

## Light from Within

Pleasure to be here with you and with those with whom I have worked over the past year to produce this book, as well as some of the people who have inspired the thought and theology underpinning it (For example my good friend and colleague, Mary Coloe, who is here). Writing is both solitary and deeply communicative.... And holds that tension better than most activities. It implies you close the door to everyone and anything to gain access to your inner world of thoughts, convictions and doubts... and this often happens, I find, through the words you write *as you write them* – rather than after you realise what you want to say. And as they crystallise on the page and you look at them – or yourself in Them, and the life and faith experiences that have made you who you are or who you'd like to be, it is a graced experience to find they may have worth, for someone. This is my hope.

I write different kinds of stuff: music, classes, blogs, research into semiotics, music analysis, theological methods etc... and each of those types of writing has a different aim and implies different modes and patterns of self-presence. I rarely have the chance to spend time in the space this booklet has allowed me to explore: and that space is *the undercurrent of all this is important to me, in life, mission, and faith*. And yet, as my first mentor in theology taught me: "it is the theologian who does theology". Everything we do, write, and transmit is born of who we are. The Constitutions of my community say this in a different way:

"We share, not what we say, but what we pray and live, at depth"; Who we are. Words are never superficial.

So I thought during this time I might share a little of the background and "from whence" of the booklet: why like this and not any other way; what the booklet means to me, and why it is a book I myself will buy copies of, for a certain kind of friend and family, those who sit on the edge of faith and Church and who would never think of doing a Lenten journey, born of the realisation that is eloquently expressed in a poem by Patrick Kavanagh "We have tested and tasted too much, lover; through a chink too wide, there comes through no wonder!" It is a poem on Advent but no one understood penance like the Irish used to ☺!

### **1. The book is an attempt to teach people how to pray because for me, that is the centre of our faith.**

- When I was 15, I realised I did not have faith; I did not know God. Someone taught me how to pray. Some taught me that God answers prayer and that one could learn how to dialogue with Jesus Himself, with our mother/father God and the Spirit within. I remember thinking: "why did no one tell me this before?" I think this is still at the heart of faith, and the problems facing our Church (and I am not trying to minimise the many ways in which Church accountability, inclusion, structure, commitment, etc. needs to grow); but our faith is personal, and God can be personally experienced in prayer.
- Why am I a missionary, consecrated, living away from my country and family? Because someone taught me how to pray. No more and no less. Because I have *never* sought God in prayer and not found God, even if I had to dig deep at times.
- Prayer, personal, shared prayer (and they are, like our Chalcedonic faith, distinct but not separate) is the ground of our lives;
- Prayer with Word of God *lectio divina* – is a hidden gem we need to explore further, but also all the other forms of prayer our Tradition offers us (the *examen*, imaginative contemplation, intercessory prayer for others, etc.).

## **2. The experience of faith, or prayer is a mediated one:**

- This, for me, is tremendously powerful. "Faith comes through the word" says Paul in Romans 10:17. The context is this one: "'all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then are they to call on him if they have not come to believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard of him? And how will they hear of him unless there is a preacher for them? And how will there be preachers if they are not sent? As scripture says: How beautiful are the feet of the messenger of good news... But it is in that way faith comes, from hearing, and that means hearing the word of Christ." Missionaries and in fact the younger churches have taken this as the foundation of their call to mission, to go from door to door. And they are right. But for me the implication is even deeper from the perspective of a sacramental faith. The One who is the Word "in whom we live and move and have our being" makes Himself – forgive the language but I am talking Jesus here – through our human presence and words! It is through our connection with Jesus that people gain access to God. Even before they know it, or fully open to the gift of faith. I think this was an element of St Paul's understanding of marriage.
- What happened: I find this tremendous, and moving and scary, as an option. I would not have done it, were I God, but I am convinced that in opening to and sharing friendship with me, whatever connection I have to Jesus touched him. Fragile, not definitive, not even named.... He has not yet "Called on the name of God" but "something happened". So the quality of our prayer-life and union with Jesus affects everything.
- I am of those who believe we are all called to some level, or type of mysticism. God does not hold back as much as we think!

## **3. That the humanity of Jesus is at the heart of our faith, and "Woe are we" if we stray too far from that scandal!**

Teresa of Avila said "Take away the humanity of Christ and I cannot pray". There have been times – in fact a huge portion of the history of western theology was spent trying to defend God "without Jesus". Not consciously. The first deists – philosophers and theologians who sought to defend Christian faith with the emergence of the scientific world-view – were trying to protect our faith, but they did so using the same foundations and types of arguments as those moving away from faith. Philosophy is a necessary – essential even – part of theology and apologetics. But in the words of MPG: "God became incredible because God became small." It is reflected in Vatican I document on faith and reason *Dei Filius*, which has one Scripture reading: Heb 1:1

"At many moments in the past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets; but in our time, the final days, he has spoken to us in the person of his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made the ages." *Dei Verbum* took us deeper into the mystery of the Incarnation: the life, words, death, resurrection of Jesus is at the heart of revelation and our redemption. We cannot stray far. Easter, the journey leading up to Easter, invites us to remember that. Jesus, ever more alone and lonely, as he faces the consequences of Person he was the life he had chosen to live. Holy week invites us to be aware of this.

I am grateful to PierAngelo Sequeri for one of the key theological insights of the book, and of my own understanding of Jesus and his God: what is the fall that Eden describes? What is the key issue. We used to say pride – the desire to be God. But feminists have long pointed out that there are different kinds of pride and the one that believes itself more knowledgeable than God and everyone else is not normally how female insecurity shows itself. But what it is foundational sin? Distrust. Accepting the narrative that God might have an agenda *against them*, rather than for them. And we are left with the tragic, heartbreaking image of God looking for them in the garden “ where are you?” and sowing the clothes for a broken consciousness.

Jesus is the one in whom and by whom God has challenged definitively the “ambivalence of the sacred”, in his absolute trust in a God who is “on the side” of humanity. Therefore, the root of all evil can be found in our incomprehensible, (for the human mind and God’s also), definitive role reversal: the serpent is trusted, God becomes an object of suspicion.

#### **4. Mysticism is for all people, but we cannot water it down.**

Jesus was scandalous. The man-God would last about as long today as He did then. The Guardian reported that “*More than 300 human rights activists were killed in 2019*” I was shocked. But then there are speeches I cannot listen to and lies I cannot look at. Perhaps we should turn away less.

#### **5. The Reality is the Body of Christ**

For Paul, for those who are awake to faith, God is as or more visible than not. We live, move and breathe in God. For me this is the best – I would venture to say, the only - argument for God’s existence. Love seeks presence. Love cannot abide absence from a suffering loved one. The whole dynamic of the incarnation is God seeking to be with us, and stay with us. Humanity is in god, since Jesus came and brought us into that space.

#### **6. Music has a special power to enter us into that space**

## Every Moving Light Lyrics

After the grain of wheat has died

After loving you with every living breath...

Every moving light recalls your name

After all is said and done, it is in losing You have won,

It is in giving we receive, in being broken we perceive your wholeness

Holy, You are Holy, You....

Holy...are You. Glory to You!

Now you've brought me to my knees;

My eyes are closed so I can see the You I know, turn up in places I don't think to go.

Now that all is said and done, I surrender: You have won!

My hands are open to hang on to what I can't afford to lose: this moment

*Holy, You are Holy...*

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### 7. A Word for those on the edge:

One of my favourite Church documents is Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in which he states that the Church *exists* to evangelise (EN 14), that people today listen more willingly to witnesses than to teachers" (EB 41), and that "the world is calling for evangelizers to speak to it of a God whom the evangelists themselves should know and be familiar with as if they could see the invisible." (EN 76).

That is why the first step of this year's program is an invitation to discern what is the conversion *each one of us* needs to be more witness than teacher; so that others could sense the presence of God in who I am and what I do.

## Lament Lyrics

**Osténde nobis vultum tuum et salvi érimus.**

**Show us your face and we will be saved; We ask for this. We beg for this**

**There's a place inside where I like to hide,**

**but now it's turning blue; dark colours washing through me**

**And I can't stand this, no man's land within me...**

**I know that it's not fair: at times like this, I pray**

**But maybe you don't mind; I don't know who I'll find here**

**Touch this, lonely creature...**

**Show me your face in the pouring rain, can't you see my pain, from way out there?**

**Show me my face, I got lost again, can't remember when I last saw me... it's dark again...**

**Dómine Iesu Christe, Spiritum tuum mitte; nobis miserere**

**Dómine Iesu Christe, tu vero es vultus visibilis Pátris, consecranos;**

**Te rogamos, miserere nobis!**

**Show me your face in the pouring rain...**

**I'm trying to find my way home, not sure where I went wrong; So, I'm down on my knees**

**Why do you feel so weak? Could you reach out and heal me, Lord of mercy....**

**Trying to see your face; find a way to make up.**

**Sorry 's just not enough! Why does this feel so tough?**

**How long will you hold out when you know I'm clothed in weakness now?**

**Osténde nobis vultum túum et sálvi érimus.**

**based on Pope Francis' Prayer for Year of Mercy 2016**

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One of favourite writings of all times – in fact in ways it is my manifesto – is a short two page prayer by Karl Rahner called “Prayer for Creative Thinkers”.

Karl Rahner: “With a power that is greater and more ultimate, and a love that is deeper than that of any other creative worker for the work of his or her own hands, your Word has set his own heart in the very centre of the image wrought by you. This was done in order that humanity may be the expression and the image of your glory. And therefore, whether we realise it or not, every creative activity of the human spirit has become an element in the personal history of your Word, because everything has come to belong to this world, the world into which he came in order to share with it in its living experiences, to suffer with it and to glorify it with himself. It is the world from which this Word of yours will never more be separated for all eternity. Let those for whom we pray understand this truth. What they create is inevitably either a part of the Cross to which they nail your Son in guilt, and therefore a condemnation of themselves, or else a factor contributing to the coming of the eternal kingdom of this same Son, and therefore a grace for them.” “Prayer for Creative Thinkers”.

My deepest hope is that it would be the latter: an aid to your own explorations. I remember that in a small book of Merton's writings, he says in the preface that he hopes the book will help provoke readers' own thoughts and lead them to leaving his behind. A Lenten reflection book is similar, in my mind: it is an attempt to access one's own light within so that others might do the same, in a different way. And of course, light is only perceived amongst the shadow side of life...but that is our Paschal faith]