This is true whether you live a good life or not. This is an objective fact about your life and all life and you have to do nothing except one thing. You have to decide to accept this fact of existence. You have to decide to accept your acceptance.



Now the experience of becoming aware of this fact is a terrifying experience. It fills you with dread because of the implications for yourself if you accept your acceptance. It knocked Paul down and left him blind for three days. Of course, you know what that implication is—you are beginning to get a feel for how things work in the really real world. The implication is that you have to embody this acceptance in your own life. And that means dying another death. It is a death—to our refusal to be the accepted human being that we are; it is a death to our refusal to be the greatness that we are; it is a death to our refusal to be the mover of mountains and the divider of seas; it is a death to our refusal to know the future as open and ours to create. Here we know that we have to live out of the Word that you are accepted, approved, received and that your future is yours to create. Your life must become a demonstration of this fact—for this is the Word about all human life and our calling is to be the exemplar of it for all.

Now to use language that is more traditional. The word that your life is accepted, and approved, that your past is received and that your future is open is, of course the Word of Christ. It is the Good News that Christ came to proclaim to all nations. Only now, you know that you are to be that proclaimer—you are to be the Universal Christ. You are to be the bearer of the Good News to all nations.

Finally, we come to the last category. It is **Mystery**. As you journey into the really real world and discover things about your Self, about the World and about the Word you realise that there is no end to this journey—it is a journey of life. To repeat Hesse:

Maybe life's call to us will never find an end...

We seem to be journeying into an eternal void. It is a little bit like the experience the early European explorers had. On their crude maps, they used to paint the edge of the world with

all kinds of monsters waiting to consume the unfortunate explorer who sailed to close. Well here you are exploring the really real world and their just never seems to be an end. Moreover, you do not know what is out there. You do not know what is going to appear or happen next. Soon the mystery of this eternal void becomes an everlasting enemy. It keeps demanding that you die your death and that is not easy. It is just asking too much of you, demanding too much. You just want to rest, to not have to be on guard all the time, to rest, take it easy for a while and just get a good night's sleep without constantly waking at every sound or movement. You are in a deadly contest with the eternal mystery of this void and you hate what it is doing to your life in the really real world.

And then one day something strange happens and you discover that this mystery of the void has become your friend. That if you were to find a safe harbour and the end of the voyage you would be disappointed. That living in the constant presence of the mystery is really the most exciting your life has ever been. You are alive, alive like never before. Again, Hesse says:

*At life's each call the heart must be prepared
To take its leave and to commence afresh
Courageously and with no hint of grief
Submit itself to other, newer ties.
A magic dwells in each beginning and
Protecting us it tells how to live.*

Again we die. But this time we die to our fear. We come to see that no matter what has happened to us we are still here—As Paul says, 'Always going through it never under it.' Sustained in being, we die to trying to sustain ourselves and simply trust the mystery. Thus, it is that the mystery becomes our friend. We greet each day of the voyage with joy and pleasure. We welcome the unknown and rejoice in its presence and promise. We honour the mystery. Eventually the mystery becomes our immutable friend. We are inseparable from it. We know the mystery as our ally and guide in this voyage into the really real world. We trust the mystery to be always there, never to abandon us, never to forsake us, to be true and constant.

Finally, we know the mystery as our father and dare to speak that name. Knowing the mystery of God as father is the fourth dimension of knowing in the really real world. Knowing that nothing we do, say, think, or be can ever separate us from the sustaining love of our father. We dare to acknowledge it, secure in the knowledge that, no matter what the journey brings us, we are loved.

*This is my Father's world
And to my listening ears
All nature sings and round me
Rings the music of the spheres.*

Or as Herman Hesse reminds us,

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*A magic dwells in each beginning and
Protecting us it tells us how to live.
High-purposed we must traverse realm on realm,
Cleaving to none as to a home. The world
Of spirit wishes not to fetter us
But raise us higher, further, step by step.*

This is all there is to knowing in the really real world—the world of spirit. It is just about being a human being. It is about what it takes to live the really real life you have been given in the really real world, which is the only **REAL LIFE**.

This is Knowing.

Doing

Today we want to continue our journey in the really real world—the world of spirit. I want to make it clear that we are not talking about three separate journeys here—one for knowing, one for doing and one for being. It is one journey of discovery into one really real world. It is just that it has three dimensions. However, in terms of our experience of this in our lives it is all one.

First let me read another familiar story from John 14.

“You must not let yourselves be distressed—you must hold to your faith in God and your faith in Me. There are many rooms in my Father’s House. If there were not, should I have told you that I’m going away to prepare a place for you? It is true that I’m going away to prepare a place for you, but it is just as true that I am coming again to welcome you into my own home, so that you may be where I am. You know where I am going and you know the way I am going to take.”

“Lord,” Thomas broke out, “We don’t know where you’re going, and how can we know the way that you’ll take?”

“I myself am the way,” replied Jesus. “And the truth and the life. No one approaches the Father except through me. If you had known who I am, you would have known the Father. From now on, you do know Him and you have seen Him.”

Then Philip said, “Show us the Father, Lord, and then we will be satisfied.”

“Have I been such a long time with you,” replied Jesus, “without your really knowing me, Philip?” The man who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you believe that I am in the Father? And that the Father is in me? The very words I say to you are not even my own. It is the Father who lives in me that carries out his work through me. Do you believe me when I say that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me? But if you cannot, then believe me because of what you see me do. I assure you that the man who believes in me will do the same things that I have done, yes, and he will do even greater things than these, for I am going away to the Father. Whatever you ask the Father in my name he will do—that the Son may bring glory to the Father. And if you ask anything of me in my name I will grant it.”

This is the doing of the really real world—“I assure you that the man who believes in me will do the same things that I have done, yes, and he will do even greater things than these, for I am going away to the Father.”

Now I want to make one thing clear. While I am talking about doing that is grounded and flows from the world of the spirit, the really real world—I am talking about the actual doing of your life in this world. I am talking about what you do every day of your life. I am talking about going to work, washing the dishes or laundry, walking the dog, celebrating a colleague’s birthday, and all the other mundane things all of us have to do to

live in this world. I am not talking about the doing of angels. This world is the only place we have to do our lives. The question is not where but how and why we do our lives. Jesus did not say to Philip--you and I are going to join the Father and there we will do great things together. He said, you are staying here and will do the same things that I have done and even greater things since, "*I am going away to the Father.*"

Well, what does it mean to do the same things as Jesus and even greater things in today's world?

The first category is **Person**. Here in your journey in the really real world you discover that you have been given a unique calling and that you have to surrender to this calling. You have to be willing to say "**Yes**" to the call. This involves the awareness that the acting out of your existence is all you have and that this "**Yes**" entails an unlimited commitment. You are the suffering servant of all creation who lives their life and dies their death on behalf of all. Well that is great! But what does that look like in real life in this real world? It means seeking out the most hopeless situation, the place where people's humanity is being denied, and putting your life into it for sake of creating humanness there. This does not necessarily mean moving to Africa or Latin America, although there is a lot of hopelessness there. I knew a man who worked in one of the largest law firms in Chicago. The people in that firm made hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. And it was a hopeless, dehumanising situation. I suppose it still is and it still needs someone to bring the life of the spirit, the life of the really real world to it. Therefore, do not all run to the Mother Superior and tell her you want an air ticket—just look around you. Jesus did not go looking for special situations—He just walked around the communities of his day and found hopelessness and dehumanisation everywhere he looked.

The second category is **history**. Here you do history. That is to say, you create the future in every situation on behalf of all of history. In every situation, you are the one, who by their actions determines the future of that situation. This requires that you live every moment as your last. If you are concerned with what will happen to yourself in the future, you cannot create history, you cannot create the future. You know that this moment is it—your only change to create a more human world and that what you do is shaping the future of all creation. In this, every moment is the eternal moment. There are no tomorrows, there are no yesterdays—it is all in this moment and in your act. This looks like, in every situation asking these sorts of questions. What needs to happen here so that these people can see the possibility for their lives? How do I reveal to these people their greatness and uniqueness as human beings? How do I make these people aware that they are not trapped by their past? Alternatively, to use the more traditional language, how do I proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ so that these people really hear it? That is creating history. Now it also means engaging the structures of this world that are holding people in their dehumanness. The international financial structures or uncaring governments need to have a new vision of what a more human community would look like. This is proclaiming the good news and is creating history.

The third category is the **League**. H. Richard Niebhuur, the German-American theologian, in writing about the dynamic of the church in history talks about God's People and the

People of God. God's People are all of human kind. This means all six billion of us. The People of God are that small group, in the midst of God's People, who having heard the Good News about life, decide to assume responsibility for and act to create history on behalf of all. These are the religious in history. Now, these people have always existed. They are the only ones who really create history. All that stuff you studied in school in a history class is just a lot of "sound and fury, signifying nothing!" Real history is the unbroken chain of people who have worked with all their lives to create a more human world. I am sure that you are tempted to look around and say that they have failed. Well, when the reality that is in charge is eternal it may be too soon to judge. The People of God are on God's timeline not humanity's timeline. The League is these People of God. We are not alone but are part of a long chain reaching into the distant past and stretching forever into the future. God always has his people—even when he has to raise up the very stones.

Finally, we come to the last category, **Christ**. Remember Jesus said, "*Do you not believe that I am in the Father? And that the Father is in me? The very words I say to you are not even my own. It is the Father who lives in me that carries out his work through me. Do you believe me when I say that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me?*" You know yourself as the obedient daughter who in her doing is doing the doing of the Father. But what is the doing of the Father in today's world. It is the same as it was in Jesus' day. It is proclaiming the Good News that all people might have the possibility of being fully human. It is opening people up to the possibility of being in relationship to God the Father. Now the problem we have today is that the world has changed and the imagination and mentality of people is not what it was in Jesus' day. Largely, people respond with indifference to the Good News proclaimed in the traditional way. I live in a country that is 99% Catholic and where more than 90% of them never attend Church except for the big three (baptism, marriage and burial). This is not the Father's problem. It is our problem since we are the doers of His doing. We desperately need new ways of doing His doing in order that we may get on with the building of a more human world. The Father expects that in doing His doing we will invent ways of making real His world, the really real world, in this world. Manifesting the really real world, the world of spirit in this world is the Father's work and is the only doing worth doing. Two thousand years ago, our ancestors in the Faith invented the Church. They have worked on it for two thousand years. As we enter the next thousand years what new inventions will be required to do the Father's doing. For the Father's doing will be done—if necessary by raised up stones.

This is doing.

Being

Yesterday I talked about the People of God in history as the League. This League stretches across all time and all cultures. From mid-September until mid-October, 1972 was an extraordinary month in my life. I met five men who are in this league. It just happened that all of them were in the Church and all of them were men. Now I do not want you to think that I usually associate with such people but this was an extraordinary month for two of them were Bishops, both named Samuel, two were Patriarchs and one was an Archbishop. We called the Bishops Samuel One and Samuel Two. Samuel One was a Bishop in the Egyptian Coptic Church whose burning passion was to get the Coptic Church engaged in the world. I met him in Cairo because he wanted us to come to Egypt and begin to train priests and lay people in community development methods to use in their parishes. He had an intensity of spirit that left little room for argument. He arranged a brief meeting with the Patriarch of the Coptic Church. The Patriarch was about to speak in the cathedral in Cairo so he was in his ceremonial black robes with crosses and an elaborate hat. He had a full beard and piercing black eyes. He did not look at you he looked into you and yet you felt a warmth and compassion underneath all those symbols—you experienced his humanity and his care for humanity. He had just returned from visiting the Patriarch of Istanbul and the Patriarch of Moscow. It was the first time ever that the Patriarch of the Coptic Church had met the Patriarch of Moscow and the first time in 1200 years that he had met the Patriarch of Istanbul. A few years later, sitting together, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Bishop Samuel were assassinated in a hail of bullets.

Samuel Two was a bishop in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and was concerned to get his church into, as he used to say, “at least the 19th century if not the 20th.” Again, we met him to plan training programmes for the priests and lay people of the church. Again, he arranged a meeting with the Patriarch of the Church in Ethiopia. This meeting was very formal. The Patriarch met us in his throne room. He spoke English but chose to use an interpreter. He also wore the flowing black robes, crosses and elaborate hat of the Orthodox Church. However, underneath all that he was a very modern and caring man. He wanted to know all about the training we were planning with Bishop Samuel. He even made some suggestions for some things we could do which we had already thought of but had dismissed as too radical for the local church people. He was a bold, aware, and caring man. Both Bishop Samuel and the Patriarch died in the revolution that overtook Ethiopia later in the 1970s.

Finally, on the day that the last of the people of Asian descent left Uganda we arrived in Kampala and met with the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda. Again, it was to talk with him about training for the local churches. He offered us a church training centre and even arranged to have his son take us up country to visit it. Finally, he said that he did not know what President Amin was going to do and that he could not ensure our security so perhaps it was best to wait and see how things developed. He was a simple man but one who cared deeply about the innocent human suffering in Africa.

You know people of the League, the People of God when you meet them. The really real world, the world of the spirit, shows through them. They have a presence and a being

about them that communicates their passion for humanness. You can smell the mystery around them.

Now back to these categories. I think that some of you have already figured out what I am about to say. That in talking about these categories of Knowing, Doing and Being I have really been talking about the Trinity—about God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and God the Father. An often-used metaphor for the Christ is The Word of Life. Jesus the Christ Our Lord came into this world so that all men, for all time might have knowledge of the love of God for them. His life and death were about this one task. Knowing in the Other World, the really real world, the world of the spirit is about the knowing of the Christ Word in our lives. Doing has to do with the Holy Spirit. Jesus said in John, *“I have said all this while I am still with you. But the one who is coming to stand by you, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will be your teacher and will bring to your minds all that I have said to you.”* (John 14) The Holy Spirit is our teacher and guide in the acting out of the word of Jesus Christ in our lives. The Holy Spirit has to do with the doing of our lives—or as I said yesterday, the doing of the Father in and through the doing of our lives.

Finally, we come to the centre where we find Being. Being has to do with God the Father. This is the Being of Being itself. This is the final eternal mystery at the centre of all existence. This is that which sustains us in being with unconditional love. St. Teresa of Avila says that here we experience that in the midst of the storms that come in life; the Father makes the soul forget everything but his presence.

Now I want to talk briefly about the four categories in this area.

The first is **Experience**. I want to paraphrase what St. Teresa says about this experience. The soul has died and its new life is that of self-forgetfulness. The soul no longer desires to exist: that is to say, it has so transcended its situation that it has no desire to live, to save its life, other than God have need of it. The soul takes care of the Lord's business and the Lord takes care of the business of the soul. The soul understands that finally, it can do nothing in and of itself, and that anything it can do is God acting through it and is in God's service.

Another way of talking about this is to say that when you have transcended your self, your ego, you experience a bottomless void at the centre of your being. You are falling into that void and you are in profound awe—both terror and fascination. In addition, and at the same time, the void is sustaining you. You are falling and sustained in this void. There is nothing to do, or know or be here—you are beyond seeking and questioning. Finally, in one last act of your will, you give yourself to the void—you surrender to it. The void enfolds you, it takes you in and you become one with it. Other writers have written about becoming one with the mystery. Others have talked about being absorbed into no-thing-ness. You are one with no-thing-ness and at the same time, you are all-thing-ness. I know that this is just poetry that makes little sense unless you have had the experience or even a little glimpse of the experience. However all witnesses to this experience agree that you experience a surpassing peace and confidence in God, or the void, or the mystery or the no-thing-ness—take your

pick. You are one with the father. This is Jesus talking about having the Father in him and being in the Father at the same time.

Now the second category here is **Knowing**. This is about the fact that when you really die to yourself, you die to your ego. You give up any attempt to keep and protect your personal being for you are filled with the being of the mystery, of no-thing-ness, of the Being of Being, of the being of God—your being is reborn in the world of spirit. You are born anew and are no longer an heir of this world. You join the Christ in being born solely of the world of the spirit.

Doing here has to do with the death of your attempt to control and be in charge of the doing of your life. You surrender your will in total submission and as St. Teresa says, do only the will of God. She says the soul takes care of the Lord's business and the Lord takes care of the business of the soul. You join the crucified Christ for the sake of doing the doing of God.

Finally, we come to **Being**. This is the Being of Being. Finally, here you and the Father become one. St Teresa says that here, it is the Lord His Majesty who lives in the soul and though this very fact induces terrors and great suffering, the Lord always gives the soul what it needs. Here the soul dares to trust God, to listen for His call and obey. The Lord quiets the soul and teaches it that there is no need here for the soul to try to understand, to look for knowledge for God will show it what it needs to know. The Lord bestows the kiss, sends the olive branch in the storm.

Here you are finished with all knowing and doing. Your life is beyond all such concerns. You are consumed with only one thing—the Presence of the mystery, the void, the no-thing-ness, God the Father. You are quite simply all spirit. You are wholly of the world of spirit. You have died to this world and been resurrected in the world of spirit. You join Christ in being one with the Father.

The strange thing about all this poetry and the reality that we are pointing to is that it happens at the same time we are living, working, caring and being in this world. I once met such a man. I do not ask you to agree with me but for me he is as close to a human being who was born, crucified, and resurrected in the spirit that I am likely to get.

In March 1979, I went to Recife in Northeast Brazil to visit a group of sisters who had attend a training programme we had done in Rio de Janeiro. They wanted me to help think about there work in the Slums and building greater community participation. The first day we were walking in the slum, visiting some of the people they were working with. One of the sisters casually said, "Would you like to meet the Archbishop?" I stopped walking and just looked at her. Finally, I said, "Is that possible?" I did not really believe her. She said, "Sure, we can go tomorrow morning," I said, "don't we need an appointment, won't it take days to arrange?" She replied, "No we can just drop in during the morning and talk with him."

I suppose you know who the Archbishop of Recife was in 1979. Don Helder Camera was a man who had taken a stand in the Church and world out of his concern for the innocent human suffering of this world and Brazil. He had been criticised in both the Church and the world. He had to live outside Brazil for a while because of the threats on his life. He was also a man who as it is put, “Walked the Talk,” That is he lived his life as a demonstration of care for the poor and always called injustice wherever and whenever he encountered it to account. I had admired him for years and read his writing whenever I could find it in English.

The next morning we went to see him. He had turned the Archbishop’s palace into a community centre full of services for the poor. Just off the entrance, he had a single room that was his office. It was bare except for some plain wooden chairs lined up around the walls and a table in the middle with a few chairs around it. He was sitting at the table. A small man who looked like he could do with a few of the meals we have here twice a day. What happened was that anyone could come to see him. When you arrived, you waited your turn, sitting in the chairs around the wall, while other people talked to him at the table. It was all in public. No private, behind closed doors conversations happened here. His business was public and thus your business with him was public. Finally, it was our turn and we joined him at the table. The sisters explained who I was and what I was doing in Recife. He then asked me to explain what I was hoping to do in Brazil. Therefore, I told him about our work in development to empower local people. We talked for about 15 minutes and he welcomed us to Recife and said that he would pray for our work.

I was in awe the whole time. He seemed to be transparent—I felt like I was seeing into his being the whole time. It was as if he was inside out—his being on the outside and his flesh on the inside. When we left, the sisters suggested that perhaps I should have lunch and a siesta before we started talking again. It took me about four hours to be able to focus my attention on anything else than that meeting. He died last month.

Finally, there is no way to talk about all this. We have the witness of those who have journeyed to the centre of being and returned to share their experience with us. However, there is no rational or logical way to understand it. It is simply a matter of our willingness to trust ourselves to the world of spirit and dare the journey in the really real world for ourselves. Bon voyage!