

Encountering Mystery

Spirit as “inexpressible closeness of God”

Jurgen Moltmann

John V. Taylor, closes his book *“The Go-Between God”* with a story of a West Indian woman who had been told that her husband had died in a street accident. The shock of grief stunned her, and she sat in her London flat “rigid and unhearing”. Her family and friends came and went, not knowing what to say or do. Then an English woman, a teacher of one of the woman’s children, called. Without a word she sat with the woman, “threw an arm around her tight shoulders, clasping them with her full strength”. For a long time that is all that happened. No words were spoken, and after a time, the visitor left, leaving her contribution to help the family in its immediate needs. John Taylor ends the story, and the book, with these words:

“That is the embrace of God, his kiss of life. ...And the Holy Spirit is the force in the straining muscles of an arm, the film of sweat between pressed cheeks, the mingled wetness on the backs of clasped hands. He is as close and as unobtrusive as that, and as irresistibly strong”.

Ruth Cracknell, the Australian actor, wrote of a defining moment in her life when her husband died.

“It is the most precious moment I have known: it is the most surprising moment because entirely unexpected. And if this moment I can keep, then nothing more do I need, now or ever. We are not, and this you must believe, in an empty room, but in a space suffused. We are golden; we seem for a tiny fragment of time, holy; a medieval painting....”

Philip Carter is a retired Anglican Priest. He was the inaugural president of the Australian Ecumenical Council for Spiritual Direction (AECSD). He ran the Julian Centre in Adelaide, an independent and ecumenical centre for spirituality, from 1997-2009.

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Can you recall moments in your life when you have felt the “embrace of God, his kiss of life”? Often, these moments come unexpectedly: they can occur in the most ordinary of circumstances- walking along the beach: doing a bit of gardening: a chance encounter with an old friend....

Both John Taylor and Ruth Cracknell speak of moments when we are less observers of life than participants. We do not place or posit God or the divine into our experience. These are moments when we wake up to the fact that our experience of life has a dimension of depth and richness to it. The Spirit comes to us not so much as the bringer of power but as the opener of our eyes. As a Jesuit has written: “The second prize is insight. The first prize is encounter”.

Call to mind moments of closeness, and imagine this intimacy as the Holy Spirit.

God is closer to us than our breathing.

Can you grow in this sense of the immediacy and intimacy of God

“breathing” you to reach out beyond yourself as you relate

to your world,

to other people....?

“Prayer is....God’s breath in man returning to its birth”

George Herbert

Radical compassion, in which an individual puts his own life at risk in order to help another, points to the truth about humankind as being fundamentally oriented toward the other, which is simultaneously a truth which God has revealed about himself.

Oliver Davies

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