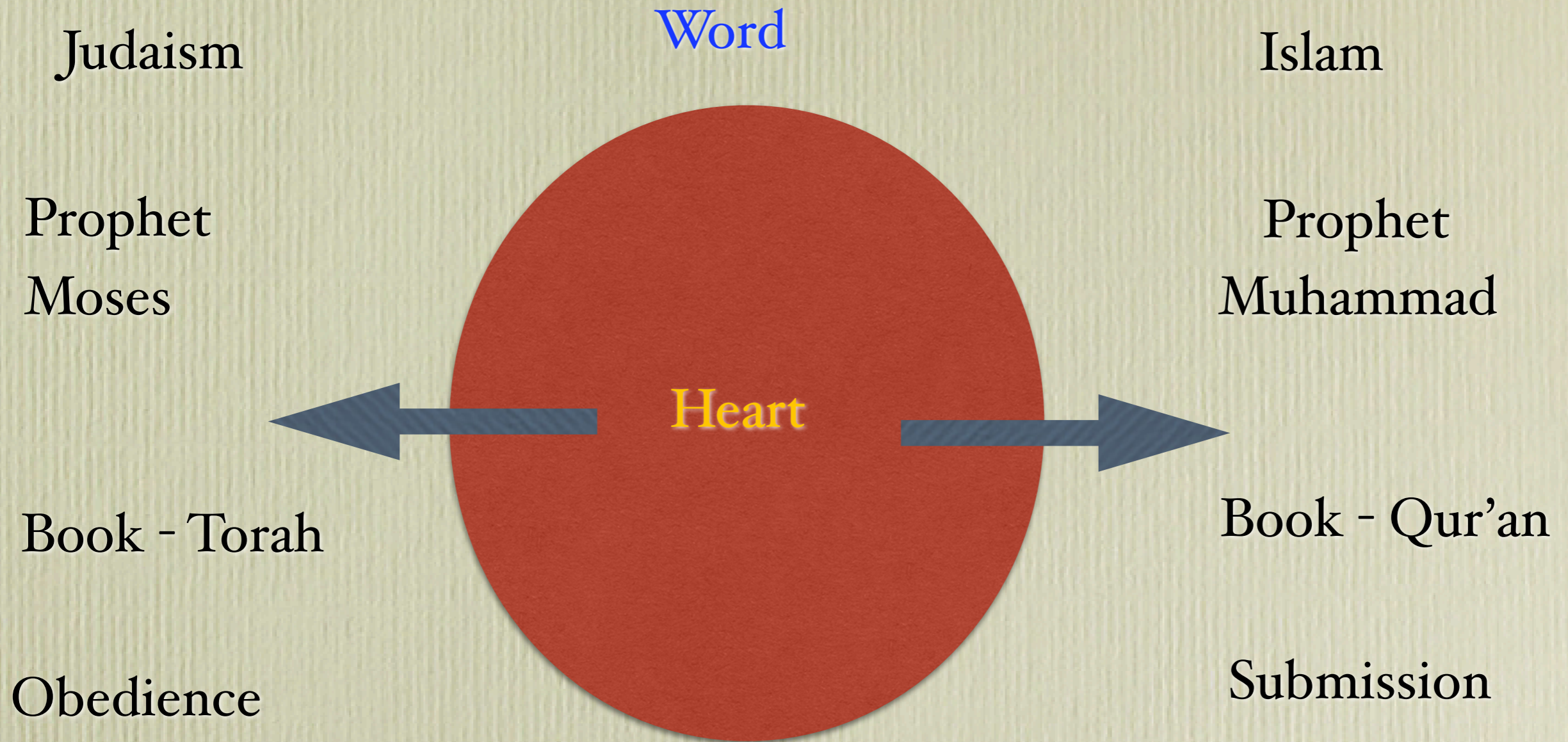


02. We are journeying through inspired expressions  
of religious experience

Part 2

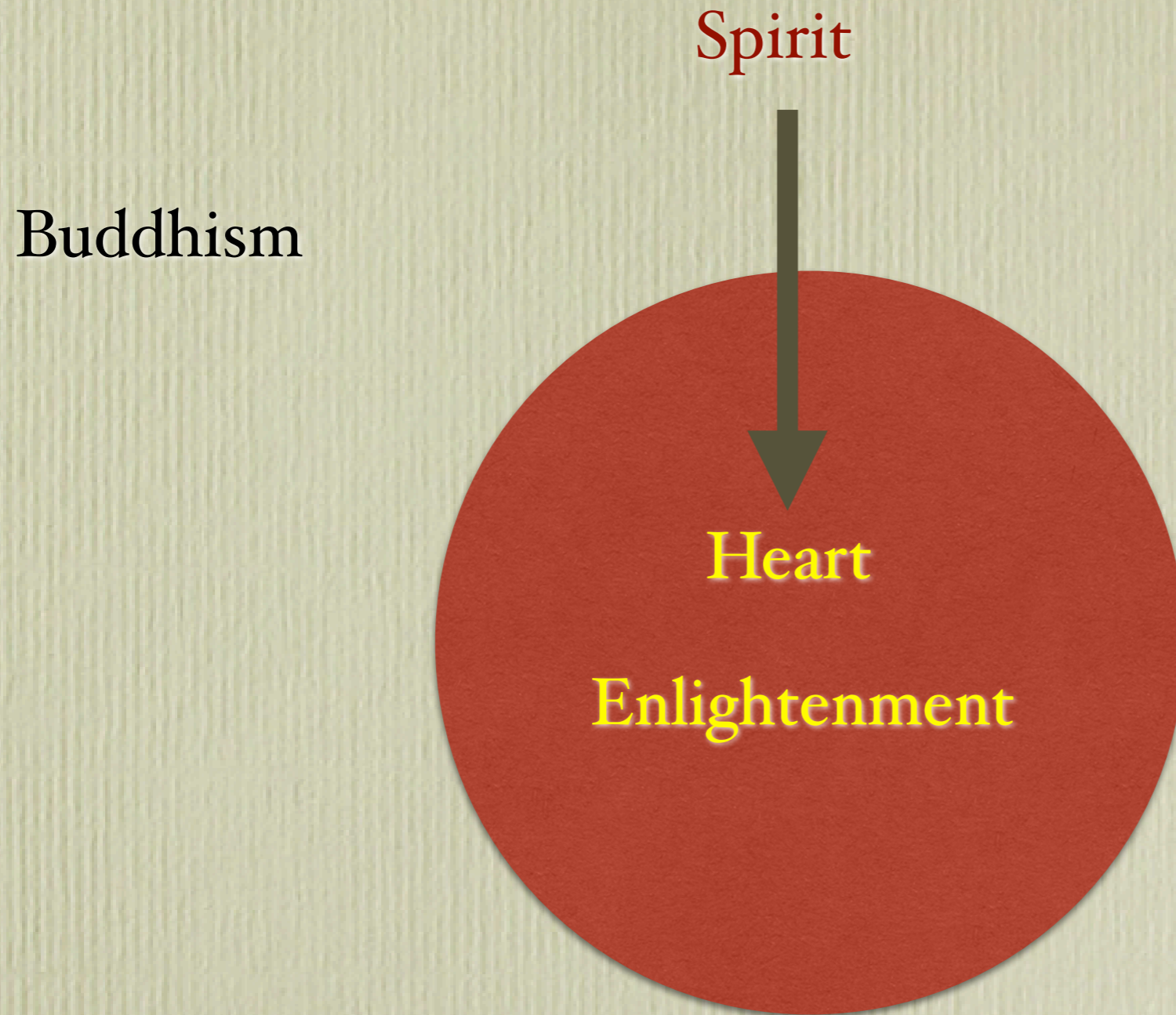


# The **Numinous** dimension of religious experience



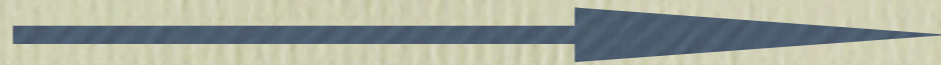
‘The world is full of God’s glory’(Isaiah 6:3)

# The *Mystical* dimension of religious experience



‘God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us’(Romans 5:5)

Revelation



Numinous

Mystical

Heart

speaks to

Heart

# Our experience of God is necessarily mediated



Moses said, “Oh, let me behold your Presence!” And the Lord answered, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name Lord ... but you cannot see my face, for man may not see Me and live.” (Exodus 33:18-20 JPS)

We experience movements of thought and feeling within our hearts that engage our yearning for communion with the One for whom we long, the One whom we believe is their source.

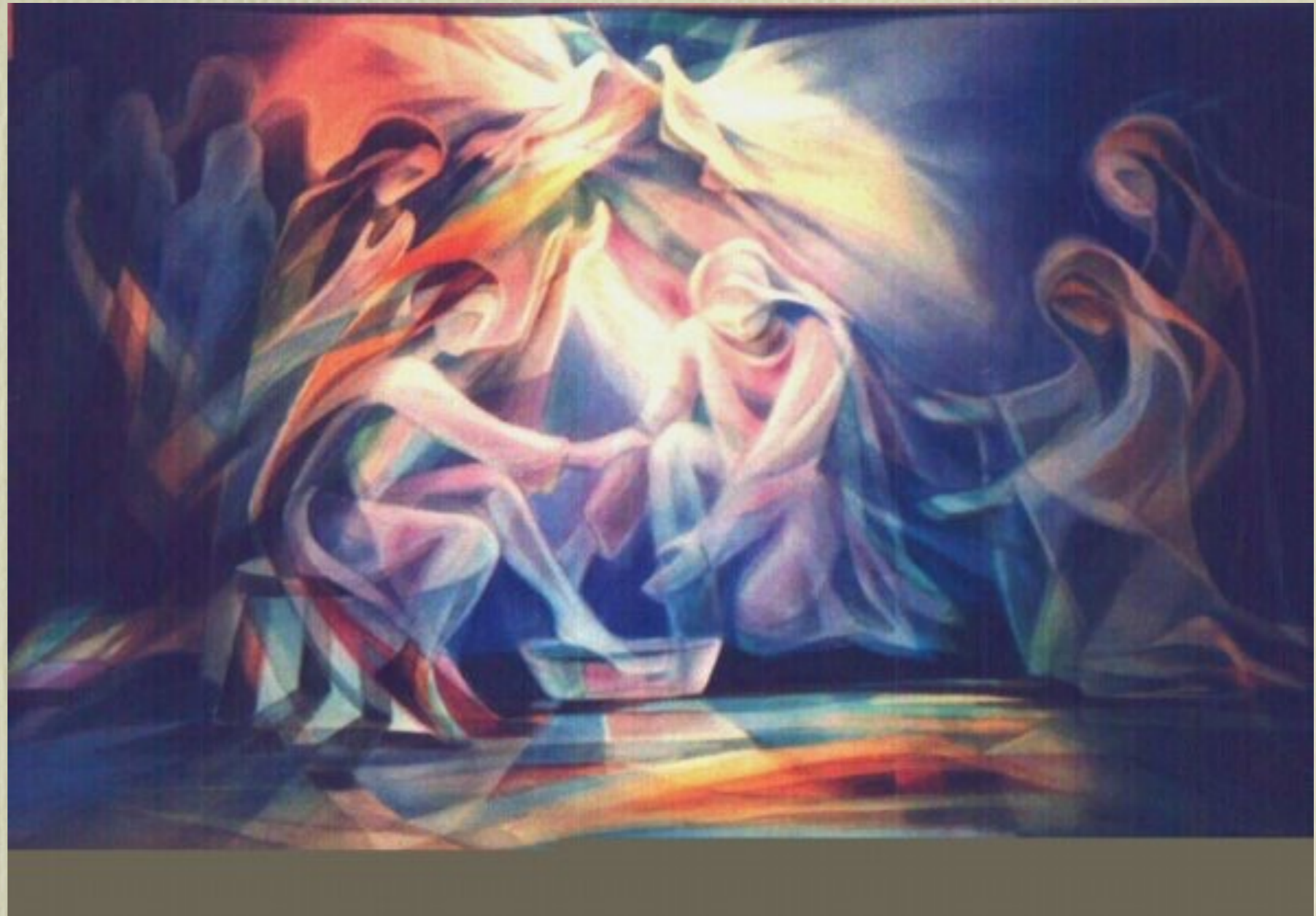
It is our thoughts and feelings that we are directly experiencing. We are experiencing God only in and through them.



We experience people and events around us that speak to us of God and engage our yearning for communion with God.

It is actual, limited people and events that we directly experience. We experience God only in and through them.

Washing feet at Supper



We read the words written by the actual historical people who were moved to write under the inspiration of God's Spirit.

It is their limited words that we directly experience.

We experience God only in and through them.

This is an essential insight that should guide us in reading the inspired writings of the Bible.







Sunset from Caesarea

The inner movements of our soul  
and the outer realities of the world  
engage our yearning for God  
because they disclose something of the truth,  
they reveal something of the beauty,  
and they participate in something of the goodness of God;  
but while they participate in God,  
God always transcends them.

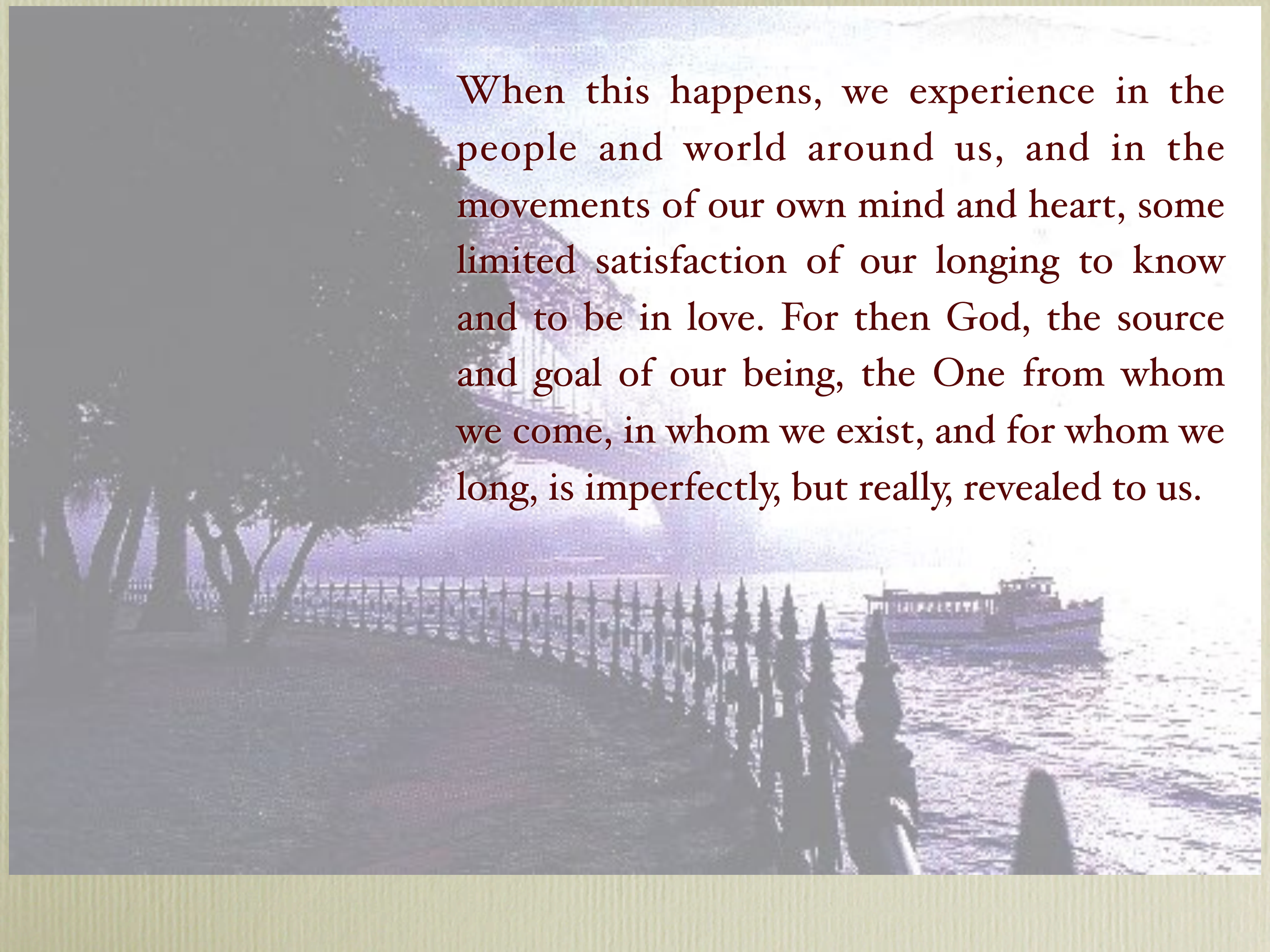
It is right to associate God  
with the experiences that awaken our religious desire:  
the spring, the mountain, the grove, the person, the cult,  
the proposition expressing distilled wisdom,  
the inspired word contained in sacred Scripture.  
It is wrong to limit God to any of these.

God, being free, can reveal God's self to people in whatever way God chooses.

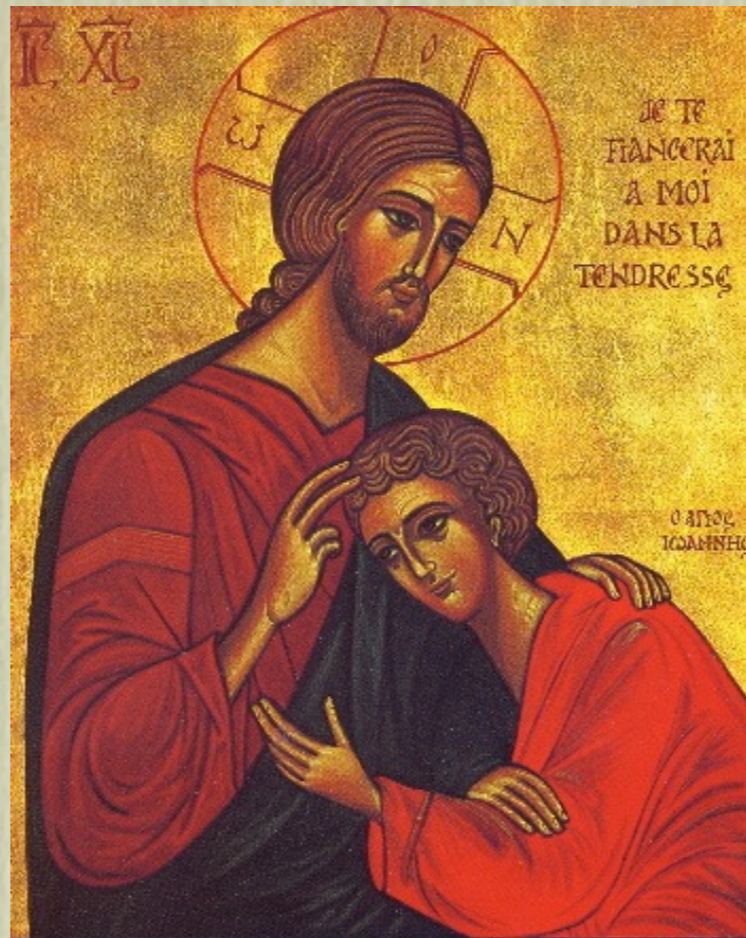
God, being transcendent, the revelation remains mysterious.

The veil hiding God is not over God but over us.

When we do receive the mediated revelation of God, the veil is partly lifted.

A scenic view of a harbor. In the foreground, there are several tall, thin trees. A pier with a railing runs across the middle ground. A large ship is docked at the pier. The water is calm, and the sky is clear. The overall scene is peaceful and serene.

When this happens, we experience in the people and world around us, and in the movements of our own mind and heart, some limited satisfaction of our longing to know and to be in love. For then God, the source and goal of our being, the One from whom we come, in whom we exist, and for whom we long, is imperfectly, but really, revealed to us.



God's perfect  
human Word,

symbol of the  
Divine Word  
of the Self-giving  
always Transcendent  
God

Communion in the  
Love-Spirit that  
unites Jesus and God,

symbol of the  
Divine Love-communion  
of the  
always Transcendent  
God

‘Is not my word like fire, says YHWH, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?’(Jeremiah 23:29).

Let us pray to share in the experience of Cornelius and his household when they heard God’s word spoken through the apostle Peter. Peter assured the Christian community in Jerusalem: ‘As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning’(Acts 11:15).

There is beauty and truth in the Bible texts.

To find this beauty and this truth (as distinct from imposing on the text our own preconceived notions) we will need to explore the historically conditioned and necessarily limited human experiences that gave rise to their inspired insights.





Jesus' disciples reflected on the sacred texts in the light of the new revelation that they experienced in Jesus of Nazareth. They came to what they believed was a deeper understand of God's intention in inspiring the scriptures – an understanding that was hidden prior to God's revelation in Jesus.



The New Testament has its origins in the religious experience of Jesus' disciples.



‘We declare to you what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life ... We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete’(1John 1:1).

Matthew 5:43-48

‘You have heard that it was said,  
“You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.”  
**BUT** I say to you, Love your enemies  
and pray for those who persecute you,  
so that you may be children of your Father in heaven;  
for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good,  
and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous ...  
Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

In the course of history the Older Testament has inspired people from every culture. Its meaning has also been covered over, much as wood is covered with layer upon layer of paint till we have no idea of its native beauty. People continue to use the texts to claim divine authority for their own prejudices and unexplored assumptions. The texts have purified cultures. Cultures have also accommodated the texts to support their failure to be converted by them.

It is essential for those who want to follow Jesus, that we see him as the one who brought the scriptures to their fulfilment. He helped us get to the heart of God's revealed word and to transcend the human limitations of its authors. We are to pray to read the sacred Scriptures with Jesus' eyes, and to hear him say: 'It was said to you of old, but I say to you'(see Matthew 5:21-43). We cannot avoid bringing our own assumptions to the text in the questions we ask of it, and so in the answers we find. But at least we must make the effort to check what we claim as our insights by examining the text in the light of the revelation we have received in Jesus.

## The Bible

The word 'Bible' comes from the Greek word *biblia*, meaning 'books'. The Bible is in fact a small library of books. Christians call it 'The Bible', meaning 'The Book' because it is the inspired record of the religious experiences of the people of ancient Israel and Judah culminating in the religious experience of Jesus and his disciples in the first century AD.

## The Older and Newer Testaments

The Bible is made up of two parts, customarily called by Christians the Old ('Older') Testament and the New ('Newer') Testament. 'Testament', as in the expression 'last will and testament', means a personally guaranteed declaration of will. The word 'testament' is used because those who preserved these writings saw in them a revelation of God and of God's presence and action in their lives, as well as an expression of God's will revealing to them how they were to live so as to be open to God's life-giving presence and action.

## The TaNaK

The Hebrew word for 'Bible' is 'TaNaK' from the first letter of the three sections into which the Hebrew Scriptures are divided: The Torah, the Nevi'im (Prophets) and the Kethuvim (Writings).

The earliest witness we have to this division is in the Book of Jesus Ben Sira ['Sirach'], a teacher in Jerusalem in the early second century BC. His grandson, who translated the book into Greek, writes: 'My grandfather devoted himself for a long time to the study of the Law and the Prophets, and the other Writings of our ancestors.'

Ben Sira himself speaks of 'the one who devotes himself to the study of the Law of the Most High! He seeks out the Wisdom of all the ancients, and is concerned with Prophecies'(Sirach 38:34 – 39:1).

## I. *Tôrāh*

The Torah comprises 5 scrolls:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

These five scrolls are sometimes referred to as ‘The Pentateuch’, from the Greek word for ‘five scrolls’.

*Tôrāh* is frequently translated ‘Law’ in English, with the danger of limiting its meaning. It is better translated ‘Instruction’, from the Hebrew verb *yarah*. ‘The **Way**’ may be an even better translation, as the Torah shows us the **way** we are to respond to God (this is the sense covered by ‘Law’). More importantly it shows the **way** God is present and active in the history of his people.



## II. Prophets (Hebrew *Nevi'im*).

The 'Former Prophets' comprise 6 scrolls:

Joshua, Judges, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings and II Kings.

The 'Latter Prophets' are prophets whose oracles have come down to us in the scrolls that carry their name. These comprise 4 Scrolls:

1. Isaiah

2. Jeremiah

3. Ezekiel

4. the Twelve Minor (shorter) Prophecies:

8th century BC: Amos, Hosea, Micah

7th century BC: Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk,

6th century BC: Haggai, Zechariah

5th century BC: Obadiah, Malachi, Jonah, Joel

### III: The Writings (in Hebrew the *Kethuvim*).

In the Hebrew Bible these comprise 12 scrolls:

6th century BC: Lamentations

5th century BC: Song of Songs, Job, Ruth,

4th century BC: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Ezra-Nehemiah,  
1Chronicles, 2Chronicles, Psalms.

2nd century BC: Daniel

The Greek Bible (Septuagint) has a further 7 scrolls:

Tobit, Sirach, Baruch, 1Maccabees, 2Maccabees, Judith, Wisdom  
plus additions to Esther and Daniel.

These inspired books of the Older Testament form the matter for our reflections over the 8 days of our retreat.

As the advertising brochure stated:

‘The aim of this retreat is to offer an update on the latest scholarship in regard to the Old Testament. It will provide opportunities to listen, to think, to discuss, to converse and to critique, in an atmosphere of silence and prayer.’

next presentation: 03. Prophecy in Ancient Israel