

## Lifting the Veil

**'The capacity to tolerate complexity and welcome contradiction, not the need for simplicity and certainty, is the attribute of an explorer.'** (Heinz Pagels)

It seems that for some explores what makes the desert beautiful is that somewhere it hides a well. We, by grace, live in a universe of 'hidden wells'. Our Congregation Chapter invites us to 'be ever open to exploring the Mystery of God in all of Creation' and come, in time, to discover some of these 'hidden wells.' Yet God, the ultimate Mystery, is traditionally and almost universally understood as a transcendent personal being who hears and answers prayers and intervenes miraculously in the world. Does our exploration of the Mystery found in the Congregation Chapter (2008) invite us into another more experiential earth-bound perspective?



In his *Mass of the World* Teilhard de Chardin writes: 'In the beginning, there was not coldness and darkness: there was fire...the flame has lit up the whole world from within...for the inmost core of the tiniest atom to the mighty sweep of the most universal laws of being.' In the little world that lies right in front of us each day is this well of burning fire, yet so often we fail to see it, connect with it or spontaneously respond and celebrate its presence and elegant beauty. Our blindness may be due to rigid mind sets which seem to have been formed through our earliest years into ways of thinking and perceiving that objectify the material world by categorising rocks, tables and wall hangings as just 'things'. Food, flowers, gardens and forests are there for our entertainment and benefit that we gladly use and enjoy when we take time out of our all important demanding routines and activities. We don't seem able to intentionally spend our time contemplating the well of Mystery that lies hidden within our visible world. Is it time we dared to break open our indoctrinated traditional beliefs of our tribe and open ourselves to different ways of being and seeing?

Modern science and most religious traditions hold the basic tenant that to live life fully is about learning to pay undivided attention. Perhaps the Chapter (2008) recognised that 'attentiveness' is one of the highest forms of prayer. We are invited to see what's on our path and under our feet and to witness to others what we see.

So much depends upon on our attentiveness -

a red wheel  
barrow  
glazed with rain  
water  
beside the white  
chickens.

(William Carlos Williams)

In these deceptively simple words Williams touches into a direct experience grasped, a personal experience of the deepest truths of life and faith. To truly apprehend a red wheelbarrow glazed with rain can be prayer if we are truly aware through an

attentiveness born of seeing deeply and slowly with unhurried eyes. Perhaps this comes when we listen with expectant hearts and come to see that the true Mystery of this life is the visible not the invisible.

Biologists now tell us that between ourselves and the butcher bird is a difference of complexity, but not of kind. As I write this reflection a butcher bird is fluttering with lightning speed, catching insects brought out of hiding by the recent rains. This feathered creature lives on the edge of biological possibility and it is this fierce intensiveness of aliveness, that makes her seem so exuberantly free, alive and spontaneous. It takes a million years of evolving atoms of carbon, oxygen, hydrogen and nitrogen for this butcher bird hopping right in front of me to spring into life bearing 'the (original) flame that lit up the whole world.' The miracle of this little black and white bird was built into the universe from the first moment of the creative unfolding of the great flaring forth.



God, I have sought you as a fox seeks chickens  
curbing my hunger with cunning.  
The times I have tasted your flesh  
there was no bread and wine between us,  
only night and the wind beating the grass. (Alden Nowlan)

Wind, grass and night like bread and wine are divine expressions of themselves. Each is a Word speaking of Presence, written in the language of the ordinary. The drop of rain on red paint, the stalking fox and the hungry butcher bird reveal a deep 'well' hiding in the interstices of creation, revealing in this silent moment a tribute to the holiness of everything. All we need to do is to slip off our shoes and recognize we are standing on holy ground above the well of life-fire. Indeed, like the incredulous Moses of old, we discover we have always been standing on holy ground but without attentive awareness.

Is this a time for letting go some of our precious, firmly held beliefs and discover again for the first time their real significance. Is it possible that when a certain image of God is gone, everything is radiantly Holy. (Recommend books by Chet Raymo)

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