

## 9. What Do You Say God Is?

We have ventured to say much about God as we have sought to trace God's footsteps in the events of human history and personal experience through the pages of this book. It is perhaps time to sum up things and see where we are in our journey into mystery, into the unknown that we seek to know and that seeks to be known.

We spoke of “correspondence” between creator and creature as grounding both divine revelation and human receptivity. We spoke about panhuman experiences of the numinous and posited a spiritual reality, an innate, if often undeveloped, human awareness or intuition of the sacred in itself and within creation. We spoke about the creative, enlivening, inspiriting presence and power of God “in the beginning” resulting in the whole creation—not just human-kind—being brought into being and animated by the Spirit of God. And in so doing, we have stretched the limits of human language in attempting to speak about the ineffable. As it is said in the opening lines of the *Tao Te Ching*, “The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name.”<sup>1</sup>

And so we have stressed the importance of Jesus' God-consciousness as a disclosure of God that reveals some of what is hidden, while acknowledging that although God will never be less than the revelation of God in Jesus, God will always be more than the revelation of God in Jesus. That being said, our quest to understand the Way of Jesus has given us a language and interpretive categories for

exploring our own, hopefully expanding, consciousness of and experience of God. Our exploration of Jesus' teaching and practice of the rule (kingdom) of God, and the resulting ethos, provided us with tools to critique both our own individual spirituality and that of institutional religion in such a way that could lead to increased credibility and relevance for Christian faith and practice in our culturally and religiously pluralistic world.

### Images of God Matter

One wonders if the seemingly common experience of the "absence of God," or the "silence of God" stems, not from any absence or silence of God, but from the fact that we neither see nor hear God because we are looking and listening for a God who does not exist. Perhaps we relate more to our images of God than to God. Our images of God may just get in the way of our experience of God. This account by Karen Armstrong of her experience as a Christian nun gets right to the point:

I wrestled with myself in prayer, trying to force my mind to encounter God, but he remained a stern taskmaster who observed my every infringement of the Rules, or was tantalizingly absent. The more I read about the raptures of the saints, the more of a failure I felt. I was unhappily aware that what little religious experience I had, had somehow been manufactured by myself as I worked upon my feelings and imagination. Sometimes a sense of devotion was an aesthetic response to the beauty of the Gregorian chant and the liturgy. But nothing actually happened to me from a source beyond myself. I never glimpsed the God described by the prophets and mystics . . .<sup>2</sup>

Could it not be that her image of God as a "stern taskmaster" stood between her and the God "described by

the prophets and mystics”? Images of God drawn from the Pauline and post-Pauline legal understanding of the atonement have in large part “silenced” images of God that emerged from Jesus’ experience of God. In this book, we have tried to reclaim some of those images for post-modern faith.

It can be very instructive to pay attention to how people from outside the Christian tradition view what’s going on within the Christian church, particularly with respect to images of God and the impact those images have on human experience. Thomas H. Fang, a Chinese scholar versed not only in Chinese thought but in Western Christian thought as well, has described the ethos of the church which stems from juridical images of God as a “medieval way of living.”

Now what is the medieval way of living? Let us read together a beautiful passage in that great work on the Italian Renaissance by J. A. Symonds. “During the Middle Ages human beings lived enveloped in a cowl. They had not seen the beauty of the world, or had seen it only to cross themselves, and turn aside and tell their beads and pray. Like St. Bernard traveling along the shores of the Lake Lemano, and noticing neither the azure of the waters, nor the luxuriance of the vines, nor the radiance of the mountains with their robe of sun and snow, but bending a thought-burdened forehead over the neck of his mule; even like this monk, humanity had passed, a careful pilgrim, intent on the terrors of sin, death, and judgment, along the highways of the world, and scarcely known that they were sight worthy or that life is a blessing. Beauty is a snare, pleasure a sin, the world is a fleeting show, human beings fallen and lost, death the only certainty, judgment inevitable, hell everlasting, heaven hard to win; ignorance is acceptable to God as a proof of faith and submission; abstinence and mortification are

the only safe rules of life: these were the fixed ideas of the ascetic medieval church.”<sup>3</sup>

This may well sound unreal to us. Long gone is the cowl that covers the eyes of the travelers walking along the shores of the Lake Lemman. But for many Christians in our post-modern world, images of God inferred from the church’s teaching that “human beings are fallen and lost, death is punishment for sin, judgment is inevitable, hell is everlasting, even heaven is hard to win” either drive them out of the church or deprive them of the spiritual joy that should emerge from the teaching and practice of the one who declared, “I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” (John 15:11).

In opposition to what he has called “a medieval way of living,” Professor Yang urges us to develop an alternative view of life, one informed by his Chinese philosophical and religious backgrounds. He suggests that:

What we now really want and what we can heartily appreciate, especially in philosophical contemplation, is a different picture of human existence, in which the fullness of life, richness of sensibility, the charm of youth, the strength of love, the loveliness of body, the virility of spirit, the dignity of thought, the nobleness of action, the freedom of creation: all of these that pertain to the beauty of the world and the glory of human being are actually realized.”<sup>4</sup>

This may seem like a glorification of humanity at the expense of God, but is it? It certainly leads to different images of God than those which informed the “medieval way of living.” Implicit in this affirmation of humanity is an affirmation of the God of love and beauty who created and inspirited this marvelous universe for human beings and all creatures to inhabit.

## Not Who, but What (How) Is God?

There are many more stories that could be cited to direct our thoughts to questions about the images of God that influence the direction of our religious thought and experience. It may well be, however, that asking the question “*Who is God?*” may be the problem. When we ask *who* God is, we tend to begin thinking of God in personal terms. When we meet a stranger, one of the first questions we ask is “Who are you?” By that question we show an interest in many things. We want to know the stranger’s name, but also where he or she is from, what he or she does for a living, even what he or she believes. We are interested in their personality and character and, at a deeper level of relationship, wanting to know “Who are you?” implies an interest in the other’s inner life, his or her attitudes and feelings; hopes and dreams; fears and worries; intentions and purposes. All these questions are related to the stranger’s personhood. Of course, the immediacy of the person standing before you enables you to ask your questions and receive an answer.

But when you ask the question, “Who are you, God?” the most immediate answer will be silence. God is not immediately present to you to receive and answer your questions in the same manner that the stranger is. Furthermore, most of the “personal” questions you might ask of a stranger do not seem applicable to God.

As to asking about God’s name, we are still in a quandary. In human religion, God goes by many names. Jews and Christians have several names for the divine, among them Yahweh, Adonai, Elohim, and simply God; Muslims call the divine Allah; Confucianists use the name Heaven; the name is Ngi for the Kikuyu and Nzambi for the Bakongo in Africa; Hindu believers call upon the divine with the names Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma, and Shakti; for the Ojibwa people of North America, the sacred is Manitou or Great Spirit.

Remember, however, the wisdom of the *Tao Te Ching*, “The name that can be named is not the eternal Name.”

Recall the story of Moses in the wilderness tending the flock of his father-in-law at Mount Horeb, the “mountain of God” (Exodus 3ff.). Suddenly, he sees “a flame of fire [coming] out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.” He is overcome with curiosity and draws closer to it and is told to take off his shoes for he is standing on “holy ground” (3:5). In this visionary experience, Moses is commissioned by God to return to Egypt and lead the Hebrew slaves to freedom and to the promise long ago made to Abraham and Sarah of a land and a nation. Before setting off on his mission, however, he asks God to tell him God’s name because, as he puts it to God: “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ What shall I tell them?” (3:13). With his question, Moses is drawn into an “ontological divine mystery of the most daunting character.”<sup>5</sup> God responds to Moses’ request with a name that is not really a name; it is a verb: *’Ehyeh-’Asher-’Ehyeh*. This Hebrew expression can be translated in various ways: I Am-Who-I-Am, I-Am-That-I-Am, or I-Will-Be-Who-(or What)-I-Will-Be. It is “also possible to construe this as “I am He who Endures.”<sup>6</sup>

After giving Moses a name that is not a name, God says to him, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM (’Ehyeh) has sent me to you’” (3:14). This does not mean that human beings cannot call upon their deity by whatever name embodies their devotion, their longings, their experience of the divine. It does mean, however, that God is more than the name with which human beings invoke God.

We are not done with the encounter between Moses and I AM. Before releasing Moses to his task, God also said to him, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD (I AM), the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God

of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you” (3:15). Which is to say, “That-which-is-before-and-after the promises to your ancestors has sent me to you.” Here we stand before the God beyond our projections and images, the God who transcends our attempts to name and define God, but whose hiddenness is at least partially disclosed in the events of human history—chief among them for Christians, as we have noted, in the Exodus and in the life, death, and post-crucifixion appearances of Jesus of Nazareth.

Whenever we attempt to define God or to ascribe attributes to God we come up against the limits of both human language and human intellect and imagination. As T. S. Eliot put it:

Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still. (*The Four Quartets: Burnt Norton*)<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, speak of God we must, but our speaking must be done with a keen awareness that our words are not God. Our words cannot contain God, and if we ever think they can, then we have lost God altogether. Our words about God are no more than attempts to interpret experiences of the divine and to lay the grounds for further exploration of this great mystery. As a Zen aphorism would put it, the finger pointing at the moon is not the moon.

So speak of God we will, but bear in mind the analogical nature of what is said. We are seeking to find some similarities among realities that in most respects appear to be dissimilar. As an attempt to avoid the slippery slope of *over* personalizing or anthropomorphizing our images of God, we will ask not “Who is God?” but rather, “What (or even how) is God?” The focus is then more on how God is experienced

rather than on God as God is in God's self. We are seeking to understand ways in which God is active in relation to us and in doing so to catch a glimpse of something in God that moves God to relate in gracious and caretaking ways to all that is not God.

Before delineating a few images that speak more to "how" God is in human experience than "who" God is in God's self, let's stop to reflect on the following questions:

1. In what ways does our quest to understand Jesus' teaching and practice of the rule of God give us (or not give us) a language and interpretive categories for exploring our own consciousness and experiences of God?
2. Can images of God drawn from Jesus' experience of God and images of God drawn from a Pauline legal understanding of the atonement be reconciled? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. Does Professor Fang's characterization of the "medieval way of living" ring true or not true? Why?
4. In what ways, if at all, does a "medieval way of living" manifest itself in contemporary Christian culture?
5. Theologically, psychologically, and practically, how might asking "how" God is rather than "who" God is impact both personal and communal spirituality?

### What (or How) Is God?

Wondering what and how God is in the world brings us to the words Spirit and spirit. Spirit points to the "what," to God as vital principle, the *élan vital*, the creative life force, or animating force within creation, while spirit points us to



the “how,” the essential principle, the essence of God’s activity in the world. What follows continues our summing up of major themes in this book.

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## God Is Spirit

In John 4:24, Jesus declares in conversation with a Samaritan woman, “God is Spirit.” It is clear from the gospels, however, that Jesus has more in mind than an impersonal energy or force that both creates the natural world and is the principle of causation and evolution in the natural world. For Jesus, to say God is Spirit seems to mean that God is *incorporeal consciousness*. Although once again our language fails us, we are to understand that in Jesus’ experience, God is revealed as having the attributes of consciousness: awareness, intelligence, thought, will, intentionality.

The presence of God as Spirit, as incorporeal consciousness, is affirmed in the New Testament gospel narratives. His mother, Mary, is said to have conceived him “from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:20). After his baptism by John the Baptist, “the Spirit descended on him” (Mark 1:10). It was “the Spirit that drove him out into the wilderness” to go through a rigorous preparation for his ministry (Mark 1:12). When he delivered his mission manifesto in his home town of Nazareth, he declared “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me” (Luke 4:18). It is “by the Spirit of God” that he casts out demons (Matthew 12:28). He “rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, thanking God for revealing to him things ‘hidden from the wise and the intelligent’” (Luke 10:21). From beginning to end, Jesus carries out his teaching and practice of God’s rule accompanied by the Spirit, inspired by the Spirit, enlightened by the Spirit, and empowered by the Spirit.

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## God Is the Spirit of Creativity

We have seen how the Spirit hovered over chaos “in the beginning” as God brought the world we know into being. We affirm that creation was not a once-for-all event, but rather is on going. Creation is not a clock—made, wound up, left to run until it runs down. Creation, what we would take to be the “necessary” work of the Spirit, once begun continues in the evolution of the universe and in the evolution of life forms.

One of the ways in which the correspondence between Spirit and humankind can be seen is in human creativity. It is interesting how works of magnificent artistry, be it a symphony, a painting, or a poem, are often characterized as “divine.” Human artistic creativity, as well as scientific and technological ingenuity, and the creation of political, economic, and cultural institutions that “choose life,” reflect (and perhaps embody) the Spirit of Creativity that is God.

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## God Is the Spirit of Renewal

All things grow old with the passage of time. Civilizations and everything in them rise and fall. The once vital lose vitality and move toward dissolution. And so it is of all living creatures as well—the cycle of birth, growth, decline, and death. Everything that arises persists for a while and then falls away. As Buddhism teaches, all things are temporal, transient, impermanent. To take Paul a bit out of context, “the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope . . .” (Romans 8:20).

What is the “hope” of creation? The immediate hope of renewal and the eschatological hope of re-creation (cf. Revelation 21:1–6). We discussed renewal in the opening

chapter and pointed to the promise of the renewing Spirit that, “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22). In chapter 8 we saw with respect to living creatures that:

These all look to you  
to give them their food in due season;  
when you give to them, they gather it up;  
when you open your hand, they are filled  
with good things.  
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;  
when you take away their breath, they die  
and return to their dust.  
*When you send forth your spirit, they are created;  
and you renew the face of the ground.*  
(Psalm 104:27–30, emphasis added)

It could be argued—to use the language of Genesis—that humans are correctly exercising their “dominion” when they engage in acts of renewal. Each time we plant the fields, cultivate, harvest, and replant, we are renewing the face of the earth. Each death and each new birth is a renewal. Each struggle to revitalize exhausted, devitalized, dispirited institutions that no longer serve the wholeness and well-being of people and/or the natural environment is a renewal of the face of the earth. Each scientific and technological advancement that enhances previously diminished life is a renewal. We are acting in correspondence with Spirit when our efforts bring about some form of renewal.

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### God Is the Spirit of Truth

To say that God is the Spirit of Truth is not an invitation to abstract philosophical or theological speculation

on “truth.” It does, however, involve us in practical questions of ethical importance. It is not without reason that the Gospel of John expresses the faith of the early church by having Jesus declare, “I am the way, and the *truth*, and the life” (John 14:6, emphasis added). There are many ethical considerations to be drawn from Jesus’ understanding of the rule of God, but chief among them is the truth we pointed to in chapter 8 that Spirit does not discriminate in its caretaking of creation. Love does not discriminate (Matthew 5:43ff.). The notion that some are worthy and some are not is antithetical to Spirit and thus the work of what Jesus called “the father of lies” (John 8:44). That God does not discriminate was not an obvious truth for Jesus’ contemporaries who believed that God had a “preferential option” for the Jews, and it seems not to be an obvious truth to many Christians who harbor beliefs of “predestination” and “manifest destiny.”

God as the Spirit of Truth, however, tells a different story. Contrary to what we might desire, God has no preference for special nations and peoples. One need only read the Acts 10 account of how Peter learned the “truth” from the Spirit of Truth that he “should not call anyone profane or unclean” (Acts 10:28). Peter had come to understand that “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34). It was the Spirit who told Peter not to make discriminatory distinctions (Acts 11:12). The same truth is reflected in Paul’s proclamation that discriminatory distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female have no place in a Christian world view because all are “one in Christ” (Galatians 3:28).

Whenever people work to dismantle the “isms” that plague our world, for example, racism, sexism, ageism, and classism, their work is an expression of the Spirit of Truth. Whenever people work to dismantle the power structures that exploit, oppress, or brutalize some people for the benefit of other people, their work is an expression of the Spirit

of Truth. And it must be said that whoever does this “work,” regardless of their religious commitments, is worshipping the Spirit in “spirit and in truth” (John 4:23–24).

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### God Is the Spirit of Justice

To say that God is the Spirit of Truth is akin to saying that God is the Spirit of Justice. The truth we just mentioned demands justice, that is, fairness, equitableness, parity with respect to those things that make life “abundant” (John 10:10). The rule of God is egalitarian. This is the untiring message of the prophets of ancient Israel.

To give just two examples, over against the rampant social and economic injustices of his society, the Prophet Isaiah declares that God is “laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation. . . . And [he] will make justice the line, and righteousness the plummet; [and] hail will sweep away the refuge of lies . . .” (Isaiah 28:16–17). And as we mentioned in chapter 5, according to the prophet Amos, God is not interested in, indeed God detests, the worship of people who tolerate or practice injustice and waits for the day when “justice [will] roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).

Clearly justice as envisioned by the Spirit of Justice has little to do with legal definitions and codes of justice that prevail in most human societies. Such legal codes often, in the name of justice, legally sanction attitudes, values, and behaviors that radically contradict justice viewed through the prism of the rule of God. Whenever men and women work in favor of, and are willing to suffer and perhaps even die for, justice understood as simple fairness, equitableness, and parity among peoples in the things that enhance human dignity and well-being, they are standing on the “foundation stone” established by the Spirit of Justice.

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## God Is the Spirit of Counsel

To call God the Spirit of Counsel is to evoke more than one image. Most people when faced with difficult and complex realities will seek the “counsel” of others, particularly those whose knowledge or expertise in the area of difficulty or complexity is greater than their own. In the business world, we might seek the advice of fellow professionals; in our personal lives we might seek the counsel of friends or family members. In some cases we might seek the counsel of a pastor, a social worker, or a psychiatrist—individuals who are often referred to as “counselors.” These are all people who can give us advice, help us solve problems, open new perspectives for us, provide new insights. Such folks, be they family, friends, or professionals, also serve as “truth tellers,” that is, their counsel can help guard against the human tendency for self-deception and moral blindness.

Those with some wisdom will seek counsel from family, friends, colleagues, or professionals when they perceive its necessity for them. Sometimes counsel is offered when it has not been sought; those with some wisdom will pay attention and take it into account. In either case, counsel as positive advice, guidance, direction, and truth-telling is something we all understand and, if we are fortunate, experience. God as the Spirit of Counsel fulfills this function for those who are open to it.

In John 14, Jesus promises his followers just such a “spiritual” counselor when he tells them:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate (helper) to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and *he will be in you*. . . . the Advocate (helper), the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name,

will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” (John 14:16–17, 26, emphasis added)

Christian experience of the indwelling of the Spirit of Counsel has been the impetus for prayers seeking advice and direction in making decisions as to how to live faithfully under the rule of God in the day-to-day world. The meaning of counsel, however, goes beyond seeking advice and direction.

When we are hurt, grieving, anxious, or feeling lost, we seek the counsel of others for encouragement, comfort, and consolation. God as the Spirit of Counsel brings such comfort and consolation to both the community of faith and individuals. In Acts 9:31, Luke tells of how the church lived “in the comfort of the Spirit,” and Paul declares that God is “the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). Both in public worship and in private devotion, it is characteristic of Christian people to seek the encouragement, comfort, and consolation of God, the Spirit of Counsel, and to extend such divine consolation to others who are afflicted in any way.

We have not yet exhausted the meaning of counsel. The words *counsel* and *counselor* are also legal terms and are used as synonyms for attorneys, for those who “advocate” on behalf of others. It is in this sense that Paul states that, “the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26). It is interesting to note that God, as the Spirit of Counsel, advocates not only on our behalf, but also on behalf of Jesus. “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf” (John 15:26).

Each of these meanings of counsel that can be found in an English dictionary are also contained within the Greek words *parakaleo* (verb) and *parakletos* (noun) which are often used in the New Testament to describe the Spirit's activity with respect to both individuals and communities of faith. More than anything else, I suspect that it is confidence in God as the Spirit of Counsel that moves Christians to petitionary and intercessory prayer and action. When Christian men and women are counselors in the full meaning of the term to each other and to those outside the community of Christian faith, they become the occasion for those others to experience God as the Spirit of Counsel.

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### God Is the Spirit of Compassion

Over and again, Jesus, the revealer of God, is described in the Gospels as having "compassion" and mercy. His compassion was indiscriminating. One of the most poignant texts in the Gospels shows Jesus expressing his compassion for the people who were about to kill him: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Matthew 23:37). Even during the agony of crucifixion he continued to express compassion when he advocated for all those complicit in his death: "Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

If human religious traditions emerge from the panhuman quest for the numinous, then thematic correspondence between the traditions is to be expected. That is certainly the case with respect to compassion/mercy. To give one striking example, *tz'u*, compassion/mercy is a Chinese concept deeply rooted in the religious consciousness of Buddhist devotees. Used with other words, the meaning of mercy



and compassion is deepened, for example, *tz'u pei*, which combines *tz'u* (mercy and compassion) with *pei* (a heart of pity, sympathy, or sadness). The emphasis becomes “pity for another in distress and the desire to help that person.” Other examples would be *tz'u hsin*, a compassionate heart, *tz'u yi*, the mind of compassion, and *tz'u yen*, the compassionate eye.<sup>8</sup> When the word *pei* (pity, sympathy) is combined with *yuan* (vow), you have a term which expresses the “the great pitying vow of Buddhas and bodhisattvas to save all beings.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the term bodhisattva refers to an enlightened being who, out of compassion, forgoes entry into Nirvana until all beings are enlightened. It is correct to say that Buddhism, particularly in its Mahayana expressions, revolves around the theme of compassion or mercy (*tz'u pei*). It stems from the Buddhist religious insight that life is suffering and that compassion is necessary in enabling people to journey through this life of suffering (*samsara*) to finally reach eternal bliss (*nirvana*).

In Christianity as well as in Buddhism, the theme of compassion/mercy elucidates the relationship between God and humankind and God and the non-human world. God is experienced as the Spirit of Compassion, and it is here that we can so clearly see how our different linguistic attempts to describe the numinous collapse into each other. God as the Spirit of Compassion is the Spirit of Creativity, and the Spirit of Renewal, and the Spirit of Truth, and the Spirit of Justice, and the Spirit of Counsel, and all together express the fundamental truth of Christian faith and experience: God is Love.

When people look upon each other with compassion, the Spirit of Compassion looks through their eyes and to be spiritual is to look upon the world with compassion. When describing God's caretaking of creation, God's indiscriminating love for all people, Jesus told his followers that they were to “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Given the context, the text could be translated as “Be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate.”

## A Child's Meditation on God

How, then, should we conclude our reflections on God? Jesus said that the rule of God belonged to children (Mark 10:14). Perhaps, then, a poem on God by a child would be most appropriate. With these simple, but certainly profound words, Gayatri Lobo Gajiwala, a twelve-year-old girl from Indonesia, expressed her sense of God as Spirit:

To me, God is a diary  
To whom I can tell all  
To whom when I'm in trouble  
I can very easily call.

From whom I have nothing to hide  
To whom I can easily show  
Every single bit of me  
For She already knows.

To Her I can tell my story  
No matter how short or long  
I can tell Her everything  
Whether it's right or wrong.

But unlike the usual diary  
What I tell Her no one knows  
For after I have finished  
My book is shut tight—closed.

Then when I want to talk to Her  
I have a special key  
This key is really important  
And it is reserved only for me.

And maybe God is your diary too  
And you have your special key  
But even if you don't, be sure  
God is still there for you and me.<sup>10</sup>

This is a prayer from the heart of a twelve-year-old girl, innocent, sincere and simple, but filled with powerful images and metaphors that make it rather extraordinary. "God is a diary," says the prayer. This diary is a life story told in the privacy of the spirit. This diary consists of the happenings, thoughts, and reflections that take place between a human spirit and the divine Spirit. It reflects the human longing for the divine Spirit. It is filled with the hopes and despairs, tears and laughter that the diarist "writes into" God. The diary also contains the responses of God that pave the way in the diarist's life journey. In short, the diary is a metaphor for the conversation between a human person and God in the fellowship of spirit with Spirit. Without the "correspondence" between spirit and Spirit, the conversation is not possible.

The prayer of this little girl speaks of "a special key" to open the diary. What is this special key? We are not told explicitly. All she says is that the special key "is really important." We can, however, venture the guess that if the diary is God, then what opens the diary for the little girl to record her life is the divine will to love expressed throughout creation in the ubiquity of Spirit. God as Spirit is the "key." Not God as a theological construction, not God affirmed in the belief systems and creeds of the varying churches and religions, not God handed down by religious traditions and authorities, but God as Spirit, the Spirit that was "in the beginning," that inspirits all creation, and that, as Jesus noted, blows freely like the wind where it will (John 3:8). Without this Spirit, our prayer would not be a conversation between us and God. It would no more than a sad and futile monologue, no more than our talking to ourselves.