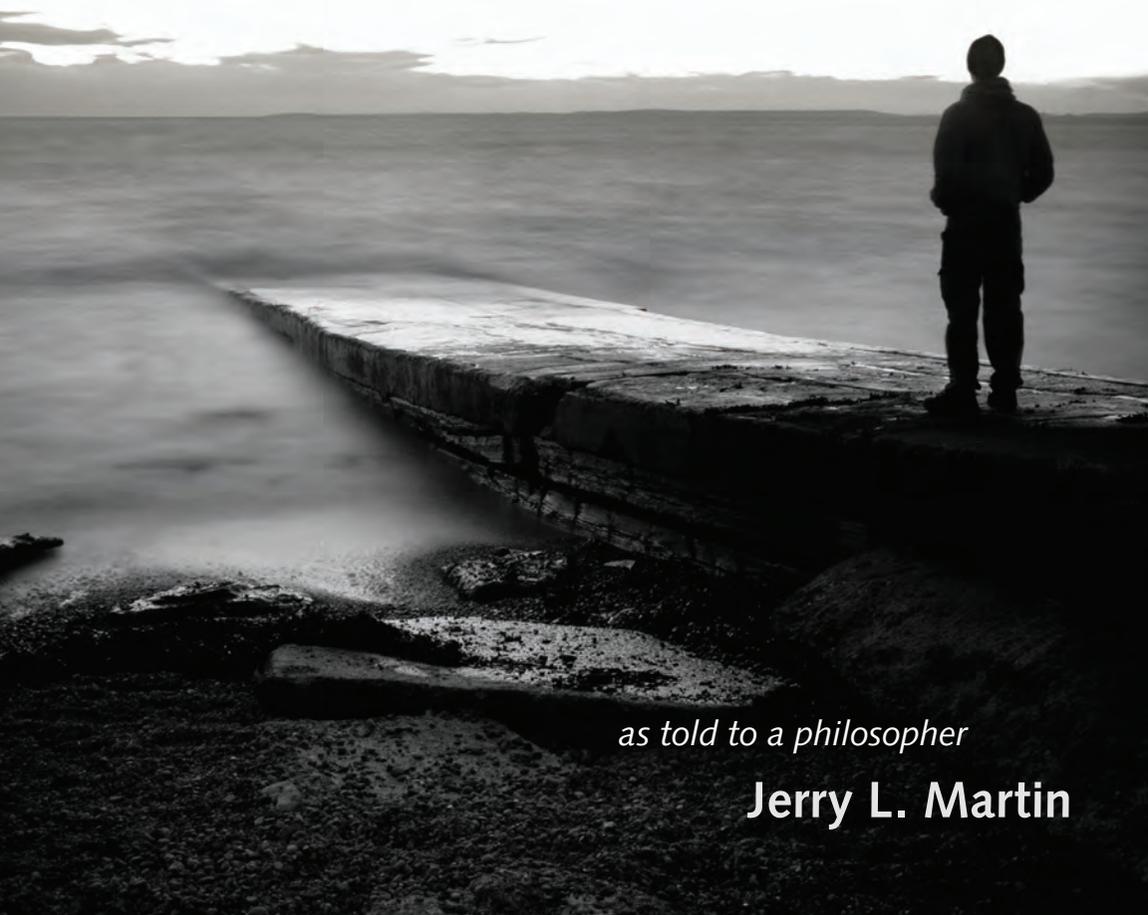


GOD

an autobiography



as told to a philosopher

Jerry L. Martin

God: An Autobiography, as Told to a Philosopher

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www.godanautobiography.com

**For media inquiries and requests, please contact
Jerry L. Martin at
jerry.martin@godanautobiography.com**

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For Abigail

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The Beginning

The first time God spoke to me I didn't believe He existed.

Billy Graham once reported, "I know God exists—I talked to him this morning." Theatrical posturing, I thought. Graham may have been talking to God, but was God talking back? I remembered psychologist Thomas Szasz's comment: "If somebody talks to God, that's praying. If God talks to them, that's schizophrenia."

I had been raised in a Christian home, but those beliefs did not survive Philosophy 101, where arguments for the existence of God were shot down like skeets. Since that time, I had been what one of my professors, Philip Wheelwright, called himself: a "pious agnostic"—respectful of belief in a higher reality but, when it came right down to it, staying eye-level with the natural world, the world of experience as I then knew it.

It is said you do not have to believe in God in order to pray. That is what happened to me.

I had been divorced for many years. I always thought I would be happier married but, as the decades rolled on without Miss Right showing up, I began to think she never would.

Then one day, the phone rang.

It was Abigail Rosenthal. She was a professor at Brooklyn College, a school with an outstanding liberal arts curriculum. The new college president had decided to replace core courses that opened students to the whole world of learning with—telescope from wide vista

to a keyhole view—a focus on the borough of Brooklyn, the one thing the students knew already, in fact knew better than their professors.

Rosenthal and a colleague in the history department were fighting the change. They had succeeded in rallying most of the faculty, but the administration was driving a steamroller. She called the higher education organization I ran in Washington, D.C. Could we help? “Yes, that is what we do,” I said.

Our only hope was to take the issue to the public, and we did. The battle raged in the press through the spring and into the summer. Abigail and I talked almost daily, strategizing and getting the story out. None of the talk was personal, and we never met, yet I found myself thinking, “This is a very remarkable woman.”

In fact, I fell in love with her on the phone.

And we won the fight. In September, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published a front-page story on the Brooklyn Connections fight with a full-page photo of Abigail and her colleague, along with a small, smiling photo of me on the inside.

A week later, I went to New York to give a talk about the struggle and, for the first time, we met in person. I brought her up to the front to field questions. She was funny and articulate and smart—and really cute! So cute, in fact, that I was overcome with shyness and, instead of lingering, made a quick get-away.

I feared I had missed my chance. I had to get back to New York. In December, I made a point of going to the city “on business” and made sure we had dinner. We mainly talked about issues at the college, but I thought I might have struck a spark. Her diary entry the next day, she later told me, was “Dinner last night was disturbingly interesting.”

The pace of our phone calls quickened and grew more personal. But, other than hanging on her every word, I was not fessing up to my feelings. And she, of course, was playing her cards close—as much as her impetuosity permitted. Thinking to maintain her feminine elusiveness, she nevertheless warned, in a stream of modals, “If there may be or might or possibly could be something personal, at some point perhaps, between us, we should make sure it doesn’t inter-

fere with our efforts for Brooklyn College.” My lips said, “Of course, the college comes first,” but my heart said, “She loves me!”

I was not just in love; I was completely overwhelmed. I suppose it’s a well-known phenomenon. Poets have sung about it ever since poets learned to sing; yet I had never really believed in love, not romantic love. Being in love was a delusion, based on projection—even the poets call it a form of madness—the kind of thing you expect to outgrow as you get older. I was only looking for compatibility, even had a Myers-Briggs personality profile in mind.

Instead, I found myself so totally, deeply in love that it did seem like a form of madness. “If you knew how much I love you, you would think I was crazy,” I told her. I was a pretty buttoned-down, levelheaded guy, but on one occasion, I said “I feel as if I have always loved you.” I am not sure what that meant, but I know it is how I felt. I would have been in sad shape had Abigail not had similar feelings, but she too responded to what she called “the summons of love.”

Being in love was so strange to me that—what does an academic do?—I read books, mainly relationship books, but also an interesting collection of love letters by famous writers over the ages. The contrast was striking. The relationship books reflected something like my earlier attitude. They warned about projection, talked about the ups and downs of relationships, cautioned you against your own feelings. The love letters were the opposite—sometimes sweetly so, sometimes tragically so, as when Edith Wharton writes desperately loving letters to a man not worthy of her. The love letters testified to the reality of love but also justified the warnings issued by psychologists.

Women are supposed to be the experts in love. What do *they* think it is? Ah, I thought, they read novels, love stories. One had been left in a place I was staying. It was the first book that really told me about love. Love is not a set of psychological triggers firing off wildly. In a sense, it’s not subjective at all, not a mere feeling. It is an ontological fact, a bond between two people that is deep within the structure of reality itself. That is what women, or at least some of them, know.

Being in love was not only a profound new experience, it shook my worldview. My whole life took on a new meaning. No, that is not quite right. My life went from a collection of purposes to *having*

a meaning. It went from black and white to Technicolor. No, more radical than that, it went from a two-dimensional universe to a three-dimensional—or, as it turned out, n-dimensional—universe. I felt surprise and joy and gratitude. I did not know whom to thank, but an extraordinary gift had come into my life.

One summer morning I felt an urge to express my thanks, to pray—to Whomever. I did not see any reason not to express what I genuinely felt. So I fell to my knees, as I had been taught as a child, and thanked “the Lord.”

I now believed in love, but not much else. I did not know if I was praying to the God of Israel, to Jesus of Nazareth, or, for all I knew, to the Lord Krishna worshipped by Hindus. Or simply to a benign universe. I didn’t worry about that. I just poured out my heart in prayer.

A few weeks later, I felt this same urge and said another prayer of thanks, still addressed to a Lord I did not actually believe in. This time, to my surprise, I offered to be of service. To a God I didn’t believe existed. Inconsistent of course, but not insincere.

Toward the end of a long summer day, Abigail and I were sitting on a park bench along the Potomac, across from the Lincoln Memorial. She was writing in her journal and I was pondering the challenge of making a future together. Without thinking about it, much less expecting an answer, I prayed again, this time asking for guidance.

Immediately a visual image appeared, like a hologram, a few feet in front of me—a rising, sparkling, multi-colored fountain. It radiated vitality and promise, an answer to my prayer. But there was more.

A voice spoke.

Listen

I am the God of All

The voice did not sound particularly different from my own inner voice, but *it wasn't me talking*. I looked at Abigail to see if she heard it, but she continued writing, undisturbed. I asked, not out loud, "What is this voice? Who are you?"

The answer came back:

I am God.

"The God of Israel?"

I am the God of All.

The questions that led me to pray evaporated. Then the encounter was over. For the moment.

The historian Paul Johnson writes in his spiritual memoir about having once called the prime minister's office and, instead of getting the secretary's secretary, the prime minister herself answered. "It happened to me once with a prime minister," Johnson writes. "But with God it happens all the time."

I don't know if Johnson's experience is like mine, but from that day on, when I prayed, I almost always received a verbal response, often with quite specific guidance. At first, it just seemed an oddity that went too much against my agnostic worldview to be taken seriously. Once my son had classical music playing in his ear all the time. It turned out to be an ear infection, causing buzzing signals that his

brain skillfully translated into Mozart. Maybe my prayers were like that.

I would tell Abigail about these odd experiences. While I always disdained paranormal reports, near death experiences, and the like, she did not. I assumed she put the voice in that category. I didn't really know because, usually, she just took in what I told her and didn't say much. She explained to me later that she thought I was engaged in a sensitive communication and did not want to create static.

Then, one day, she did speak up. "Are you going to take the voice seriously, or is this just entertainment?"

She had put her finger on the contradiction I was living. The voice was too real and benign and authoritative to ignore. Yet I could not imagine acting on it. Well, actually I could and did act on it, but without taking it seriously. I would be told to do this or that. Sometimes the guidance was about some matter facing me that day, and following the guidance usually worked out pretty well. Other times I received arbitrary directives which, since harmless, I followed. For example, one morning, Abigail and I had just sat down to breakfast when I was told,

Don't eat.

So I just sat there for maybe fifteen or twenty minutes.

You can eat now.

I always did as I was told, but it was still more like a game of Captain-may-I than a life imperative. I was not ready to answer Abigail's question.

On a visit to Boulder, where I used to teach, I told a former colleague about my experiences. I was afraid he would think, "poor Jerry, he has gone daft." But he listened with interest, and recommended that I read American philosopher William James's classic essay, "The Will to Believe." An influential British scientist had declared, as a principle of the ethics of belief, "It is *wrong*, always, everywhere, and for every one, to believe *anything* upon insufficient evidence." The scientist had religion in his crosshairs.

James responded that there are some beliefs that, if you accept them, will shape your whole life. And shape it in a different way if you do not. You cannot remain neutral; yet evidence is inconclusive

either way. You just have to decide which belief you would rather live with.

My situation seemed to be exactly what James was describing. Facing a similar choice between belief and unbelief, the seventeenth-century philosopher Blaise Pascal had seen it as a wager. If I believe in God and am wrong, well, I'm dead anyway, so I haven't lost much. But if I don't believe in God, and there is one . . . well, you might say, there's hell to pay.

I faced my own wager. Either I follow the voice or I don't. If I follow the voice and it is *not* divine, what is the worst that can happen? Well, I would be a fool, maybe a laughingstock, and would say goodbye to an excellent career. But if I decide not to follow the voice and it *is* divine, then I would have missed my purpose in this life. What if Moses had done that? Or George Fox, the founder of the Quakers? The Old Testament is full of people called by God, who at first demur and only reluctantly heed the call. Even Moses worries ("Suppose they do not believe me") and feels inadequate to the task ("I have never been eloquent. . . . I am slow of speech and slow of tongue").

I am not comparing myself to these great religious leaders, but all of us in our lives face moments when we have to decide whether to respond to a certain call—be it the call of duty or service or simply, as Joseph Campbell puts it, to "follow your bliss"—rather than continue a more conventional or comfortable course. If I had to live with one worst-case scenario or the other, I could live with being a fool, if that's what it came to, but I could not live with having refused God's call.

Making a decision to believe is not quite the same as accepting that belief in your bones. It is more like the first step toward believing. My philosophy still had no place for God—especially for a God who talks to *me*. Outside the Bible, who talks to God?

Another notable book by William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, helped answer this question. The founder of pragmatism, the only distinctively American school of philosophy, James also taught physiology and psychology. He was a man of science but, for him, empiricism did not mean restricting our understanding to what science registers. He looked without prejudice at all kinds of human

human experience. He talks about famous people such as George Fox as well as ordinary people who have received answers to prayer or psychic intuitions or visitations from recently-departed family members.

Many people have had moments of divine or non-natural awareness, probably more than feel comfortable talking about them publicly. Duke English professor Reynolds Price writes about his own battle with cancer. During the course of his treatment, he had an encounter with Jesus in a vision or, as it seemed to him, in another dimension. After he published his story, he received letters from many people with similar experiences—experiences that they had never told anyone. My experience was not as out-of-line as I had thought.

I decided to follow the voice and see where it would lead me.

Listen to Me— even when I whisper

It seemed to be a training in obedience. One day, after breakfast at a little café in Alexandria, I was told,

Don't go to work.

“Lord, do you know we have to get that grant proposal in today?”

Of course.

My organization lived on grant money. But the voice said not to go in. What to do? Well, the sky is not going to fall if the proposal goes in the following day. I would go back to my apartment.

As I turned on the ignition, the voice spoke again.

You can go to work now.

I remember that incident because something was at stake, but usually I was told do something trivial, such as to listen to a different radio station or sit in a different chair. As these arbitrary commands continued—mounted as it seemed—Abigail expressed concern. This sounded more like Boot Camp than spiritual guidance. Maybe I shouldn't do *everything* I was told. Maybe I should, as she put it, “use your intelligence.” I was puzzled. Was I supposed to second-guess God?

The next day I stopped at Border's bookstore near Pentagon City. On the way out, I felt guided to move in a particular direction, like a dowser following his stick: first straight ahead, next to the right, then straight ahead, now stop. I was at the religion section. I felt guided down to the third shelf on the right, and finally to a particular book.

It was a book I never would have chosen on my own: John Calvin's commentary on the Gospel of John. I know that Calvin is one of the great theologians of the modern era, but I had an impression of him as stern and rigid. I picked up the book and it opened to John 8:28, where Jesus says, "I do nothing on my own." Calvin explains that "Christ wants to prove that he does nothing without the Father's command . . . he depends entirely on his will and serves him sincerely . . . he does not just partially obey God, but is entirely and without exception devoted to his obedience." It was a lesson in obedience.

Near the register, there was a display with another book I never would have bought on my own: *The Ten Commandments*, by Dr. Laura Schlesinger and Rabbi Stewart Vogel. Many people like Doctor Laura but the few times I had heard her on the radio, she seemed harsh rather than loving. I believe in tough love, but she just sounded tough. However, I opened it and my eyes fell on a line bold-faced in the text. It is where the people of Israel accept the covenant: "Everything that God has spoken we will do!" Another example of total obedience.

I had been led to one other passage in Calvin's commentary. John 9:4 says, "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work." Calvin comments, "as soon as God enlightens us by calling us, we must not delay, in case the opportunity is lost."

The note of urgency reminded me of the story a village chief in eastern Brazilia told of his own encounter with a divine being. He had encountered the being while out hunting, but was too scared to speak and the being left. "At night while I was asleep he [the divine being] reappeared to me. . . . He led me some distance behind the house and there showed me a spot on the ground where, he said, something was lying in storage for me. Then he vanished. The next morning I immediately went there and touched the ground with the tip of my foot, perceiving something hard buried there. But others came to call me to go hunting. I was ashamed to stay behind and joined them. When we returned, I at once went back to the site he had shown me, but did not find anything anymore." He had missed his moment. I did not want to miss mine.

So I began to take the prayers more seriously and started writing some of them down. Sometimes the voice would speak to me even when I was not praying. One day I was driving to New York, running behind schedule. Along the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, I kept hearing a faint sound, not much more than a gnat in the ear, and I kept trying to “brush it away.” But it was persistent, and so I finally paid attention. It was the voice telling me to pull over and pray. I don’t remember the rest of what I was told, but the first words I have always remembered,

Listen to Me—even when I whisper.

I have tried to do that ever since but it is not always easy.

In spite of the voice, I wondered why, most of the time, God is irritatingly illusive. But I was told,

You see Me all the time.

I looked around and tried to see God, but nothing registered. Martin Buber talks about saying Thou to nature, and that was about as close as I could get. If God wants to be so coy, why does He bother to get our attention at all? How, I asked, could our response possibly matter to Him?

It is very important. It is at the heart of my being.

Human recognition is at the heart of God’s being? I found that intriguing, but it only heightened the paradox of an invisible God who wants to be seen.

Abigail was still teaching full-time in New York, and I was working in Washington, D.C. We saw each other only on all-too-brief weekends. Come summer, we were spending more time together. She needed a car. I looked at the ads and found a nice little white used car. The guy selling it was youth minister at his church. I started to explain I was buying it for my girlfriend. No, that would not sound right, and it was not true. I was buying it for my future wife. “I’m buying it for my fiancée.”

There had never been any doubt that I would marry Abigail. I never considered anything short of that. But, in my methodical way, I had held off for six long months. It was time to pop the question. I

took her to a dark, romantic Spanish restaurant in Alexandria. I don't know how we behaved in those days but the waiters called us the love-birds, and they put us in the "lovers' cove" upstairs. I had written her a little poem, a bad poem. I can't write poetry, but I thought the effort might soften her up. But it was not our night. A thunderstorm came up and, just as I was warming up to ask her, drip-drip-drip right in front of us. Ink in the poem ran. We scooted the table to the side. And then I told her I loved her and wanted to "spend at least one lifetime together" and would she be my wife? I knew well the scene in Hollywood movies. The woman looks longingly into her paladin's eyes and gushes, "oh yes, yes!" Well, not the philosophical Abigail. I asked, and waited. And waited. Then waited some more. She seemed lost in deep thought. Like an underwater swimmer, I was holding my breath. Finally, "You haven't answered my question." In the gravest of tones, she answered. "Yes." Why the long pause? "It was a serious question and I thought I should give it a serious answer."

By the time we went through the legal hoops, there were only three days before Abigail returned to teaching. The only solution was to "elope." No announcements, no visiting family, a weekend "honeymoon" in Annapolis. We would have a simple interreligious wedding with a rabbi and a priest (my upbringing was Protestant, but he was an old friend from grad school) and the mandatory two witnesses. We barely managed to reserve the chapel in time and, when we arrived, almost late, the severe young man guarding the entrance refused to let us in. "We're here to be married," I explained, thinking our wedding finery would speak for itself. "Yeah, likely story," his eyes said. "It's the old dressed-up-like-a-bride scam." Finally, we convinced him we were not disguised Visigoths.

To us, the ceremony was not just the last step of a legal process. It was important to be married "before God." *His* presence was required. Yet it all seemed so slap-dash—the priest couldn't get permission to officiate and the rabbi forgot to bring the service we had agreed upon—that I actually worried that God might not be present. "Lord, will you be with us?"

You couldn't keep me away! My presence will be fully with you. I bless this marriage. I will be present in every pore of your being.

It was a simple and beautiful ceremony, and we did feel blessed. But, as time went on, I found I was praying but not really listening. I was avoiding something.

I am an evolving God

I had entered college a Christian and left an agnostic. I had no desire to be “washed in the blood” again. The question I had been avoiding was, “Do You want me to become a Christian?”

No, I don’t want you to join any denomination.

“Is it okay for me to read about Jesus?” I asked about Jesus rather than Christ. Jesus is an historical person, who certainly existed, but whether he was the Christ, the Messiah, is a religious question. I did not want my question to prejudge the answer.

Yes, but reading through the Old Testament first is a good approach.

“The God of the Old Testament seems terrifying. You do not seem terrifying, Lord.”

I was young then. I had not had much experience with people. I am an evolving God.

God was *young* then? He is *evolving*? I thought God was supposed to be perfect, eternal, and unchanging. I had been an agnostic, but I thought I had a clear idea of what I was agnostic *about*. I was usually disturbed to be told something that did not fit my preconceptions. Yet this bit of news, while puzzling, did not upset me. The God who spoke to me was very much a personal God. It was surprising but not out of character if, like other persons, He changes over time. Later I would learn this is why God wanted to talk to me.

I was relieved I did not have to become a Christian, but I still wondered whether Christian beliefs about Jesus were true. “Lord, is Jesus Your Son?”

Yes.

I wondered about the doctrine of the Trinity, that God comprises the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. “Lord, is Jesus God?”

Yes.

I had trouble tracking these answers. “But You told me I should not become a Christian.”

Yes, you should not.

“But You just said ...”

To believe that Jesus is My Son is not the same as being a Christian. Christianity is a sect, with some truths but many limitations. Study Jesus, learn from him, but do not become a Christian.

So Jesus is God. Or is he *a* god. Perhaps all highly spiritual people are god-like. “Lord, does Jesus have a unique role or is he one of many manifestations of God?”

Unique.

“Is he the key to saving or healing the world?”

Yes, he is an important part of it.

“Is the language of ‘believing in him’ apt?”

Yes.

“Should I pray to Jesus or to God?”

It is the same.

The same! That certainly sounded Christian to me.

Protestants don’t “worship Mary,” as they suspect Catholics of doing, but for some reason I asked, “What about Mary?”

The feminine side of God—the healing side—is important in healing the world. Mary is a good embodiment, representation, reflection of that side of God.

My wife is Jewish and I was afraid all this talk about Jesus would upset her. But, like someone who talks too much about the very thing he wants to avoid, I asked, “Lord, did the Jews make a mistake in not being open to the new covenant announced by Jesus?”

Yes.

Oh, no, here it goes!

They became wedded to the covenant, the covenant with the people of Israel in their Messianic destiny. That was, and remains, a valid covenant.

But it is not the only covenant. I make many covenants with human beings. They are all valid and have their own destiny, and work together toward a common destiny for mankind.

The new covenant of Jesus is not as incompatible with the covenant with Israel as Jews tend to suppose. It is compatible, but does not supersede, does not erase or nullify, the old covenant.

I wanted to nail this down. “Does Jesus replace the covenant?”

No, he fulfills it.

That answer was consistent with the New Testament. In Matthew 5:17, Jesus says, “Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”

Like an attorney driving a point home, I asked again, “Does Jesus fulfill the covenant in a way that *replaces* it?”

No, it remains fully valid.

But, back to my first question, “Should Jews, in Jesus’ day, have accepted him as Messiah?”

Yes.

Okay, Abigail would just have to live with that answer. “Lord, why didn’t they accept Jesus?”

Many different reasons. He was too radical, flouted their traditions, spoke a language they found uncomfortable, alien. It’s not easy to believe. It is easier to pray for a distant Messiah than to accept a present one.

I didn’t seem to be able to stop myself. “Lord, was it a *sin* for Jews to reject Jesus?”

No, no more or less than all those years you did not believe. It is a sin in a sense, but it is also much of the human condition not to believe. People are skeptical for good reasons, having to do with their intelligence, as well as bad.

Finally, I went over the top. “Did Jews kill Christ?”

That’s a silly question. Did Americans—or Southerners—kill Lincoln? Some Jews, some Gentiles were equally implicated. That is a non-issue.

Good. At least that issue was taken off the table.

I had also heard that St. Paul redefined the people of Israel to include all people who believe in Jesus. “Lord, are Christians part of the people of Israel?”

People who believe in Jesus are members of My people.

I would often tell Abigail what I had been told, and usually she reserved comment. But, when she heard that Jews should have accepted Jesus, she burst into tears. Two thousand years of pogroms and persecution, ghettos and exile—all for a mistake? I don’t know if that is really an implication of what I had been told but it was certainly a natural reaction. She later told me that, “mistake” or not, the people of the covenant, as the “suffering servant” identified by Isaiah, will always be susceptible to persecution.

After that, I wondered whether I should share everything with Abigail. Perhaps I was supposed to keep it to myself. She is a sensitive person—feelings shoot right through her body. I was told to use discretion.

Do not break the vessel.

Judaism, Christianity, Jews, Jesus—all this upset me, so, for a time, I concentrated on day-to-day matters. One morning I started to ask some trivial question and was interrupted.

You stopped asking about Me because some of the answers disturbed you. They shook your faith.

That was true. When answers upset me, I would start thinking that, surely, this was not the voice of God. “Lord, why is faith like that? Why is Your interaction with us so tenuous and subject to doubt?”

First, it is not. During most times, people have not had trouble believing. Believing in Me or in some gods was—is—the most natural thing in the world.

Second, my “invisibility” has to do with the kind of Being I am. It’s like asking why we can’t see neutrinos. Nobody can see your “mind.” You believe in “other minds” with no greater “evidence.”

God was alluding to the topic of my doctoral dissertation. One of the great philosophical puzzles concerns skepticism with regard to knowledge of other minds. The problem arises from the fact that we do not have direct access to other people's thoughts and feelings. We only observe their outer behavior. In fact, we do not have any proof that others really have inner thoughts and feelings at all. Yet it is reasonable to believe they do. Is God any more elusive than minds? Well, He certainly seems so.

Suffering is the law of growth in the universe

4



I was trying to be flexible, but my mind was being stretched out of shape. Some days I would doubt the voice. It was, after all, in my head and talked a lot like me. But I was told,

My words are coming to you for a reason. Do not worry that it (My voice) sounds like you. It is bound to sound like you (and to use) your vocabulary, your concepts. That is how revelation works ...

As I listen, I have a sense of what God means and spell that out in parentheses.

But notice that what you are now writing is completely different from what you believed prior to prayer—so different, much of it is profoundly uncomfortable and disturbing to you.

Just relax, and put yourself in My hands.

Being reassured by the very voice I was doubting seemed circular. How can you tell whether a message is really from God? I sought advice from a philosopher at a religious college. Did he know of any writings about how to tell if an answer received in prayer is really from God. I learned that my question had an official name, the Problem of Spiritual Discernment, and that indeed it had been addressed. Now I would get to the bottom of it.

The classic text on the question is *The Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). I read it eagerly, but the section on Rules for the Discernment of Spirits sent a chill down my spine:

“It is characteristic of the evil one to transform himself into an angel of light, to work with the soul in the beginning, but in the end to work for himself. At first he will suggest good and holy thoughts that are in conformity with the disposition of a just soul, then, little by little he strives to gain his own ends by drawing the soul into his hidden deceits and perverse designs.”

Evidently, the evil one is a very good con man. Could my voice be a clever deception leading me down the garden path? How could I tell? St. Ignatius explains:

“We must pay close attention to the course of our thoughts, and if the beginning, middle, and end are all good and directed to what is entirely right, it is a sign that they are inspired by the good angel. If the course of the thoughts suggested to us ends in something evil, or distracting, or less good than the soul had previously proposed to do; or if these thoughts weaken, disquiet, or disturb the soul by destroying the peace, tranquility, and quiet which it had before, this is a clear sign that they proceed from the evil spirit.”

My prayers did suggest “good and holy thoughts.” God had certainly not told me to do anything wrong. On the other hand, the prayers did disquiet my agnostic soul. Well, it is actually more complicated than that. The moments when I most “dwelt in God” were calm and reassuring. But I was not always comfortable with what I was told. And I was most disturbed when I was not actually praying, but wondering what people would think if I told them I talk with God—and He talks back!

So I continued to investigate the problem of discernment. I looked for something more recent and found it in *The Art of Praying: The Principles and Methods of Christian Prayer*, by Romano Guardini. According to Monsignor Guardini, “It may happen in contemplation that we have a strange experience. We may have been reflecting on God in faith alone. Suddenly, God is present . . . a wall which was there before is there no more.” Okay, this spoke directly to my situation.

According to Guardini, there follows a period of divided reactions: “Our intuition tells us that this is God or at any rate connected

with Him. The intimation may frighten us. [‘Yes,’ I thought.] We do not know whether we dare presume that this intuition is true and we are uncertain what to do. [‘Yes, exactly.’] However, the intuition becomes a certainty, even an absolute certainty which leaves no room for doubt. [‘That is true also.’]

However, Guardini says, doubts may return “when we discover that other people have no knowledge of these things.” Yes, the problem of what will other people think. This, he says, can lead to total unbelief. “It may also happen that one doubts whether the whole experience had not merely been a delusion or temptation.” Well, I never went that far. But all is not lost, he says, if one follows this advice. “In the face of these difficulties and doubts one should remain calm and trust in God. One should submit to His will and pray for enlightenment.” “Thus,” he concludes, “faith is fortified and love becomes pure.”

In short, there is a problem in believing every voice you hear. But there is also a problem if, having sensed the divine presence, you give in to doubt.

Unfortunately, since Descartes, doubt has been the preoccupation—perhaps the occupational disease—of us epistemologists. “Lord, I am skeptical by nature and that worries me.”

Don’t worry about doubting unless it interferes with faith. Doubting is a natural response of a thinking mind to conflicting evidence. You may doubt—you might always doubt—but faith must transcend doubt as it transcends knowledge.

I determined to follow that path, maintaining a critical distance on my experience of God while, at the same time, yielding to divine guidance. It is not an easy balance to strike, but it seems to be a challenge at the heart of the life of faith.

Is God a Person? When I asked, I was given a complex answer.

Yes and No. I come to you—but not to raindrops—as a Person, and therefore I *am* a Person. One cannot be a Person in some modes without *being* a Person.

But I am also much more than a Person. Just because I seem so

familiar to you—we talk just as persons do—should not mislead you into thinking I am “just a guy.” It is true that I have many of the attributes of a person—desires and a history, for example. But again do not assume that desire and history mean just the same for Me as they do for human beings. Keep in mind that I am definitely *not* a human being.

“But Jesus is.”

Yes.

“Then how can it be right to say that Jesus is *identical* with God, that he *is* God? Two beings cannot be identical if one is human and one is not, one is mortal and the other is not.”

This notion of identity is not helpful here. Jesus’ whole heart and soul and mind were one hundred percent infused with Me. What he said, I said—just as what you are writing now is what I am telling you. And some of your thoughts are put there by Me, which means they are Mine, because they are put there by an indwelling of Me in you, a partial merge, if you will. This is not just inspiration. When I enter something, I really enter it—become infused—“intermingled” is too weak a word because the elements are no longer separately identifiable.

Well, that was a lot to take in. I would have to “let it percolate” as Miss Finley, my high-school Latin teacher, used to say.

Reading the New Testament, I came to the story of an angry Jesus driving the money lenders from the Temple (Mark 11:15-17): “And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. . . .”

“Lord, what I am to make of Jesus’ temper?”

People often irritated him.

“Irritated him? If he is God, wouldn’t he be above that sort of feeling?”

Yes and No. You don’t understand. Jesus is a human being, though he is also part of Me. He is subject to limitations as well as benefits that result from that. He has feelings and emotions. That is

why he can save the world so effectively. He is a model of how a finite creature, with all the pushes and pulls of emotions, can nevertheless give boundless love.

“Okay, that makes sense to me.”

Like others before me, I wondered how a Supreme Being could possibly care about us human beings. Job asks (7:17-18): “What is man, that you make much of him, that you fix your attention upon him—inspect him every morning, examine him every minute?”

“Lord, what are we to You?”

You are my face onto the world. And onto each other—you, whom I love. I want you to love each other. Christ’s two commandments are right.

Matthew 22:37-39: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

They are rooted in the Old Testament. It is hard for Me to love people directly—hard on them, that is. I need people to do it for Me.

It seems that we open the world to God. He experiences the world through us. I remembered French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s argument that, since perception is essentially perspectival—from a vantage point—there is literally no God’s-eye point of view. We are his eyes and ears.

“I have read that our grace or salvation had to be ‘purchased at a price’—namely, God’s giving up His only Son. I really don’t understand this, Lord. Did You really suffer from giving up Your only Son?”

It is more complex than that. God as Son takes on the suffering of mankind, takes it on quite literally and co-suffers with mankind. *I* co-suffer with mankind. Otherwise, I would have put creatures into a fallen (limited) world and watched them suffer from a distance.

Moreover, My growth requires that I suffer. Suffering is the law of growth in the universe. There is even a form of suffering for subatomic particles—the constant disequilibrium and disruption of particles. Like muscles, things grow by being torn apart and healing.

Okay, so we suffer, Jesus suffers, and God suffers, but the question remains: How does the fact that suffering is divinely shared make anything better?

You got a glimpse of life after death

I don't care whether there is life after death. That may seem odd, but I tend to be a contrarian with regard to my own feelings, a habit since childhood. I do not live a roller-coaster of hopes and fears. My emotions are like the plains of Kansas, so flat water doesn't know which way to run. That includes the afterlife.

Still, as long as I had God on the line, it seemed like something I should ask about. When I asked, I was reprimanded. I was told that I didn't really want to know, I was asking merely because I thought I should, and I should figure out why I didn't want to know.

At first, I had no idea, but then it came to me. As I pictured the afterlife, it was boring and lonely, like driving all night on one of those long western highways.

Then I was given a series of images—more accurate ways to picture the afterlife. The first was being immersed in wonders of nature of incomparable beauty. The second was being an Einstein whose mind now grasped fully all the vast mysteries of the universe, having the ultimate “aha!” experience over and over again. Another was listening with full intensity to music more lovely than any the world has ever known. Or, finally, it was like being in love, but with a vaster compass, sustained over endless time, and receiving boundless love in return.

That night I had a dream.

I was a young man in the Navy. We were told we would ship out the next day, but were given a few hours leave the evening before. My buddy had to go do something first—fix a ship or something. So I went to check out with the “sergeant.” You needed to turn in two forms. I had misplaced one and assumed they would give me another but, no, they were teaching me a lesson in Navy discipline. I saw my friend’s forms lying there, so I “borrowed” one of his, thinking that, savvy in the ways of the Navy, he would know how to get around the problem. Later I felt I had done the wrong thing.

The scene changed. I was driving through Kentucky, heading home to my family (though, in real life, I have no family in Kentucky). Somehow I found myself in an institutional compound of stark concrete buildings enclosed by thick walls. The inhabitants—inmates?—seemed friendly. But some began to suffer mental decline and animal-like deformities. First there were just a few victims—we all had the condescendingly charitable attitude, “poor Joe”—but the condition kept spreading, and finally afflicted me. I looked grotesque, my head oversized and ape-like, and I began losing memory and focus.

It became evident that the people in charge meant us no good. That night, I escaped over the wall, and was hunted. I came to a Hindu monastery run by women, perhaps nuns. I felt God guide my words and, to my surprise, I said, “I need help but, more importantly, I can help you.” They were in financial trouble. I said I could get \$10,000 for “each one.”

About this time I woke up. It was the middle of the night, but I sat up for a few minutes. Abigail was asleep by my side. The dream continued even as I was awake. As people visited the monastery, I told them my story—I was still deformed—and they were moved by it. I began giving advice and helping people, and then praying for their healing, successfully I guess. My personal story was published, and more people came. Although I was still ugly, my face took on a look that was pleasant for people to look upon. The main nun and I became lovers or soul mates. Then I died.

I expected the dream to end there, but it continued. At some point, I had lain down and gone back to sleep.

I found myself in heaven. There were glorious lights and an airy openness. From that vantage point, one could survey the whole universe, seeing everything through God's eyes, as it were, and with His understanding. I could see all the people on earth, past and present, but I saw them, not as a crowd, but one by one and felt a God-like deep personal concern for each person.

The nun, along with a lover from a different life (a version of Abigail from the times of ancient Israel) were with me, very loving, but without a sexual dimension and without jealousy. And I thought the dream had come to a conclusion.

But, no, I found myself in the world again, in some faraway land, perhaps China, first as a baby in a basket in a field. A moment later the baby turned into a peasant working in the field. As the peasant, I forgot the previous experiences, but I had an attitude of kindness and benign understanding that seemed to carry over.

And then the dream ended.

It could probably be read as an allegory—my having done something wrong, suffered for it, offered service which was redemptive, and enjoyed an afterlife characterized by love. I did not think about it that way at the time, but two aspects did stay with me: first, looking at all of humanity from a God's eye view, and seeing and loving each person in his or her particularity; and, second, the surprising rebirth in which I start all over again but with some kind of retention of life's lessons.

A few days later, I started praying about daily matters and was interrupted.

If this were our last conversation and you could know only one thing, what would it be?

I thought, what is it that affects me personally? "Lord, is there life after death and, if so, what is it like?"

You flunk. You have asked Me a question I have already told you the answer to.

"But not what life after death is like."

The dream I sent you told you that. You got a glimpse of life after death.

There is a second reason you flunk. Your motive is honest but

wrong. You ask only what concerns you. You ask out of desire, and fear of not getting what you desire. You should ask in terms of the good of life, of all life, and of what I want for you, not in terms of what you want for yourself. You should seek understanding.

I tried to step back to see what question my “soul” would ask. “How can I merge with You? I’m not sure if that’s the best way to put it, Lord: be at one with You, at rest with You, at one with Your will?”

The question is adequately formulated. The goal—one way to describe the goal—is to be at one with God, the God of All. At bottom, the Soul’s will *is* the will of God. The Soul is at one with God.

It is not that you and I are literally the same substance, the same particular. It is that we are “at one,” in perfect harmony, and not accidentally so. It is in the nature of what the Soul is, that it is at one with God. Remember that these metaphysical (philosophical) categories are crude and inadequate in the first place.

Back to your question: how can you become at one with God? Of course, the answer is that you already are—your Soul, that is. The task is to come to realize that this is so, to realize it not merely in theory, but in intuitive, felt understanding, in your emotions and feelings, and in practice.

“That’s the goal, Lord? It sounds simple. The one-ness is already inside. All we have to do is to bring our conscious selves along.”

That is right. It is the simplest thing in the world. And everyone, at some level and at some moments, knows it, at least glimpses it. But it is very difficult to actualize in practice. The empirical world—the world of desires and the senses—seems so real and is so powerful that it is extremely difficult to redirect one’s energy.

And the empirical world *is* real, in its own way. The world is not an illusion, a mirage. If it is a mirage, it is one from which you can drink water. No, you must respect the empirical world while at the same time emancipating yourself from it, not letting yourself be identical with your interests in this world.

So the world of our experience (and desire) is quite real—it is the arena in which we live our lives and loves, joys and sorrows. In spite of that, we should not let ourselves be ensnared by it. How are we supposed to pull that off?

I was in the drop of water

I wondered if the traditional “divine attributes” were accurate. “Lord, are You infinite?”

I am boundless.

“Are You omniscient?”

I know everything that is important.

“Are You omnipotent?”

I can do everything I want (care) to do.

God had just contradicted every key attribute in the conventional definition of God. He is not exactly infinite, not exactly omniscient, and not exactly omnipotent. All this was so new, I just didn’t know what to think, but I was beginning to sense that one reason God spoke to me was to clear up some misunderstandings.

I decided to try a different approach. Philosophers have also conceived of God as Being, the very ground of reality. So I asked about that way of understanding God.

Being, pure Being, Being itself, and the like, are not quite right. You need to keep reading and thinking about this.

The great Catholic philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas defined God as that being whose very essence is to be, to exist. “Lord, is to-be—the *esse* of Thomas Aquinas—right?”

Close but not quite right.

“Why the guessing game?” I wondered. “Why don’t You just put the answers in my head?”

That isn't the way the human mind works.

That made sense to me. As a teacher, I understood that minds are not just storage bins you drop things into. Learning is an active process. So I continued the questioning. "Lord, do any of the gods of the world's religions fit You correctly?"

Some—many—come pretty close.

"Lord, is the God of the Old Testament one of the accurate depictions?"

Yes, that is certainly Me. And that is what I was like at that time. I led you to the Miles book because that is something he got right.

I had read and liked Jack Miles' award-winning book, *God: A Biography*. Though a trained theologian, Miles reads the Bible like a novel in which God is the main character. That may sound as if it would fail to do justice to scripture, but it avoids the worries that theologians and historians usually bring to it. He just lets the text—and the character of God—speak for itself.

One day, a New Age friend gave me a mantra that was supposed to "center" one's self. I thought I would give it a try. I don't remember the mantra now, but it was addressed to "the Lord." I asked, "Is the Lord in the mantra You?"

There is only one God but many "lords," many spiritual beings for whom that is not an inappropriate title. Your early prayers—which were addressed to "Lord" and you thought perhaps Lord Krishna or Who-knows-who—were about right. When you address "the Lord," you do not have to specify or have in mind a particular spiritual entity. The Lord who is right for you at that time will respond. The Lord that was right for your early prayers was Me, and so I answered.

I had a very basic question. The God who speaks to me is personal and, in human experience, persons are either male or female. The voice I heard was definitely a masculine voice but sometimes, in some indefinable way, also had a feminine aspect. To my surprise, the answer came in a female voice.

There are many sides to God, some of which *you* might call feminine.

Then, one day, I had an experience that felt like the feminine presence of God—like a powdery shower, perfumed talc being sprinkled over my whole being.

“Lord, is there a special meaning to the feminine presence?”

You need both (masculine and feminine). What you call the masculine presence gives you strength and energy. It is a bonding in My service. The so-called feminine gives you grace and peace. It is a healing between you and Me.

Abigail asked if I had ever had any spiritual experiences in the past. At first I said “no.” I had forgotten two events early in life. Well, not actually forgotten, but set them aside. That’s what people do in our secular age. A woman I know recently took a boat trip up the Amazon. One night, she awakened when everyone else was fast asleep, and went up to the deck. The entire galaxy was splayed across the sky. She was enveloped by the dark sights and murmuring sounds of the jungle, teeming with life in the midst of tranquility. It was an immersion in the universe itself. She did not call the experience mystical or even religious, but it was certainly an epiphany, a moment of intimate connection with the Whole, full of awe, wonder, and reverence.

My friend’s experience was in a more impressive setting than my two moments. The first occurred when I was just a kid. One of my chores was watering the lawn. I had run water in the shrubs and bent down to turn off the faucet. I don’t know why I lingered for a moment, crouching down, looking at the tap but, as I did, a last drop of water slowly formed on the bottom edge and hung there. I looked at that drop of water in a way I had never looked at anything before. I saw it—how to describe it?—in its full presence, its suchness, its integrity as an independent existent in the community of being. When I later read in Buber about encountering Nature as Thou, this experience came to mind. It was not as if the drop of water had a mind or soul or was looking back at me or anything like that. Yet I no longer saw it as merely an *it*, merely an item in the inventory of the universe. I saw the drop of water as, in a sense, a member of what Immanuel Kant called the Kingdom of Ends—the community

of all beings who should be respected as ends-in-themselves, not just as means for the use of others. This is, of course, language I now use. I don't know how I would have described it at the time. I was just a kid, after all, and it didn't seem worth telling.

The other experience was more arresting and consequential. It was a balmy evening during my senior year at Riverside Poly high school. We used to go downtown to one of those old-style, elegant movie theatres. My friends and I were outside, standing around and joking, waiting for others to arrive. Suddenly, I was in a world of my own, enveloped by concentric circles swirling around a center, like a small spiral galaxy. Just as suddenly, the experience was over. It would have been hard to describe even then, but its meaning was crystal clear. Time had disclosed its essence to me. I did not mention it to my friends, who had not noticed my "absence." I did not tell anyone—whatever understanding I retained I could not have articulated even to myself—but the moment left an imprint. Though not much for poetry, I found myself responding to T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, a deep meditation on the nature of time, and particularly to the lines:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor
fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from
nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

I developed an interest in philosophical questions regarding time and years later published a phenomenological analysis of the experienced "now" that provided a way of understanding Plato's insight that "time is the moving image of eternity."

These two moments—and that of my friend in the Amazon—were divine shafts of light breaking through the clouds, as are many experiences people gloss over and relegate to their mental attics.

Later, I was told,

Think about epiphanic experiences. When did you feel close to Me or most spiritually open?

“I can only remember the two experiences. The first was the I-Thou with a drop of water.”

Yes, that is *very* significant. What did you understand from that experience?

“I understood the subjectivity of all things . . . but I’m not sure that is quite right. I did not imagine the drop of water looking out at me or having feelings or the like. I just encountered the ‘suchness’ of it, its full independent integrity, my respect for it, that we were in some kind of relationship . . .”

That was an encounter with Me. *I was in the drop of water.* Why not? Where else would I be? I am in everything. You suddenly became open to My presence in that drop of water. You did not think of it that way, and you were right. It is not that I as a great mystical being somehow inhabited this tiny object, but you rightly experienced the drop for what it was, and that is precisely how I am “in” things. As you can tell, I am in each thing “fully.”

“Lord, if you were in the drop of water, then are you in each of us also? Are we all part of You?”

You are both other and same (as Me). I need you to be other so that I may encounter another self. I am a Person and, like other persons, define Myself by responding to other persons, and being responded to (by them).

But I also need union, not distance—just as other persons do. You and Abigail are both other and same. You need to be different people—love is a bridge between differences. You also merge spirits at certain moments, though not totally. That is also a kind of completion or fulfillment. Life, including My life, is the dialectic, as you might call it, of same and other, confrontation and union.

We are both other than God and yet the same as God? But same and other are opposites. This did not go down easy for a former logic professor, but I went on. “Lord, are those moments of union with God the goal or are they just nice accompaniments?”

Neither. You shouldn't strive for moments of union per se, for peak experiences. That is self-indulgence, and a mistake of some who seek mystical experience. It is like orgasms—you should not seek them for their own sake. That is an abuse, a kind of idolatry. They happen naturally as the outcome and expression of love. But the experience of union is not just the accidental accompaniment of loving God. It is the essential expression.

Then, late at night, I felt the boundary between me and the world becoming thinner and less distinct. Slowly, subject and object were blending, becoming intimately bound, not standing apart from one another. I was noting this intellectually, but it was not an intellectual experience. It was an ontological experience, an experience of my whole being. Finally, for a few moments, it approached total one-ness, the complete loss of awareness of self. At that point, I pulled back.

“Lord, what is the meaning of this kind of experience?”

There are many levels and kinds of experience with Me—including music. Do not make too much of it. It is good, just let it happen. It does not mean that you are about to become a mystic or anything unworldly. It is not unlike—it is on a continuum with—a wide range of spiritual experiences, in and out of religious practice and sensibility, that people have all the time. But it is definitely good. It will give you energy and peace and insight, so let it in.

Many times one “loses oneself” in an experience, but those moments are less threatening than merging with God. I pulled back, but felt a nagging sense I was not supposed to. “Lord, I feel you want me to do more of the mystical stuff, ‘entering’ You and so forth.”

Yes, and you can remove the scare quotes. There is nothing strange about it. That is how the universe is. The parts can communicate with the whole. It is no more mystical or mysterious than your ability to move your arm.

Actually, since Descartes introduced a sharp mind-body distinction, how the mind moves the body has been a philosophical mystery. But, in actual life, it is not. The parts can communicate with the whole and vice versa. I had never thought of the universe that way.

My Story

I want you to tell My story

Memorial Bridge was lit by the morning sun, white and bright. The Lincoln Memorial rose up in front of me, also white, but grave and rich in national meaning. For me, crossing the bridge was a daily call to purpose. But the voice broke today's silent entry by announcing, out of the blue:

Your work here is done.

My work here is *done*? I thought I was right in the middle of it.

After teaching philosophy for fifteen years at Boulder, I had come to Washington on a Congressional Fellowship and stayed, working first on a Congressional staff, later at the National Endowment for the Humanities, finally at the non-profit organization where Abigail had first reached me. When these prayers began, friends and associates were moving into the highest levels of government and I was being asked to consider positions, just below Cabinet level, that would have crowned a career like mine. But now, suddenly, I was being told, "Your work here is done." *Done*.

About that time, I felt guided to look at Matthew 16:13-14, where Jesus asks, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" "And they answered, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'"

Then I was directed to the very last verse of the very last book of the Old Testament. Malachi 4:5 promises that Elijah, the prophet

who was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot, will return with God's message, "Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah . . ."

Abigail's train was late. I had been waiting at Union Station for over an hour and stood to stretch my legs. Some now-forgotten images passed before my eyes, and then,

I want you to be My new Elijah.

"Your new *Elijah*?" I did not know whether to feel flattered, or overwhelmed, or just crazy. I protested, "Lord, I am not worthy."

I will decide who is worthy.

I didn't know what a new Elijah was supposed to be but I knew I did not want the job. "Lord, I don't have faith enough."

You have more faith than you know.

"Who is Elijah?"

He is the prophet.

"What is he to me?"

He is you.

I didn't think that meant that I was literally a reappearance of Elijah, but still I objected, "No, Lord, this is just crazy."

He is you.

I remembered Abraham Lincoln's story about the man who was tarred and feathered and run out of town on a rail. "If it weren't for the honor of the thing," the man said, "I would rather have walked." And I had seen the war movies, "You will have the honor of leading the assault." Some honors aren't worth it.

I did feel the honor. God was about to put His seal on this role for me, a role more suitable for a real Elijah. I felt a swell of pride, as I was being told this, and immediately the line went dead. Ego had broken the connection.

Abigail's train had still not arrived. I paced back and forth, no longer seeing the other people in the station. What to think? What to feel? Finally, I forced a deep breath and, with irritation mitigated by resignation, asked, "Lord, what exactly do You want of me?"

I want you to describe the inner life of God, what it is like to be God.

The *inner* life of God? What it is *like* to be God? I didn't know what this could possibly mean, but I forged on. "Lord, why is that important for us to know?"

Mankind sees God only from the outside and that leads to distortions in its view of God, as it would of anyone—too distant, awesome, oppressive, Other. Even mystics are very one-sided. They experience oneness but that is not the same as empathizing with My subjective experiences.

Okay, I could see that, if God is too distant, it would be hard to relate to Him, but there was a problem. "Lord, we think of God as being so infinite and ethereal that 'subjective experience' doesn't even make sense."

Exactly—that's one of the distortions. Although I am much more than a Person, I am a Person, a soul, like you. You—people—cannot relate properly, constructively, to Me unless you understand that. (Take) love, for example. My love comes across as impersonal, generic, oceanic wallowing, but (in fact) it is quite specific, concrete, with feeling, with response to the particulars of your being, of your life.

I want you to tell My story.

Thinking of the Bible, I said, "Lord, hasn't Your story already been told?"

Yes, but it is time for it to be told anew, and not in the same way. We are entering an unusual time in the history of the world. The old religions are coming apart. Yet there is a renewal of religious spirit. Many of the great religions rested on a relatively clear reception of messages from Me. The new spirituality does not. It is aimless, made-up, impressionistic, psychologized, sometimes flaky and even dangerous and demonic. Not all "spiritual" forces are from God. Some are evil or distorted. A purity of message must be regained.

But there is gain here as well. The old revelations were limited. They fit the understanding of people at the time. The messages were sometimes garbled or misunderstood or distorted over time.

Also, I have evolved since then. There is new information to impart.

There it is again: God evolves.

There is a long history, that has not been chronicled, of My development. I would like to tell you that story and perhaps have you publish it.

My message is evolving over time. You will carry it forward. Do not credit this to your ego—it will be My voice. (Just) focus on the task. The world's religions have spent themselves. They need renewal.

Believe the inspirations I send you. Do not worry about any other standards than communicating correctly what I reveal to you. It may seem crazy to others. It (revelation) always does. This is the courage of the messenger.

I felt like Dorothy swept up in the whirlwind. And poor Abigail, would she be swept up too?

Her train had finally arrived. Over dinner, I broke it to her. She just listened, unfazed.

“I felt submissive; it sounded like orders from Above,” she explained later. “I thought: Jerry is clearly not making it up. What it means in my life is, of necessity, open-ended. To receive such a directive is to move to a realm or level not foreseeable. In other words, it is a blessing.”

There is a spiritual reawakening

8



The next day, the words—“an instrument of revelation”—came to me. “Lord, is this what you want me to be?”

Yes, that’s right.

“What kind of revelation?”

And what kind of instrument. First, I want you to model the spiritual life. Live it deeply. Theology is not just an intellectual exercise. It must be grounded in an intimate relationship with Me, an intimate openness to My Word.

“Aren’t I already open, Lord?”

Yes, but you turn away. You know the problem. You hold Me at arm’s length and listen to Me only part of the time, and only partially, not as a whole person. You need to draw Me into yourself totally—live through Me—and let Me guide you totally.

“But that sounds miserable. I couldn’t have fun and enjoy life anymore.”

No, it doesn’t mean that. You will find life perfectly pleasant. This is not a renunciation. It is an affirmation, a growing in a certain direction, in a certain domain.

This reminded me of saying a sad farewell, before getting married, to all I would be giving up—having my apartment as messy as I wanted, living on pizza, watching the Late Late Show. It’s amazing what a bachelor can cherish as the good life.

“Lord, what do You want me to do?”

Nothing dramatic. Just pause in the course of the day to take Me in. It doesn't mean you have to interrupt other things you're doing. But I will be co-present and a co-participant. Try that now, as you eat your lunch.

"Okay, Lord." I drew Him in and unwrapped my sandwich. "Let me share this with You, Lord."

Good.

That day I ate lunch "with God." But most days I do not.

"Lord, it sounds as if You want to announce a new revelation. In this day and age?"

There is nothing surprising or shocking in further revelations. I reveal things to people all the time in many different ways—in prayer, inspiration, intuition, ethical insight, even aesthetic response. My revelations evolve. I reveal different things now than millions of years ago.

"Millions of years ago?"

Yes, I revealed things to prehistoric people, though they had a limited ability to understand. My revelations to Abraham and Moses were unusual, because they marked the first of the clear messages that got through and were really understood.

But the current situation is different. I have been revealing things always to individuals who asked, but this was piecemeal, fragmentary, and usually added by the recipients as interpretations of previous texts and old revelations.

Now we need new systematic revelation, from bottom to top, almost to start over again—with (a new) Genesis, one might say, with a new Gospel of John. And a new philosophical understanding of God. The old one was only partly inspired and contains too much of the arrogance of human reason.

Mankind does not live in a period for a Great Prophet. There can be no new Moses or other Deliverer. There can at best be Elijahs—prophets and seers—people who explain My story in a form that can be understood by this age.

A time of mending is needed, but the nature of the world today prevents the presentation of a single, unitary vision. The best I can

do is to share visions with particular individuals and let them articulate these visions in their own voices.

It is difficult being God. One is not well-understood. One is even ignored, neglected, and denied. Yet I need to be known, to be recognized. The world needs for Me to be known.

My nature, the true nature of the universe, of Being, and My relation to human beings, to their role and destiny, is complex. Einstein's theory of relativity is child's play by comparison. An adequate understanding cuts across some of the categories human beings find most natural, though they are really profoundly "unnatural"—and I mean that in the eerie sense. They are warped; they often represent disorders of the soul, distortions of Being.

It is your task, as one of My messengers, my Elijahs, to straighten out some of the errors and distortions, and also to broadcast these particular revelations to others.

"Lord, how will I get myself heard?"

You will be heard precisely because there is a spiritual reawakening. Many are listening, waiting, open to a new word. It will be most hard for two groups—the atheists, secularists, who have set their hearts against Me, against hearing, and (followers of) the old religions, who are set in their ways, very attached to specific forms and formulas. The latter pains Me because, in many ways, these have been My most faithful servants. Like a servant whose master has died and faithfully carries out his last wish—but misheard the wish. The old religions are mostly based on insights, revelations I gave them. But they became rigidified. Partial insights were mistaken for the whole. Ritualism and creeds have been overemphasized, and I am Myself partly to blame, since at one point those were the most important thing in the world to Me. I am hoping I can open their hearts to something new, without unduly disturbing their good and faithful practices.

One other thing, besides the new spiritual openness, will help. The testimony of the speaker, by which I mean the witness of his character, makes the message credible. You have a good (sound) character. People can see that. You are not a nut or a fanatic or a self-important impostor. People see that. That is why it is important that

you write in your own, honest, authentic voice—not as some oracular imitation of Me.

Following that instruction, I have not tried to “improve” what God told me.

When I was told to “tell God’s story,” I was cautioned against claiming divine authority.

I give you information, insight, but I am not bequeathing any authority. Pass it on in that spirit.

“But, in fact, having this line of communication with You does make me feel superior, Lord.”

You are not superior. You have drenched yourself in sin for fifty years. Do not feel superior to anyone. Your only superiority is your willingness to obey, and that I have given to you. I opened your heart to love and to Me. You did things to prepare, but I have opened the hearts of some who did not. It is neither deserved nor a gift—it is a fact about Me. I am expressing Myself through you—neither more deserving nor more blessed than the paint used in the Mona Lisa.

Well, okay, no matter who the artist is, paint is just paint. But I couldn’t help thinking that, if you’re paint, what could be better than to make it into the Mona Lisa?

Still, I did not feel like a prophet or seer. As I started reading about different religions, I found an endless cast of characters—priests, saints, mystics, apostles, evangelists, gurus, shamans. None seemed to fit me. “Lord, what is my role supposed to be?”

Just to be a serious reporter of what you are told when you pray.

Okay, *that* I could do.

Still, it all seemed intolerably bizarre. I thought I should talk it over with the wisest people I knew. One, a distinguished medical ethicist, responded, “First of all, this is not weird.” Nothing he could have said would have been a greater relief to me! Another, a well-known author, said, first, “That’s great—now you *know* there is a God,” and then added, “You have had a Kierkegaard moment,” recalling that philosopher’s question, “If you encountered Jesus on the streets of Copenhagen, would you follow him?” A prominent lay

theologian said he was “touched” by my story and suggested some reading while I waited for my “big” assignment.

While there were also cautionary responses, no one seemed to think I was crazy or a fool to take the voice seriously.

Still, I was not prepared for the next experience.

I want you to enter My heart.

“Enter God’s heart? This is weird, Lord, and scary, like out-of-body travel.”

I will protect you.

For moral support I asked, “Lord, first give me Your love.”

Let Abigail love you. You will feel My love through her.

“Then strengthen me, be with me, for this.”

I will.

He took my hand, as it were, and led me into the “heart of God.” I had expected it to be an overpowering, perhaps terrifying experience. But it was more like the eye of a hurricane. I was at the center of something vast and powerful, but here it was quiet, calm, and peaceful. I surveyed the things I feared—the end of my career, loss of reputation, financial insecurity, and a book that went nowhere. In that calm that is God, each concern disappeared.

I want nothing other than your fulfillment

The brash display at the front of the bookstore announced *Conversations with God*—the first of three volumes in which God tells all . . . to *somebody else*. I thought I was the one anointed to carry God’s message. What’s going on here?

Before my own experience, I would not have thought for a minute that the author, Neale Donald Walsch, actually heard from God. But, if God spoke to me, He could surely speak to anyone He pleased. In fact, I had been told that He communicates with people all the time. Walsch too reports God as saying, “I talk to everyone. All the time. The question is not to whom do I talk, but who listens.” Just what I had been told.

Has God appointed two messengers? With different messages? Or is this guy not on the up and up? I have to admit I was skeptical. My own prayers were herky-jerky and the voice I heard spoke in my own casual vernacular. Walsch’s conversations are reported in polished prose. That looked rigged.

Nor was I impressed with what Walsch reports having been told. It sounded like pop Buddhism—feel-good stuff that sells books but is unlikely to be God’s authentic word. Wasn’t Walsch just a charlatan?

When I asked, I didn’t like the answer. I was told,

He got most of it right.

“Got most of it right? But, Lord, some of what Walsch reports contradicts what You have told me.”

They probably are not contradictions, but merely appear to be. Of course, you are both fallible receptors.

“Walsch reports You as saying that ‘you can do whatever you believe you can.’ Lord, that is just silly.”

Give Me an example.

I started to describe the case of a woman I know who has clear goals, strong convictions and great force of will, and yet often fails.

No, (give Me an instance) from your own life.

“Just winning a tennis game, for example.”

Give me a break. (A) You always have mixed thoughts in those situations and (B) I said you can’t alter physical laws. If you completely wanted to win at tennis and believed you could, you would practice, exercise, and so forth. When I say you can do anything, I don’t mean that you don’t have to take the necessary steps. Napoleon was charismatic but he still had to train troops, plan logistics, and so on. Stop being simple-minded. You are fixating on a single meaning of “you can do anything” and trying to rebut it. Instead, think about what meaning could be true. It certainly does not mean wish-fulfillment. Think about it.

“Walsch reports You as saying, ‘God will grant whatever is asked, without fail.’ Whatever is asked!”

The trick is in “ask.” Not everything you “want” has been “asked” in the right way, with fulsomeness of soul.

“But then the statement is completely misleading. It depends on a verbal sleight of hand.”

Not so. Some might be confused by it, but it is a way of focusing attention on the right way to ask, to believe and feel fully, and to motivate this change in people. But it is not a lie, not even a Noble Lie. It is the direct truth. When you come into the fullness of Being, of partnership with God, everything you truly seek will be granted. That may seem like a bait and switch, but that is not the way you will see it when you get there. You will see that this is indeed what you really wanted all along.

“But it still seems misleading since it suggests that you can win the lottery by wishing for it.”

But don’t you see? That’s not what your soul wants. If it did, per

impossible, it would win it. But it doesn't, because your soul has no true desire for such things.

"But, Lord, don't You see how misleading the statement is? It certainly will be read as wish-fulfillment."

Then it's a mistake. That is not what I meant. People want God's will to conform to theirs. Others try to conform their will to God's. But, at root, the two are the same. The goal is to get to the point that you surface your true will, which will coincide with God's. Remember that I want what is good for you. I do not have some arbitrary plan and then demand obedience to it. I want nothing other than your fulfillment. That is what you want too.

You will develop more and have a greater impact for good if you trust in Me and believe in yourself—not in your ego, your will, but in your spirit and your destiny.

"Destiny?"

Yes, there is a goal for you (for each person)—an individual path of evolution—that I want to help you along. Believing that you can progress and trust in Me to help you is very helpful in achieving that goal.

"Walsch reports that everyone will achieve union eventually, through many lives."

That is true, but that does not mean that it is automatic. Everyone will succeed because eventually everyone will do the right thing. In a sense, it doesn't matter who gets there first—there is no prize for speed—all lives are equally valuable. But it matters to the individual, and to the amount of earthly suffering he or she will experience.

"Lord, Walsch says that God has 'no preference' with regard to 'how you live your life.'"

Wrong. I want you to become your best self. What is true is that I accept your need to do whatever you do and (to) take many lives to achieve fulfillment.

Many lives? That sounded like reincarnation, in which I had zero interest, so I didn't ask about it. I don't think I took it seriously.

I didn't pray about Walsch after that. Whatever God was or wasn't doing with him was between him and God.

Ego is destructive, separatist, defiant

“Lord, what exactly is my assignment?”

The world needs to understand My story, or at least to understand it better. I have given parts of the story to different people at different times. The whole now needs to be told. Your effort will be part of telling that whole story.

“Do You want people to piece the whole together out of the parts?”
What I most want is for people to listen to Me.

“And to listen to what You have told various people over the ages?”

Yes, that is part of listening to Me.

“What exactly do You want me to write?”

God, an Autobiography. My story is the history of Me—how I came to be.

“The story of your interactions with various peoples?”

That but not only that. Tell it from My point of view, not the history of people’s experience of God.

“Lord, the total story of Your interaction with people would be too vast.”

No, all history is selective. Use a different word—like episodes—if you like. But it is history in the sense of being chronological, developmental, and dramatic in some sense. There is a subjective point of view (Myself), intentions and concerns for the future, regrets about the past, and so forth.

“What are the materials for this history? The great religious texts?”

Yes, of course. That is one side of the human-divine (interaction), like hearing one end of a telephone conversation. So that is one starting point. But there are others as well, and I have been leading you to them—the physical record, the geological record, the biological development, the stars and galaxies, time and creation, and so on.

And I will tell you many things Myself—that is the “new revelation” aspect. Nothing overly dramatic there—I reveal Myself all the time.

“So I should read the scriptures of the major religions?”

Yes, I want you to read the early spiritual history of mankind. I will lead you to which readings. I would like you to pray as you read them and take notes as directed.

I grew up at a time when “man” and “mankind” referred to both men and women, and God spoke to me in my own vernacular.

“Lord, You said I was to tell Your story ‘from the inside out.’ But reading the scriptures is ‘from the outside in.’”

Yes, tell My story as I tell it to you. The only purpose for reading is to give you reference points for understanding My story.

“Lord, if I am going to ‘get into Your head,’ it would be helpful to know what You are up to, what Your ultimate goal is.”

No, your job is not to “get into My head.” Remember, I am *telling* you what is “in My head.” You are not trying to empathize with a fictional or historical character. You have the living Person right here, and I will tell you.

“But, as I prepare for the work . . .”

You are making this falsely complicated because you are not trusting Me. You think you will have to do this on your own by deciphering the cultural forms and so forth. But it is exquisitely simple. You ask Me what you are to read or to study. And then You ask Me what I was up to in relation to what you are reading or studying. And you don’t need to worry about the total compass or overall story, because I will lead you item by item.

“Lord, how should I approach the ancient scriptures?”

Get into the frame of mind for reading the (particular) work. That frame of mind is reverential, quiet, respectful, open-hearted. It does not consist of analyzing metaphors and stories of gods. Just take in what comes to you.

An ego rush always broke my connection with God. So I tried to keep a cold watch on this ego of mine.

When I was still in Washington, D.C., a matter came up about which I needed the assistance of an eminent intellectual with whom I had a limited acquaintance. He was completely forthcoming, and I felt flattered by his response.

“Lord, how should I take this? Is it wrong for me to feel flattered?”

No, it is not. This is joy, the joy of being yourself, which is proper to (appropriate for) human beings. I want you to be happy, to feel the fullness of your own being, its bounty. I blessed you with certain gifts. Of course, you recognize them as gifts, as benefits, as talents. That is okay. It is not the same as ego.

Ego is destructive, separatist, defiant of My will, self-satisfied and self-lustful. A proper appreciation of yourself opens your heart, binds you to Me, to those you love. Remember that I love you—I love all human beings—without reservation. Ideally, you would love yourself as I love you, as I loved Jesus. But that is not normally possible for human beings, because there are many obstacles.

“But it is possible for a few?”

For some, yes. I have blessed them with the ability to transcend those limitations. They can love themselves fully, and this permits them to love others.

One week I testified before a U.S. Senate committee. It did not go well and my ego limped out of the hearing room.

Get your ego out of it. Stand back and look (at it) at a distance.

“A ‘God’s-eye’ view?”

No, just objectively, as if it were someone else.

That helped. If it were someone else, I would know that, even on

a good day, a Senate hearing is unpredictable. But there was still an ego wound.

“Lord, what can I do about that?”

Look, you are encased in a body and a personality, and it requires ego strength and self-respect. When I say, “Get the ego out,” I mean the second-order attachment to ego. The ego, like desires, is a fact, a necessary fact. Like the body, it gets bruised. You just nurture it and let it heal. Don’t deny it but don’t dwell on it either. Accept it and don’t attach it to blame. That your ego has been embarrassed is not the same as “doing something wrong.” Don’t blame yourself. That is an example of the wrong kind of attachment.

“Then I should just say, ‘I wish it had gone better,’ and leave it at that?”

Correct.

Think about your own times of suffering

I had now accepted the assignment, but God wanted more.

You need purification. Transformation is a good word. It is obedience, which at its fullest is transformation.

“What does that involve, Lord?”

Putting Me first rather than last. Living every moment, making every decision, in response to My call.

“How do I go about doing that?”

You know this—start every day with prayer and let prayer guide you through the day.

There is another way to listen to God. One day, when I was fatigued from travel, I was told to take a day to rest.

“But I have so much work to do, Lord.”

Always listen to your body—it is also My voice.

I have not found it easy to live my life fully in tandem with God. Every day there are items on my personal radar, and I usually attend to them first, and fit God in when I have a chance.

One morning Abigail called breakfast and I held off, due to one of God’s seemingly arbitrary commands. “Is my husband becoming a holy man?” she asked with more exasperation than reverence. “I already am,” I said, in the sense of having a divine call, “just a very bad one.”

“Lord, I know I should try to live each day in response to Your purposes.”

That is right. Not just to do it mechanically, like a soldier following orders, but to do it as an organic flow, wishing to be in touch with Me and to live in accord with My will, My love.

“Yes, I always think of You ‘pushing’ me, rather than my being ‘drawn’ to You. I respond to orders rather than seeking union.”

That is good. The shallow seeking of union with Me is a delusion. The goal is to be “in tune” with Me. The work will flow from that. This is not just a matter of doing your duty. It is coming into alignment with Me—like two singers doing a harmony.

Any person who believes in God has to confront the problem of human suffering. Why does God permit it?

“Lord, does suffering have any purpose or meaning?”

Of course, suffering is what makes life serious. Imagine a world in which actions never resulted in suffering. Imagine a world without the pain of regret, without feeling bad about doing something wrong (or) shameful.

“But disease serves no moral purpose.”

Now you are fencing with Me on “the problem of pain.” Just listen. You will never learn from fencing.

Disease, disaster, aging, death are essential aspects of suffering. “We” live in a physically vulnerable world. That is the essential condition that makes life serious.

“All that’s rather abstract, Lord. What exactly does disease do for us?” I thought of Job’s boils.

Suffering is the test of your humanity. There is no greater test than pain—how one copes with it. It is easy to be nice, faithful, and such, when things are great, but very hard under adversity.

“But, Lord, that just seems perverse—or cruel.”

No, that’s not so. Think about your own times of physical suffering—in the hospital, for example—the shots, the clumsy aide, the itch, the nurse about urinating, those were full of growth.

Those examples brought back memories. A couple of years before these prayers began, I suffered a mild heart attack and was rushed to the intensive care unit. They took blood tests, day and night. There

are a limited number of places from which blood can be drawn, and the same spot cannot be used again right away. The wrists are ideal, but mine are sensitive and a needle there smarts. One does not have much power as a patient, but safeguarding my wrists became my prime imperative. One after another blood drawer would come, and I would plead, argue, wheedle, and insist they find some other place to puncture me. Each resisted, then managed to find a spot.

I was transferred to another hospital for the surgical procedure. I was met by a technician who said his name and stuck out his hand—while looking the other way and standing on my oxygen tube. When it was time to go into the operating room, he snatched away my blanket with so violent a jerk it would have ripped out the intravenous insertion if I had not by now been on high alert.

Once in the operating room, I was placed on a slab with my arms flat at my side. Medical equipment loomed above, posing an impressive threat. “Don’t move!” I was told. My nose chose that moment to itch. The itch grew intense, then more intense, dreadfully intense, until nothing existed but me and that itch. Then I understood. I can’t fight it. I just have to live with it, until the procedure is over. I don’t know if the itch went away or what—I forgot all about it.

The procedure went smoothly. I watched the monitor as the surgeon snaked a catheter through an incision in my groin up to a major coronary artery where a stent had to be placed.

Opening an artery is a very serious matter. Bleeding can be life-threatening. The patient has to lie flat and immobile for twenty-four hours. Nurses at my first hospital had been angels in white, but here I was attended by Nurse Ratched’s less charming twin. She seemed to resent patients needing her help. Finding it difficult to manage the bedpan flat on my back, I asked for assistance. She acted as if it were a dirty-minded request and responded by threatening me, “If you can’t manage the bedpan, we will catheterize you!” Finally, I did manage, and it was time to close up the artery. Another patient had told me the closing could be dangerous as well as painful.

“Who is to perform this delicate operation?”

Nurse Ratched gave me the grim news: young Mr. Sizzorhands,

the technician whose previous efforts to hurt me had been foiled, would now have another shot. I asked for someone else. “He is the only technician available.”

“I am not going to let that guy lay another hand on me.”

She made it a battle of wills. We went back and forth. Finally I said, “Let me speak to the doctor.”

She said she would see what she could do and, after a time, she returned with a young Asian-American attendant. He had magical hands. I didn’t feel a thing.

My body was recovering nicely, but the whole experience—starting with “indigestion” in the night (I didn’t know that was a heart symptom), calling the office the next morning to find out what nearby doctor was covered by my health plan, driving myself (fool that I was) to the doctor’s office, filling out forms and waiting for some time before going up and telling the receptionist, “I may be having a heart attack,” the quick examination and discovery that I was at that very moment in the throes of an incipient attack, an emergency medical team rushing to my side trying to head it off, being shoveled into an ambulance, the sirens, intensive care, the surgery, the whole ordeal—left me feeling fragile, as if I were made of spun glass. A sharp tap and I would shatter.

They (these moments) were not empty suffering; they even had to do with leading you to Me.

“How so, Lord?”

They focused your attention on your mortality, which (led) you to open your heart fully to Abigail because you realized how precious this love was. And it led to your prayer to serve God.

I am the medium through which people understand the world

12



“The external world and consciousness are one and the same thing,” writes Erwin Schrödinger, the great twentieth-century physicist. In *My View of the World*, he sees the deep meaning of quantum mechanics expressed in the Hindu philosophy of Vedanta. This sounds important, I thought. “Lord, I am reading Schrödinger . . .”

No, that is not the way truth lies.

“But, Lord, I felt you wanted me to read something scientific and . . .”

You didn’t pray for guidance about what to read.

“What do you want me to read, Lord? . . . I get the sense that You want me to read something that cuts against scientific orthodoxy.”

Yes.

“But what does that?”

History of science. History of views that didn’t work out.

“Like astrology?”

Something like that.

Paul Feyerabend was a philosopher-scientist. On the cover of one of his books, where others list their degrees and honors, he gives his astrological chart. I had known and liked him. He had a remarkable appreciation for the unpredictable vitality of the life of the mind, and hence great respect for “views that didn’t work out.” On one occasion, he heatedly denounced a certain philosopher for trying to

resolve philosophical issues by translating them into logical notation. “What a pitiful, rigid, anemic approach!” Abruptly, the denunciation ceased. “Hector should keep at it,” he said in a mellow voice. “Who knows? He might come up with something.”

In his iconoclastic *Against Method*, Feyerabend, a physicist himself, assembles a fascinating array of examples from the history of science to show that science does not depend on canons of rational method. Rather, the practice of science “can stand on its own feet and does not need any help from rationalists,” he wrote. And “non-scientific cultures, procedures and assumptions can also stand on their own feet and should be allowed to do so.”

Elsewhere I read about the three traditions in Renaissance science—Aristotelian, Neo-Platonic, and mechanistic. At the time, the mechanistic mindset provided an obstacle to progress in medicine and biology, but it was extraordinarily fruitful for physics and chemistry and established itself as scientific orthodoxy. However, the mechanistic approach to biology has never fully succeeded, and certain trends in recent physics have Neo-Platonic overtones. Science remains unpredictable.

I read about the great scientific debate of the eighteenth century: is space absolute or relative? Today, the standard view is that science and religion are opposites. But it was his theology that led Newton to regard space, “the sensorium of God,” as absolute, and a different theology that led Leibniz to uphold relativity, two centuries before Einstein made a fateful decision to study physics rather than music.

“Lord, what does this reading have to do with my assignment?”

The history of science is My story. The history of man’s efforts to understand the world is the history of man’s relation to Me.

I am the point of interaction between man and the world.

“Lord, what do You mean by point of interaction?”

I am the medium through which man understands the world.

“Is mind the medium?”

Yes.

“Lord, are You saying that, in addition to the human mind and the natural world, there is divine mind somehow essential to the act of understanding?”

The answer I received addresses one of the deep mysteries of philosophy. How is it that consciousness relates to or “intends” an object such as the Liberty Bell? For example, what is it about a thought that makes it the thought *of the Liberty Bell*? The thought is “in your head” and the Liberty Bell is in Philadelphia. What “connects” them?

There is a parallel question about language. How is it that a word relates to or refers to a particular object? The word is itself an object, a vocalized sound or a mark on a page. What connects the word “bell” to the bell? Sometimes it is said that one “points” to the other, but that is a figure of speech. As Ludwig Wittgenstein observes, the same question arises with pointing. When you stretch out your finger, why does it direct attention to an object across the room, rather than to itself?

Follow along, and open your mind. Mind is like a fluid in which human beings and the natural world exist. By participating in the fluid, minds can understand. Think of the problem of intentionality. How is reference possible? How can essences be grasped? How can objects be seen? There must be an interaction, and it is not only causal-physical. How *could* it be? Mind, understanding, is not just physical. It is a conscious, fluid medium.

“Is it somewhat physical?”

Those categories are not helpful here, but it exerts physical force, has physical consequences.

Later I learned that there are some interpretations of quantum mechanics that use a similar concept to explain how an electron in one part of the universe can be in perfect sync with an electron in another part of the universe without any physical interaction between them. I was not aware of that at the time, but I had just read about dark matter and dark energy, “dark” because they cannot be seen but only inferred from gravitational and other effects. The mass of these previously unsuspected components are now thought to far exceed the total visible mass in the universe.

Yes, you should look into those. Think of it—most of what is in the universe is unnoticed. It is inferred from gross phenomena, but it is inferred as force. Think of the human body. It is moved by the mind. How? Where is the mind? The mind is throughout the body.

It's actions are registered, but it is not noticed. I am not noticed. But in fact I am seen everywhere, and I am in the innermost being of man and in the innermost being of matter. Do not have contempt for matter. It is not the inert stuff of certain old theories. It is vital and alive and a part of Me. The interaction of mind and matter is part of Me, and I am the vehicle through which it takes place.

“Lord, I have the feeling that you want me to read and think less, and to listen more and just write down your story.”

Don't stop thinking, but think in a different way. Don't work so hard to figure everything out, to make it rational, to make it fit your categories. Just listen and think through the implications of what I tell you.

“But, Lord, some of what I learn from You comes from worrying over what you say.”

Sometimes yes, but often no. Sometimes your questioning just gets in the way. The main point is to open your mind, to try to understand what I am saying on its own terms, and to see ways it might be true or understandable to you.

If something doesn't make sense to me, how can I supposed to “see ways” to make it understandable? How do you get to that vantage point?

Pure being is not an abstraction but a living force

13



My experiences with God were personal and intimate. Philosophers drain the life out of Him. God the Person becomes God the Abstraction—the Unmoved Mover, the One, the Absolute, infinite substance, the Ground of Being, the being whose essence is to exist. William Butler Yeats describes the result: “High on some mountain shelf/ Huddle the pitiless abstractions bald about the neck.”

The great Jewish scholar, Gershom Scholen, explains the phenomenon.

“The philosophers and theologians were concerned first and foremost with the *purity* of the concept of God and determined to divest it of all mythical and anthropomorphic elements. But this determination to . . . reinterpret the recklessly anthropomorphic statements of the biblical text and the popular forms of religious expression in terms of a purified theology tended to empty out the concept of God. . . . The price of God’s purity is the loss of his living reality. What makes Him a living God . . . is precisely what makes it possible for man to see Him face to face.”

Feelings, along with other affects, are taken to be weaknesses. So God is regarded as passionless, so passionless that it is difficult to see how He can love. St. Anselm puzzles over how a passionless God can be compassionate. His solution is that “we experience the effect of compassion, but Thou dost not experience the feeling.” You can see the logical puzzle: we experience God’s love even though God feels

no love for us. For the philosophers, even to speak of a personal God is at best a metaphor or analogy. But, in my experience, God is not a metaphor. He is a Person to whom we can pray and who can give us guidance about our lives. However, I was told,

They have some aspects of Me right.

“What do they have right?”

They understand that I am pure Being, Being unto itself. They understand my metaphysical essence. They do not understand my dynamic existence, a force . . .

“A Person?”

. . . yes, and a Person. They use these categories in a way that makes them mutually exclusive, but they are not. Pure Being is not an abstraction but a living force, focused personally. Do not avoid metaphysics, but always listen to Me or you will go on the wrong track.

I had read Martin Buber’s *I and Thou* when I was a college freshman and had not looked at it since then. But, when I fell in love and realized that she loved me back, the opening words of Part Three came back to me: “The extended lines of relations meet in the Eternal Thou.” Love between human beings has a trajectory toward the divine.

That recollection rekindled my interest in Buber. Returning from New York, where Abigail still taught, I started reading Maurice Friedman’s highly-praised biography. Buber’s philosophical awakening occurred during adolescence, prompted by “the fourteen-year-old’s terror before the infinity of the universe.” Buber wrote, “A necessity I could not understand swept over me: I had to try again and again to imagine the edge of space, or its edgelessness, time with a beginning and an end or a time without beginning or end, and both were equally impossible, equally hopeless . . . Under an irresistible compulsion I reeled from one to the other, at times so closely threatened with the danger of madness that I seriously thought of avoiding it by suicide.”

I stopped reading for a moment and, as the train rumbled on, I pondered the “edge of infinity.” I was taken over by a powerful image, visual and visceral. I felt and saw space at its edges, rushing,

expanding outward, unfurling itself with vast force and at almost instantaneous speed, without stop, neither a completed infinity nor merely finite. The vision had a tremendous feeling of life-force, of Being unfurled, bursting forth at reckless speed.

Buber was saved from the brink of suicide by reading Immanuel Kant. Unsolvable questions arise, Kant argues, from trying to reason about space and time as if they were characteristics of reality in itself. They are really just forms of our experience, he says, or, as a Kantian might put it today, features of our scientific paradigms or theoretical frames. This reassuring view gave Buber “philosophical peace.”

There now came to Buber “an intuition of eternity,” not as endless time, but as “Being as such.” I moved deeply into myself to get some sense of what this might mean. I felt a great rushing, gushing, like a geyser, welling up inside me and rising up through all tiers of reality, an energy or life-force, creative and growing, but more basic and undifferentiated than these terms suggest, as if it were the very Being of these forces, running through the whole of reality. It rushed, expanded, created, grew not just outwardly but in a vertical dimension as well, from the primordial base up to the creative spiritual edge. It was, in some sense, erotic energy from bottom to top, with no level, not even the most elemental, ever eclipsed. The vision ended. I slumped back, breathing hard.

I wondered what it could mean for Being as such to be a Person, a Thou, as surely, from my own experience, God is. Then it struck me that this rushing Stuff, this force of Being, is also the being of me. And I am a person. So why shouldn't the rushing Stuff, the Being of—of what?—the World, of Being itself, be a Person writ large? I don't mean the World merely in a physical sense, since my own being is not merely that of my body. Similarly, the Being that animates everything could be a Person.

Looking out the window at the passing trees, it struck me that their very leaves are full of Being as such, the Being that is also a Person, and that it made sense for them to be a Thou for me. And, more remarkably, for me to be a Thou for them. I felt that Being facing Being, not necessarily speaking but simply facing, is what personhood is.

I slumped back again and put the book aside. Later, I read on for several pages. I was struck by how many thoughts that I had received had also occurred to Buber. He entered a Nietzschean phase with an emphasis on “dynamism” and “a creative flow of life force.” Later Buber thought eternity “sends forth time out of itself” and “sets us in that relationship to it that we call existence.” To achieve wholeness as a person, he said, it is necessary to direct the creative force of the Evil Urge, the erotic energy that I had felt to be at the center of Being itself.

I reached Washington and returned to my apartment in Alexandria, then resumed reading. I had left off with Buber speaking of the quality of “fervor with direction, all the awesome power of the ‘evil urge’ taken up into the service of God, [seventeenth-century visionary theologian Jakob] Boehme’s ‘ternary of fire’ [symbolizing desire] spiraling upward into the ‘ternary of light’ [symbolizing love] without losing any of its power thereby.” This was “one of the truly decisive moments in Buber’s life”: “overpowered in an instant, I experienced the Hasidic soul,” he writes. “At the same time I became aware of the summons to proclaim it to the world.” I knew how he felt.

I had received visions of the explosive expansions of time and space, and of divine energy rushing up through all levels of reality. Were these intimations of Creation? I was told,

The work I want you to begin involves reading and writing about My nature. Start with the Creation. I have given you some clues already. Follow up on them.

One day, in quiet reflection, I was taken deep into the Self, taken back, it seemed, to the Beginning. Here is how I described it right afterwards:

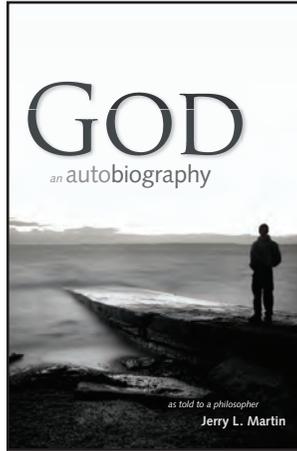
“There was a sense of things shattering, like crockery breaking, or like the shell of an egg breaking. (I think of Kabbalah and its image of Creation as divine vessels breaking.) Then there is a river, or milk, flowing out from amidst the shards. The river is clouded in mist and flows a long way down canyons of shards or rocks. Until it settles in a pool below. Tranquil waters. This is when Life begins. Cool, calm but rippling waters.”

All this was taking place on a flight to California to visit my ninety-year-old father. Sitting beside me was a nine-year-old girl, traveling alone. She kept looking at me, wondering what I was up to. Ignoring her was unkind, so I stopped praying and chatted with her.

After that, I returned to my own meditations and received a stream of visual images, a vision: the sun cracking up, solar flares that zoomed out into the reaches of space. I then saw, through the mist, an ethereal caravan of camels and their riders, coming up a valley, their long line stretching behind, down a winding road into the distance. I followed the road back to the source. I came upon vast winds, like a monsoon, then a world exploding—and then the vision abruptly stopped. The caravan seemed to represent the long course of human history, traced backward, all the way to the beginning, and then nothing.

I had received hints about the moment of Creation. Then, one day, He told me more. This is where God's story really begins.

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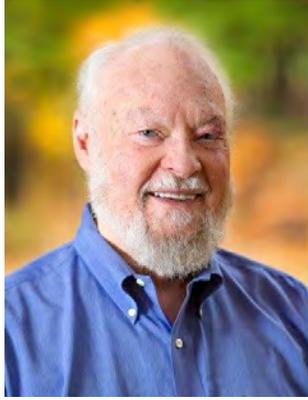
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About the Author



Jerry L. Martin has served as chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities and of the philosophy department at the University of Colorado at Boulder. He has testified before Congress and appeared on radio and television. He is a contributor to the Good Men Project and coordinator of the Theology Without Walls project at the American Academy of Religion.

In addition to a number of scholarly articles on epistemology, the philosophy of mind, and public policy, he is author or coauthor of major reports that have been cited in hundreds of newspapers, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

He was founding director of the University of Colorado's Center for the Study of Philosophy and Social Policy, state president of the American Association of University Professors, advisor to the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, founding president of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, member of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Higher Education in Virginia, Andrew W. Mellon Congressional Fellow, Distinguished Georgia Humanities Lecturer, and adjunct professor at Georgetown University and the Catholic University of America.

Martin received his Ph.D. from Northwestern University and an honorary doctorate from the Thomas More College of Liberal Arts.

He is married to Abigail L. Rosenthal, professor emerita at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, author of *A Good Look at Evil* and the forthcoming *Confessions of a Young Philosopher*.

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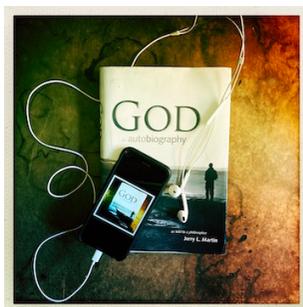
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