

01_Isaiah is Inspired

The Isaiah Scroll



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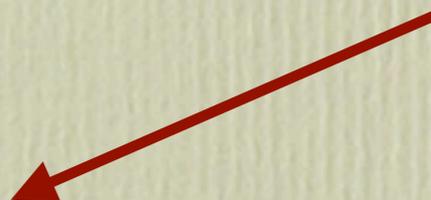
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01. The Isaiah Scroll

an inspired expression of religious experience

Part 1



2 Timothy 3:16-17

‘All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.’



1. Clearly the Scriptures are human compositions and the people who composed them did not escape the limits of the human condition. Their comprehension of reality was necessarily limited. They, and those who preserved and revered their writings, did not escape the cultural oversights that conditioned their understanding. A standout example is the judgment of the kings of Israel and Judah that we find in the Books of Samuel and Kings. If these had been written by members of Israel instead of Judah, the writing would have been very different.

God reveals God's Self to everyone. A person becomes aware of this when he or she has an insight into the Mystery, the Presence we call God. When such a person gives expression to this insight, it is essential that we recognise that the expression comes from the person. It may well be inspired by God, but it is still a human expression of religious insight, and as such it carries with it elements of the culture of the day. It must be understood within the context of the situation in which the revelation occurs.

At times the religious texts are such that they speak to the culture, and sometimes continue to speak generation after generation. This tells us a lot about the value of the religious insights expressed in the text, but we cannot simply claim God as the author. God's self-revelation necessarily transcends the words in which it is expressed.

Looking back, we can see that the conception of God expressed in the Hebrew Scriptures was faulty. They had many beautiful things to say about God, but

1) they were slow to embrace monotheism.

2) They assumed that their enemies were God's enemies.

3) For the most part they took it for granted that success was a sign of divine approval, while failure (including military defeat and sickness) was a divine punishment. This was because they understood God as controlling everything that happened.

A key difference that separates Christianity from Judaism is that Christians see Jesus himself as God's revelation. Christianity is not a 'Religion of the Book'. It is a Religion of a Person, Jesus. The Gospels and the Letters of the New Testament are the responses of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, James and the others to Jesus – responses which Jesus' followers treasured as giving authentic expression to their experience and faith. Christians treat Jesus' words found in the Gospels with the greatest respect for they offer a privileged window into his soul, but we believe that it is Jesus himself who reveals God. The Jewish Scriptures do not make this claim for the Patriarchs or Moses.

We believe that Jesus is the perfect human expression of God's Word, God's Self-revelation. Jesus' words and actions, recorded in the Gospels, take us into the heart of Jesus, into his prayer-communion with God. His words and his deeds are a precious gift for they give expression to his person, and to his intimate communion with God whom he addressed as 'Abba' ('Father'; Mark 14:36). He encouraged his disciples to address God in the same intimate way (Matthew 6:9; Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15).

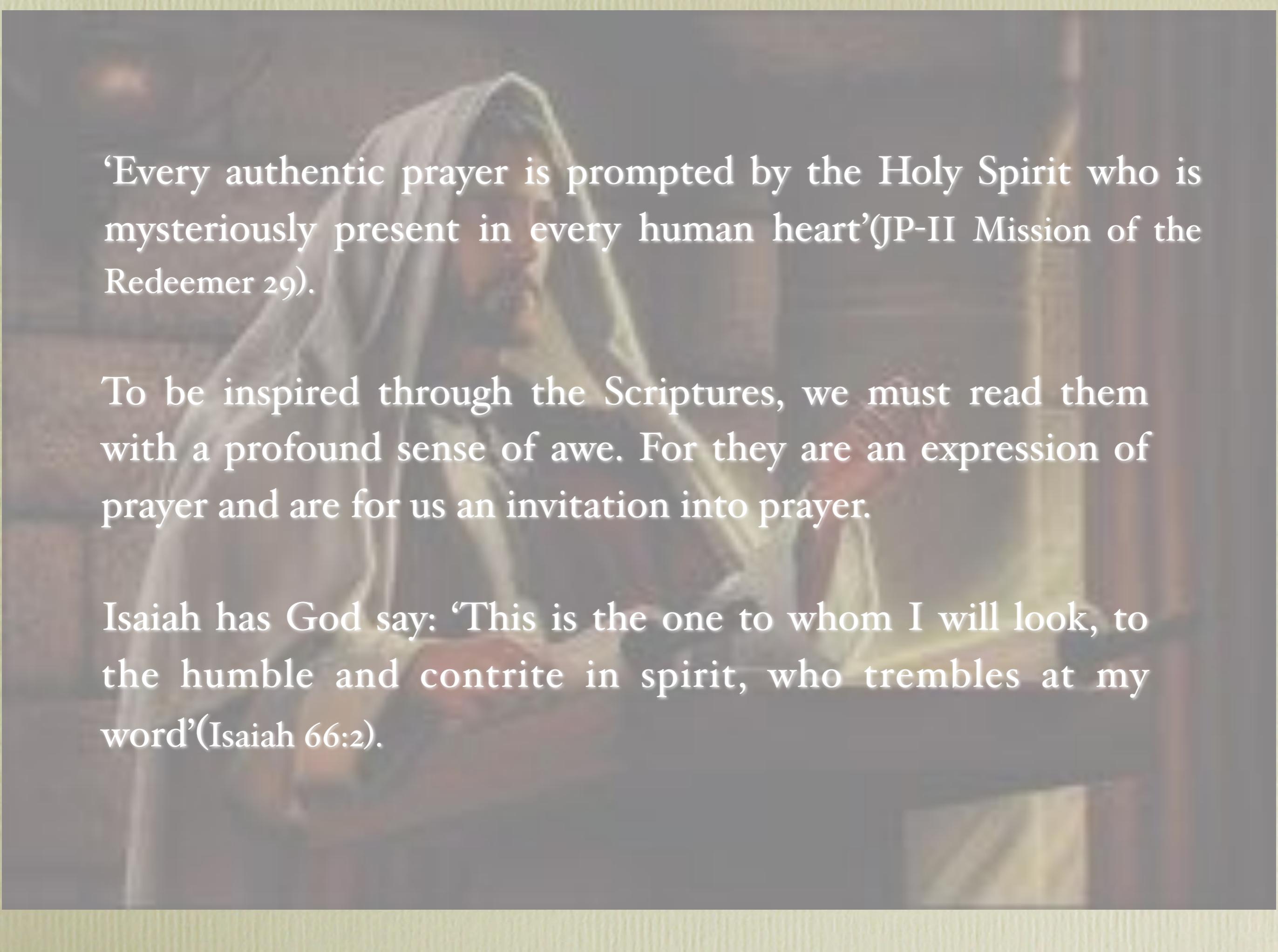
He experienced himself as God's 'Son'. Jesus felt that God knew him and that he knew God in an especially intimate way (see Matthew 11:27). This intimacy bore fruit in an extraordinary capacity to love, and it was his love that gave authority to his teaching and healing power to his ministry. Jesus wanted to share this intimacy, this love, with everyone.

In John's Gospel we hear Jesus say: 'The Father and I are one' (John 10:30). He wanted his disciples to experience this communion: 'May they be one, Father, as we are one' (John 17:11). 'May they all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me' (John 17:21).

It is Jesus himself who is the revelation. His words and the words of his disciples point to him, but they cannot contain him. We need to understand the significance of his words and actions, and so we need to grasp their context, and apply what we learn to our circumstances, which, while having much in common with his, are nevertheless in some ways different.

As we read the Hebrew Bible, we should read it with the mind and heart of Jesus. If we do this not infrequently we will hear him say: 'You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times ... but I say to you'(see Matthew 5:21-48).

3. While not side-stepping any of the above, the assertion that “all Scripture is inspired by God” is saying that there is more to this literature than limited human beings offering their limited, and often enough biased, views of what was happening in the history of the people of Israel. Those who composed the writings, and those who preserved and revered them, believed that God was not a distant object to be discovered, but a God who was present in their history drawing them into communion with God and with each other as a people specially chosen. They did not always get it right, but the Scriptures often reveal amazingly rich insights into God and so into the communion with God and with each other for which the human heart longs. When we are reminded that the Scriptures are inspired, we are being alerted to be on the lookout for these insights, so that our hearts, too, might experience this communion.



‘Every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit who is mysteriously present in every human heart’(JP-II Mission of the Redeemer 29).

To be inspired through the Scriptures, we must read them with a profound sense of awe. For they are an expression of prayer and are for us an invitation into prayer.

Isaiah has God say: ‘This is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word’(Isaiah 66:2).

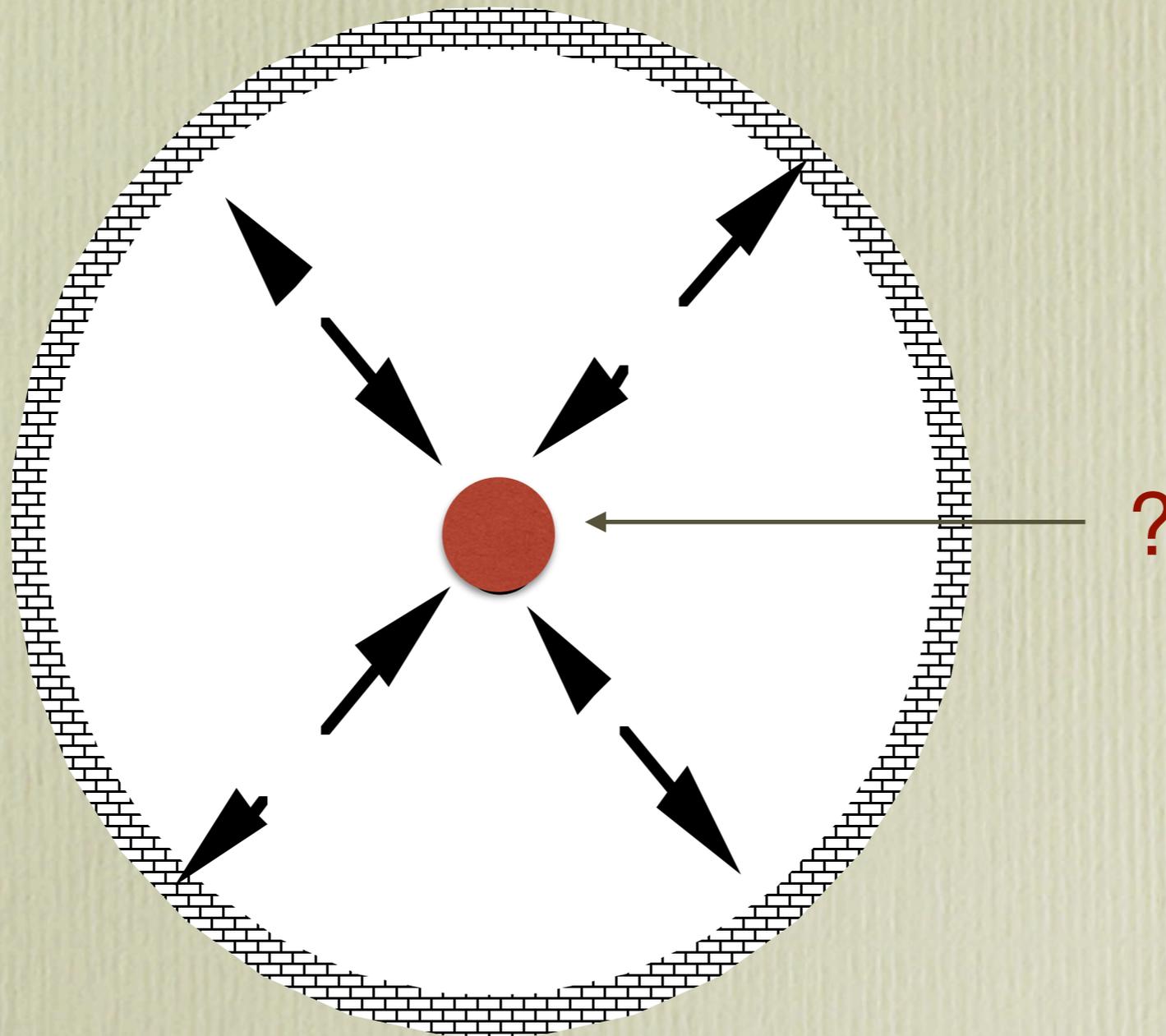
John-Paul II, Introduction to 'The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church, 1993 (page 19-20).

'To arrive at a completely valid interpretation of words inspired by the Holy Spirit, one must first be guided by the Holy Spirit and it is necessary to pray for that, to pray much, to ask in prayer for the interior light of the Spirit and docilely accept that light, to ask for the love that alone enables one to understand the language of God who is love.

While engaged in the work of interpretation, one must remain in the presence of God as much as possible.'

Religious Experience

Religion Re + ligare To bind back



God Sanskrit **Ghu** ('called' 'calling') + **To** ('The one')



God

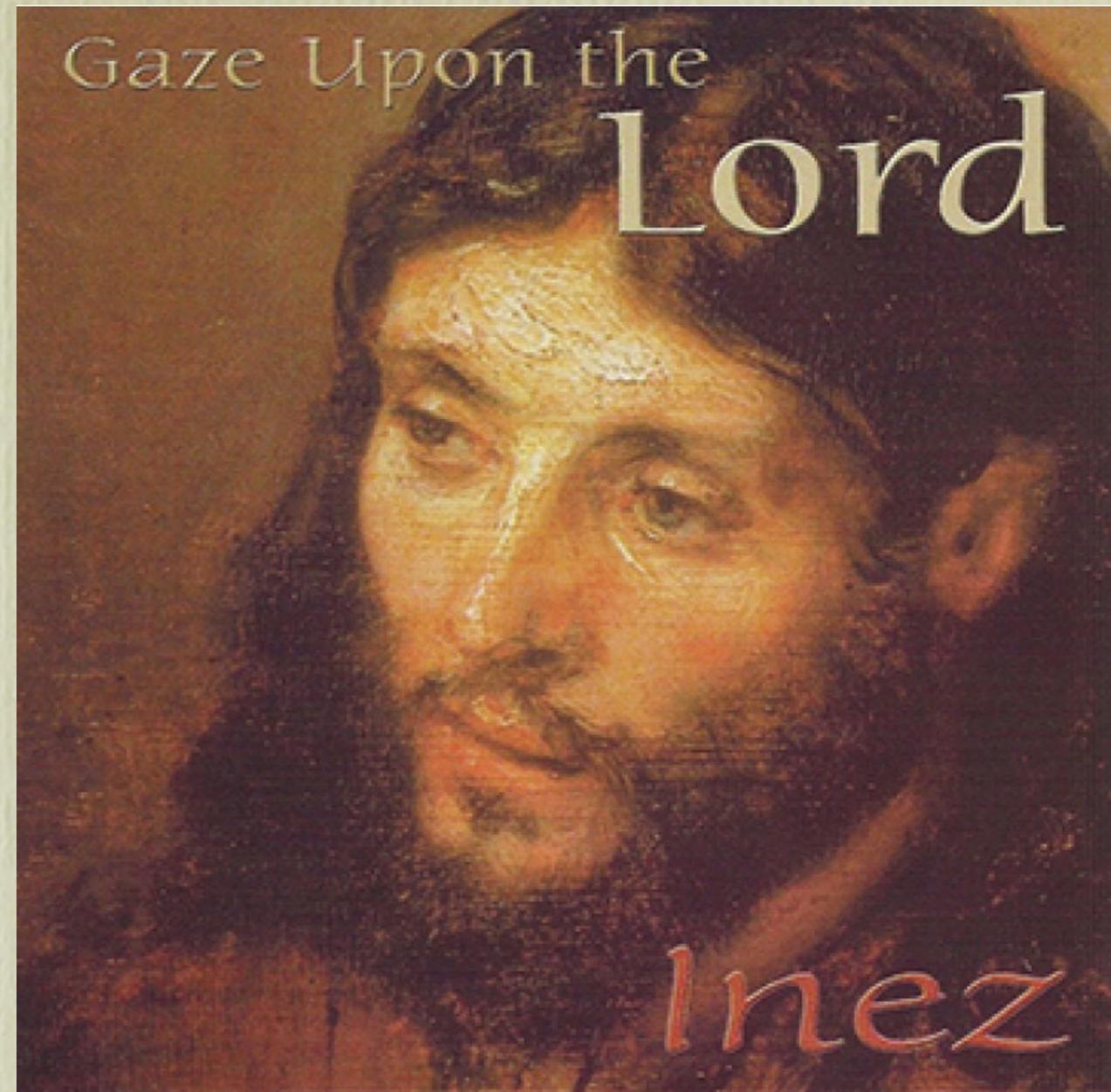
‘The Heart and the Beyond of Everything’(Teilhard de Chardin)

The images and ideas that are conjured up for us by the word 'God' are influenced, and perhaps for some entirely determined, by significant people who introduced us to the word. This is especially so when we experience these people as living in a world we would like to be part of.

If I say that I believe in God, my statement is almost entirely unclear if I do not go on to say what I mean by 'God'.

For myself, when I join the community in declaring "I believe in God" my intention is to encourage myself and others to continue to allow myself to be drawn into an ever deeper communion with the God revealed by Jesus of Nazareth.

There are objective elements to this. It includes a commitment to get to know Jesus better, to listen to his words and watch his way of relating to people, but especially to God, for it was this communion that was at the heart of everything Jesus said and did.



Of course, I can be helped by wonderful people in the past and today whose example encourages and enlightens.

Some people have associated 'God' with a grove of trees; others with a spring, or a mountain, or the moon. Others with a foundational event in their history that formed them into a people: the Exodus from Egypt. What a wonderful gift it has been to us to come to the realisation that there is only one 'God': that the sacred presence experienced in the grove is the same presence experienced in the spring, and in the words that come to us through special people whose words touch our hearts and confirm and challenge our faith. Everything is connected. Everything is held in existence by one and the same presence, one and the same 'God'.

However, wonderful as all this is, it is secondary, for 'God' cannot be another 'object' to be understood. Relating to 'God' is fundamentally and necessarily a 'subjective' experience.

Relating to Jesus I want to share in his experience of 'God'. When I pause to enjoy communing with nature, I sense a sacred presence that draws me to the heart of nature, and at the same time mysteriously 'beyond' what I am seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching. I find myself, to some degree, at home with 'God'.

This is especially so when I am privileged to be in love with another person. To 'believe', as the word itself tells us, is to 'be' in 'love'. The word 'God' speaks of the sense of the sacred, the loving mystery into which I am drawn.

Jesus drew people into this experience, an experience that was already happening in the core of their being, but they did not dare to believe it till he encouraged them by the example of his love. For Jesus 'God' is the source of all he is. In prayer, he addressed God as 'Father'. God' is self-giving love. No wonder Jesus was open to everyone. No wonder he believed in people. He knew that 'God' loved him, and so he knew that 'God' loves everyone, and unconditionally.

We don't have to change our lives to be loved by 'God'. Of course we want to change our lives, for we want to 'live and live to the full'. But this is not a pre-requisite for being loved by 'God'. Quite the contrary, it is God's love, if we would only believe in and welcome it, that offers us the grace to change.

If by the word 'God' we mean the 'God' that Jesus experienced, we have to stop turning 'God' into an object for investigation. We have to make space in our lives to reflect on what we really long for and experience. We will find that it is communion with 'God', which is to say communion with the sacred mystery that is at the heart of everything and everyone. 'God' is what we all share, and we all belong to each other. We are one with the cosmos. Everything is a radiance of 'God'. Jesus knew this. Any 'God' who is less than this is not yet truly the 'God' who holds us in existence. Every creature yearns for communion with this 'God'.

Saint Augustine (354-430)

Confessions 1.1

‘You have made us for yourself, O God,
and our heart is restless till we rest in You.’

Confessions 10.27

Late have I loved you, O Beauty so ancient and so new.
Late have I loved you!

For you were within me and I outside;
and I sought you outside.

In my ugliness I fell upon the lovely things you have made.

You were with me but I was not with you.

I was kept from you by those things,

Yet had they not been in you,

they would not have been at all.

1. You called and cried to me and broke open my deafness.
2. You sent forth your beams and shone upon me
and chased away my blindness.
3. You breathed fragrance upon me,
and I drew in my breath and now pant for you.
4. I tasted you and now hunger and thirst for you.
5. You touched me and I have burned for your peace.'

Augustine Tract 18.10.1 on John

‘Return to the heart!

Why are you running away from yourself?

Why are you getting lost, outside yourself,
entering on deserted ways?

You are wandering aimlessly. Come back!

To where? To the Lord! It can be done quickly!

Return immediately to your heart!

Exiled from your own self you wander outside.

You fail to know yourself,

you who want to know the source of your existence.

Come back! Return to the heart ...

See there what you can learn about God,

for the image of God is there. In your heart dwells Christ.

In your heart you are being renewed after God’s image.’