

42. Responding to God (Catechism n. 2566-2567)

n. 2566.

'We are in search of God. In the act of creation, God calls every being from nothingness into existence.

"Crowned with glory and honour," we human beings are, after the angels, capable of acknowledging "how majestic is the name of the Lord in all the earth"(Psalm 8).

Even after losing through sin our likeness to God, we remain an image of our Creator, and retain the desire for the one who calls us into existence.

All religions bear witness to our essential search for God' (see Acts 17:27).

1

Concepts of God: *Yielding to Love* pages 24-27

- Many concepts of God handed down in family and society. They arise from our desire to make sense of experience
- Some concepts express true insight
- Others are the result of oversight
- Our concepts of God aim to express our most profound insights into what reality ultimately is.
- No human concept can encompass God. The best we can do is to choose between contrary concepts the one that expresses better our experience, and so points us better towards the mystery.

2

- God is 'No-Thing' (Buddhism)
- God is 'Personal' (Judaism, Islam)
- A category to cover what we do not yet know?
- idea is a leftover from an unacceptable naivete?

3

People rightly reject

- a God who is envisaged as an extra, existing outside our world and history and experience, who controls things from the outside, as it were, and is directly responsible for whatever happens, intervening in our history at will, or in answer to prayer understood as a magical power.
- a God envisaged as a projection of human need and human wishful thinking, or human avoidance of the harshness of reality.
- There is no point in speaking of any God who does not require of us that we face the whole truth of our real limits, but also of the real greatness of being human. Any serious inquiry about God must be one that leads to a better understanding of and communion with our actual selves and our real world.

4

- We are rightly suspicious of a God who serves to support vested interests.
- to support the ideology of military and economic victors over the vanquished.
- Who can take seriously a God who supports apartheid, or patriarchy, or hypocritical piety, or a refusal to accept tried and tested facts in any sphere?
- If there is value in talking about God at all, it can only be about a God in which everything participates, and therefore a God who supports the intrinsic and inalienable dignity of everything that exists, a God of truth and of justice.

5

- Freud worked with people with seriously dysfunctional psyches. Some of their religious attitudes were little more than a jumble of infantile illusions. His findings alert us to the need to ask ourselves how free we are of such illusions?
- Any claim we might make to relate to God is worthless if our relationship fails to draw us on to maturity by clarifying our identity, deepening our intimacy and enlarging our capacity for generating the love that provides the only environment in which we and others can grow.

6

- It is clear that all our concepts of God are precisely our concepts. They enjoy, therefore, all the strengths of human intelligence and imagination; but they also necessarily suffer from all the weaknesses.
- In recent centuries, some have gone beyond criticising incorrect conceptions to reject any and every conception of God as unnecessary, unhelpful and irrelevant to genuine human living and progress in knowledge.
- Others, while granting the need for constant refinement of our concepts of God, hold that the claim that God exists cannot be written off simply as human projection and distortion. They hold that the claim is based on an authentic, if often unreflective, response to real human experience, and that there is a Reality, albeit one upon which we cast our projections and which we distort. They see it as a fundamental and serious error to discard the real God along with our distorted concepts.

7

The image of God given us by Jesus shows God as the Creator giving himself to creation in a pouring out of love.

Creation is the love that is poured out.

God as an object of thought is necessarily outside and separate.

Genuine knowledge of God can only happen in the communion we call love.

8

What is love? *Yielding to Love, 18-21*

- Love is being part of something that is other than myself, but in such a way that I become more fully my own distinct self in being in love. Love is not a melding into an obscure oneness in which distinctions are lost. The more love is pure, the more each of us is enabled to emerge in our precise difference. And the more we do this, the more profound and fulfilling the love-communion that is given and received.
- Nothing is at rest. Everything is becoming. Love is an experience of our interconnection, our communion with everything else that is also becoming. And what are we becoming? Our goal is not a loss of our unique self and personality. On the contrary, it is a fuller owning of oneself, but in communion, not in isolation.

9

- This is not possible without some degree of genuine self-love. Indeed, Paul claims that the whole of the law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'^(Galatians 5:14).
- He was echoing Jesus (see Mark 12:33), who was himself drawing on a tradition found in the Hebrew scriptures (see Leviticus 19:18).
- Loving oneself involves a recognition of the fact that whoever I am and whatever has happened to me, I am capable, in some way and to some degree, of receiving love and of offering my unique self in love to others. To love is not to be so falsely full of ourselves that we think we can be independent and that we can use others to build up our own false ego.

11

- Love is the experience of that creative energy that impels us to grow, and to grow in communion with everything that is.
- The other remains other, but another to which and to whom we belong. And this is because everything we experience is drawn towards the Other in whose being we all participate.
- To love is to commit oneself to be with others as they continue to grow towards the fullness of their special individuality.

10

- To love is to resist another temptation, which is to think that we can grow by holding others back to be part of ourselves. There is no place for this holding back.
- Others are part of us. They do belong. But we must learn to respect others in their unique otherness, in their difference from ourselves.
- Co-dependency is not love. No, we belong to each other because we are all involved in a journey of love, and we are meant to make the journey together, energising each other to become the unique person we are capable of being while sharing our uniqueness with each other.

12

- Love is not something we find, or something we fall into.
- It is something we create when we recognise our belonging, delight in the other, and commit ourselves to respect the mystery of our own being by daring the journey into our own heart, while we journey into the heart of the world and while we are with others in their becoming.
- When this commitment is mutual, love becomes that precious gift called friendship.

13

- Who has not experienced the attraction of love?
- The pain we experience when love is denied or taken away is itself a witness to our natural and radical sense that we are made for loving.
- The slightest taste of true love engages that longing, often in quite painful ways. We know that we are not meant to live in isolation. We are not self-contained.
- We are attracted outwards to ever more intimate communion with the world around us, and when we experience love (the word we use for this communion), we are attracted inwards to plumb the depths of the inner world which love discloses.

14

- We sometimes find ourselves pursuing this attraction in ways that fail to make connection with the outer world.
- Others do this when they think they are loving us, but we know that they are not really connecting with us. If others are failing to connect, are we sure we are not failing in the same way?
- Learning to love truly is a life journey.

15

- We sometimes find ourselves pursuing this attraction in ways that fail to make connection with the inner world.
- We meet people who do a lot of 'loving' things, who speak a lot of 'loving' words. Yet we sense that they have little self-knowledge. They seem to be striving, but it is not coming from their heart.
- A little reflection alerts us to the truth that we, too, suffer from this. Learning to love, learning to connect heart to heart, is a life journey.

16

- Sometimes we connect with neither the outer nor the inner world. When this happens we are left feeling distracted, frustrated and out of touch, not to mention the hurt we can cause to others, however unwittingly.
- But when we pursue this attraction in ways that do connect, we experience a sense of belonging, a feeling of being partially satisfied and in touch.
- This is love, and the intimacy of the love varies according to the significance to us of the communion we experience.

17

- Though love involves thoughts and feelings, it is not a thought or a feeling. It is the experience of being actually in communion with our own reality and with the reality of the other. True love is anything but an escape into a world of fantasy. The truer our love the more real and more complete our connection with ourselves and with the world around us.
- Though we fail in love, we must continue to trust our longing for love. We fail in love because we have not been in touch with our own reality or the reality of another. We must not let failure cause us to despair of discovering love, for we can learn from our failure, and the call to love is always there directing us towards the truth of who we are and the truth of the other.

18

- Experience teaches us that it is not always easy to stay in touch with our heart. This is especially so when our heart is hurting. We are tempted to fill our emptiness in ways that do not come from our heart.
- We can find ourselves driven by lust, or pride, or the felt need to exercise power over another. Our need for security can lead us to want to control another rather than engage in the risk of loving. We are tempted to use others in ways that are not sensitive to their hearts.
- We find ourselves breaking the glass to get at the wine. Our relationships may wear the mask of love, but that is what it is: a mask. Our hearts – our deepest selves where we experience a profound yearning to love and to be loved – are not engaged. We are living in an unreal world.

19

I have focused on our common human experience simply to demonstrate why it is that love, and our yearning for it, generates our primary energy for living. If we understand this we will be encouraged to be more creative in our loving, and more committed to purifying the springs of our yearning so that we will learn to love

“with all our heart and mind and soul and strength”(Mark 12:30).’

20

Love: a sacred encounter (*Yielding to Love* pages 21-22)

- Let us now examine some key aspects of our yearning and of the reality with which we find ourselves in communion. Each of these aspects points to the existence of a transcendent and immanent God:
- transcendent, because we are not God, nor is any other object of our direct experience;
- immanent, because we and everything around us exist only because we participate in the being of God.
- Whether we realise it or not authentic human love necessarily involves communion with God. It is a sacred encounter.

21

- My aim here is not to 'prove' the existence of God the way one might prove the existence of something by providing incontrovertible evidence that must convince anyone willing to attend to the evidence provided.
- The transcendent God cannot be put under a microscope.
- My aim is to invite you to attend to aspects of your own experience that might persuade you to continue to explore the mystery and not to dismiss it because it does not deal up the ready evidence that our empirically trained, scientific minds have come to expect.

22

- Let us look first at our yearning for communion, the yearning that drives all our connections with reality.
- It is clear that our experience of love never provides full satisfaction, for there are depths to our heart and to the world that remain to be explored. The inner well seems bottomless. Our yearning seems limitless. Our longing for love seems inexhaustible.
- When the yearning is partially satisfied we rightly conclude that it is not something that is merely subjective. We know that we are not living in a world of fantasy. We know that we are truly in communion with something real.

23

- However, we also know that our yearning is not fully satisfied. We long for a love that is unconditional, unrestricted, and complete.
- Our limited experience of love gives us reason to trust our yearning. Is it not reasonable, then, to trust that there exists a Reality that accounts for the ultimate longing which we experience, a Reality which is its ultimate object, and which can fully satisfy us?
- Why would our yearning be real and trustworthy in partial matters, but ultimately be unreal and deceptive? Why would we not explore the direction in which our experiences are pointing just because they point to a Reality that transcends our present experience and so remains mysterious and beyond definition? In other words 'God'.

24

- Furthermore, in light of what we have already said, since prayer is the name we give to this exploring, should we not expect prayer to be an experience of love?
- To love is to respect the sacred in myself and the sacred in the other. It is mutual communion in the gift of self. Our longing for this communion is clearly real, but is never fully satisfied.
- God alone, the sacred presence in our heart and in the heart of others can fully satisfy our longing.

25

Knowing God *Yielding to Love* page 23-24

- Coupled with our yearning for love is our experience of desiring to know. We keep learning to trust this desire, too, as we discover more and more truth. Yet our desire to know, impelled by our desire to love, is also limitless. Partial knowledge always leaves us unsatisfied. We want a fully satisfying explanation of reality. We want all our questions answered.
- That our desire to know can be satisfied in small ways encourages us to trust that there exists a Reality that can satisfy our yearning for ultimate truth. It is this Reality that we call God, and, since prayer is communion with God, should we not expect prayer to be an experience of truth?

26

- When we turn our gaze away from our longing and focus instead on that which we come to know and love, we realise that reality is not a compilation of discrete, unconnected, individual entities. Everything is in some way interconnected.
- Modern science impresses this truth upon us, from astronomy to ecology and biology. This interconnectedness of being points to the existence of a Being in which everything participates and which is the ultimate reason for the interconnection that we experience. This raises the question of God.
- Furthermore, since prayer is communion with God should we not expect our prayer to bring us to a more profound communion with the world and with our real selves?

27

- Another dimension of every thing and of every person that we know and love is that when we ask why they exist we have to look beyond them to find the answer.
- I am not concerned here with the question of why they came to exist. Obviously trees grow from seeds and babies need parents. I am saying that if something now exists, there must exist now a Being that fully accounts for this fact.
- The limited objects that we experience do not in themselves satisfactorily explain why it is that they are now existing. They are, as the philosophers say, contingent. Nor is our question satisfactorily answered by pointing from one contingent (not self-explanatory) being to another whose existence also needs explanation.

28

- Ultimately, there must exist now a Being which provides the ultimate and fully satisfactory reason for the existence of everything that exists, and which, unlike everything else we know, does not require the existence of some further being to account for its existence.
- This is the Reality that we call God. God is the creating source, the sustaining ground and the final goal for all that we experience, including ourselves.

29

- Should we not, then, expect our communion with God (our prayer) to bring us to a realisation that all we are and all we have, including our connections with reality, are gifts coming from the source of all existence.
- It is love, the love that is God, that sustains everything in being and that binds everything together.'

30

Prayer is a response to God's initiative

- Catechism n. 2567.
- 'God calls us first. We may forget our Creator or hide far from his face; we may run after idols or accuse the deity of having abandoned us; yet the living and true God tirelessly calls each person to that mysterious encounter known as prayer. In prayer, the faithful God's initiative of love always comes first; our own first step is always a response.
- As God gradually reveals himself and reveals us to ourselves, prayer appears as a reciprocal call, a covenant drama. Through words and actions, this drama engages the heart. It unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation.'

31

There is much for us to do.

A surfer has to struggle out to the deep beyond the breakers, but once there s/he must wait for the wave.

The silkworm spins the silk, but then has to wait for the time for the emerging of new life.

It is up to us to clear debris that is blocking a spring, but then we have to wait for the water.

A sailor must unfurl the sail, but then must wait for the wind.

So it is with prayer.

Ultimately it is a process of waiting, but in prayer we know in faith (even if we do not experience it) that God is certainly offering Himself to us.

32