Flying Through the Window
A Spiritual Autobiography

Andrew D. Atwood

It is by God's infinite mercy alone that I am able to tell this simple tale; for watched over I surely have been. In the present moment of morning, noon, or night, I can easily miss the movement of the wind as it impresses itself against my being; but when I step back and scan the landscape, the presence of the breeze, shaping by its invisible power, is unmistakable. The trees bend and twist; sand and soil erode leaving roots exposed and great rocks unsupported; empty holes are filled; new ones opened. Latent seeds are carried by the strength of the wind, planted both deeply in the heart, and gently upon the surface, later to be born anew. The wind supports the taloned falcon, and it carries the gentle dove. So it continues to be with me. The wind; always the wind.

It must be said at the outset, that after accepting the invitation to write, I spent three months pondering, listening to varied voices, organizing, debating, and experimenting. There are numerous tacks one could take in sharing the story of one's life. In that I am a marriage and family therapist by vocation, I have a great deal of interest in life experiences, particularly early ones, and their impact on psychological development and the formation process. My present task, more particularly, is to unfurl the movement of the Spirit within, around, and throughout my life. This, then, is a spiritual autobiography, which makes it a great and marvelous thing. But, because it is mine, it is greatness manifested in a very ordinary way. Spiritual autobiography itself is packed with wonder; full of hidden treasures and meaningful mysteries. Always remember, however, that it is by the gracious mercy of God alone that I am able to tell my common tale.

The writing of this piece began on the first day of spring, 1991, and shall be complete before the first of summer.

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During the months of winter, while closed inside for much of the time, I pondered the sage advice offered me by Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), that monastic theologian through whom John Calvin was inspired. It was Bernard who said:

We must not give to others what we have received for ourselves; nor must we keep for ourselves that which we have received to spend on others. You fall into the latter error,
if you possess the gift of eloquence or wisdom, and yet—through fear or sloth or false humility—neglect to use the gift for others' benefit. And, on the other hand, you dissipate and lose what is your own, if without right intention and from some wrong motive, you hasten to outpour yourself on others when your own soul is only half-filled.¹

Of all that I have received, what is my own gift, and what is to be spent on you? May God forgive my errors in judgment.

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Yesterday, March 23, 1991, Furman Edwards was buried. He was 97 years old.

I don't remember the last time I saw Mr. Edwards. Years ago, it must have been. The first time I met him was likely the first time my mother carried me from the parsonage to the church for Sunday worship. Sixteen months earlier my parents had moved to the Addisville Reformed Church, in Richboro, Pennsylvania; in fact, it was on the very same day that Furman and his wife Lillis' son, Harold, died of a bowel obstruction. Only a few weeks before, Harold had returned to his parents' farm with his bride after serving in the army during World War II. He was the only member of his battalion to survive the Normandy invasion. Dreams of working the family farm together were crushed. The day of Harold's funeral, his wife, Marjorie, gave birth to their son, Furman and Lillis' only grandchild.

Furman and Lillis moved to the house next to the parsonage, and in time effectively adopted the young family next door: my parents and me. Over the next thirty months, they fulfilled their commitment to me as a baptized child of the covenant community. It was not just these two kind people, but others of the community as well, who stood beside my parents and nurtured me in faith and life during those very important years. How many saints touch us while only passing by?

I can attest to the blessing of my beginning. Born into a loving and stable family, within a loving and stable Christian community, I had those intuitive experiences of faith that contributed significantly to the development of a trust in myself and the world about me. So many have begun with so much less.

Life's tranquility was disrupted at the end of those first thirty months by three events, the last of which is my very first memory. Where I had once been the adored only child, I was displaced by the excitement that surrounded the birth of my brother Dave. Where I had once been familiar with home and free-cookies-on-demand from Mrs. Edwards next door, I
was moved within three weeks of Dave's birth to Levittown, Long Island. There, pleasantly playing with my toy truck on the long plank running from the moving van through the living room door into our new home, I was scolded (I suspect by my father), rebuffed, and told to get out of the way.

Would it sound silly to you if I told you from the very bottom of my soul, that much of my life has been focused on resolving, on working through, the effects of these three apparently insignificant and natural events? These experiences have, I believe, given form and substance, predictability and purpose to much of my life, both good and bad. As with a piece of classical music, here begins the theme that distinguishes.

In 1986, I, along with many of you, experienced the motion picture "Out of Africa." Do you remember? "I had a farm in Africa . . . ." The story of Karen and Dennis. I cried. More than once. The theme was one of intimacy and isolation. This has been the theme of my life. The intimacy of the first thirty months, and the sense of isolation that followed. Oh, how I have tried both to recover and run from the intimacy. And oh, how I have come both to cherish and chastise the isolation. Here is the seed bed of my discontent, of my ambivalence, of my obsessiveness, my heartache, my attachments, my passive-aggressive behavior . . . and yet, paradoxically, my greatest gifts. Each of us must come to grips with the basic issues of our personal life if we are to grow deeply in the Spirit. Each of us can surely have "spiritual experiences" that are blissful regardless of how thoroughly we have pondered the essential issues of our life, but only those of us who have pressed hard to know these can possibly transcend self. For me, as for some others, the issues have focused around intimacy and isolation. This has been the arena of much of my personal struggle, the arena of literally heart, mind, and body wrenching turmoil, that has resulted in both defeat and victory. Here is where my deepest challenges will continue to reside, until I fully realize that one cannot be distinguished from the other. Entirely by the gracious mercy of God I have, you see, at long last, however dimly, awakened to the truth. They are one; intimacy and isolation, defeat and victory, death and resurrection. All is one; one is all.

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I, along with a small group of family and friends, will benefit from the more detailed work that I have done in recalling my story, for only half of what I have written is printed on these pages. As I have said, my interest in early life experiences is sharpened by my profession. If you were telling me your story, I would want very much to know the details of the first thirty or so years of your life, the intimate and intricate details. But space compels me to condense mine to six paragraphs.
My family moved to the Levittown Community Church on Long Island in 1951 when I was two years old. Two years later, my brother Chris was born. In 1959, the summer before my sixth grade, our family moved to the First Reformed Church of Pompton Plains, New Jersey. Three years later, my sister Cindy was born. We lived as an established and stable family of six in the Manse, a huge old house built in 1788. When I think of the home where I grew up, this is the place I recollect. Here is where I spent my adolescence; where I cut my teeth while endeavoring to master the skills needed for social and personal survival; where I developed in my conventional faith.

In the fall of 1966 I entered Hope College. Academic probation and social ineptitude marked my start; honor and award my finish. Quite a transition notably propelled by tragedy; blessed by tragedy. Early in 1968 Cindy contracted viral encephalitis, and three months thereafter Dave was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She was hospitalized seven months; he lived only five months after her release. As with a young sapling that finds a heavy rock suddenly slid against its side, one either breaks and dies, or bends, readjusts, and grows around the rock, even enveloping it over time, strengthened.

I met Jan during these days. We were married the week before I began my three fairly unremarkable years at Western Theological Seminary. I was immature spiritually, or, maybe, rather typical for my age and circumstances. In 1972 my dad gave me a copy of Henri Nouwen's book, *With Open Hands*. I let it rest, unopened. After my ordination in 1973, I was minister of congregational care and evangelism at the Lake Hills Community Church, California. I resigned after nine months, too immature to handle the very complex dynamics of this particular multi-staff operation.

Jan and I returned to Michigan, and I changed vocational directions. A Th.M. in pastoral care and counseling from Calvin Theological Seminary and a D.Min. again from Western, along with much training and supervision, led to my 1980 licensure as a marriage and family therapist. Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, gave birth in 1975 to the Marriage and Family Center, and I have since watched it grow to a multi-staff, multi-site ministry of measurable importance in our community. During these productive years Jan and I gave birth; not without a little struggle, to Emily in 1977, and David in 1980.

My conscious search began at a specific moment in time. While presenting my doctoral work to both faculty and students at the end of my program, Jim Cook asked a pointed question. Regarding my personal credo on God, humankind, sin, redemption, church, and ministry, he probed, "Andy, why haven't you written about the Holy Spirit?"

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I had not a clue. It was one of those moments in time when everything seems suspended, when revelation happens and conviction is born, a crisis created by a question. I had no idea how profoundly I was to be impacted by Jim's inquiry. You can always tell something of a spiritual director's availability to God by the quality of his or her questions. In truth, the only thing I want to write about today is the work of the Holy Spirit.

For the next year, from June of 1980 until June of 1981, I could not bring myself to read one single book. For the most part, my brain was exhausted and my will needed a vacation desperately. The only thing I could read was *Car and Driver* magazine. I just let it all settle in. "Dr. Atwood" needed some adjustment.

It seems odd to me that I do not recall much of my life during the next three years. Ministry at the Marriage and Family Center continued, reading picked up again particularly in the area of control theory. I was fascinated with its model of the human being as a control system that functions in an orderly manner. William Powers' obscure book, *Behavior: The Control of Perception*, along with what was then new work by William Glasser on the integration of reality therapy with control theory, kept my attention. At the highest level of perception, both authors maintained, is control for nothing, or "universal oneness." This is the state of consciousness reached by the mystics of various traditions who want to want nothing, and who sometimes actually so live. During this year my attention began to move away from my gigantic and necessary preoccupation with the behavioral sciences toward the more spiritual. It was, in reflection, a time of letting go, ever so easily and gently, of my certainty. Having been well educated and trained in the customs of the Reformed Church in America and the disciplines of marriage and family therapy, I now see in hindsight that I was still searching for a point of integration, a point of convergence. On the surface it was sought between psychology and theology; deeply between intimacy and isolation. It was now that I reached for and read that gifted book, *With Open Hands* and found my life focused. Space doesn't permit me to quote fully, but suffice it to say, with some boldness, that Nouwen's description of "revolutionary man" caught me and burned within my soul. I knew deeply that I desired to be such a person. The behavioral sciences, for all their worth in helping people to move from falsehood to reality, fall short of helping people to move those extra steps to the truth. The labels and categories, measuring sticks and markers of the world are of limited use in the kingdom of God. How do we measure the transforming power of love, or the patience that comes from living presently in eternity, or the effects of the resurrection upon the process of healing? I came to appre-
ciate James Fowler's identification of "conjunctive faith" as the place where paradoxes are played with in search of a unifying oneness. Such a tension-packed playground it is! A little quote from Viktor Frankl enthralled me during those days, and still inspires me.

A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth--that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way—an honorable way—in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment. For the first time in my life I was able to understand the meaning of the words, 'The angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory."

In my purest and most fleeting moments, I understand that Christ is my only true love. In my heart I developed a subtle and solid yearning to be an angel. There is something intentional about spiritual formation. Glenn Clark said that it is to be our "soul's sincerest desire."

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In 1985, I was given the gift of a meaningful friendship, and through that relationship was given a meaningful book authored by Jiddu Krishnamurti. With the book, my friend brought her questions, her natural interrogations of my faith. She asked me some simple, hard questions, at what must have been the right moment in time, questions not about what I believed theologically, but about why I believed. "I mean, why do you really believe all this, Andy?" Her gift to me was the cherished gift of doubt. The relationship was necessarily suspended, but the welcome gift of doubt warmly lingers. Thomas Merton wrote somewhere something like this: If you are going to follow Christ truly, you must doubt everything.
I read Krishnamurti broadly. He is someone from far outside our tradition. Born in India in 1895, K, as he was called, was taken to England where he was acclaimed by the Theosophical Society to be the new "World Teacher" reincarnated. He became an internationally renowned philosopher who gave talks all over the globe. In time and with maturity, K disavowed his own deification and gave up everything in pursuit of "completeness." He eventually resided in Ojai, California. K gave me a glimpse into the life of one who perceived the truth to be something other than, bigger than, doctrine. He pressed me beyond convention, encouraged me to open my eyes to my prejudices, the inculturation of my white, middle-class, Dutch, male world. Here I became more awake; more disconnected, and more connected. My gift to you, from Krishnamurti, would be these verses from the middle of his poem, "The Search."

As one beholds through a small window
A single green leaf, a small patch of the vast blue sky,
So I began to perceive Thee,
In the beginning of all things.
As the leaf faded and withered, the patch covered as with dark cloud,
So didst Thou fade and vanish,
But to be reborn again,
As the single green leaf, as the small patch of the blue sky.

For many lives have I seen
The bleak winter and the green spring.
Prisoned in my little room,
I could not behold the entire tree nor the whole sky.
I swore there was no tree, nor the vast sky—
That was the Truth.

Through time and destruction
My window grew large.
I beheld
Now,
A branch with many leaves,
And a greater patch of the blue with many clouds.

I forgot the single green leaf, the small patch of the vast blue.
I swore there was no tree, nor the immense sky—
That was the Truth.
Weary of this prison,
This small cell,
I raged at my window.
With bleeding fingers
I tore away brick after brick,
I beheld,
Now,
The entire tree, its great trunk,
Its many branches, its thousand leaves,
And an immense part of the sky.
I swore there was no other tree, no other part to the sky—
That was the Truth.

This prison no longer holds me,
I flew away through the window.
O friend,
I behold every tree and the vast expanse of the limitless sky.
Though I live in every single leaf and in every small patch
of the vast blue sky,
Though I live in every prison, looking out through every
small casement—
Liberated am I.
Lo! not a thing shall bind me—
This is the Truth.

All that I had been studying, whether theology or the behavioral sciences, pointed to the truth. The reality of reality in symbol became suddenly more apparent. The map and the territory are not the same. I wanted to be one with the territory. The truth. If I was authentically to experience intimacy, it would only be in communion with God. To realize that truth, my love of this world would have to be released, which, in truth, would only result in my more deeply loving this world. As with Augustine, I knew where my heart would alone rest. I hope that as you read this you can grasp something of the energy, the tension, the push, and drive behind my words. During these days I became fascinated by the paradoxes all about me. Milton Erikson was fond of encouraging his patients to "be apart and a part." I wanted to know how it was possible to love God with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind, and my neighbor as myself. What lies beyond the paradox? Christ, one and all, alpha and omega. God is omnipotent, and my sister was crippled and my brother dead. Randomness and chaos are a part of God's ordered system. The more I went through the window, the more I had to leave the truth behind, trusting only those
simple intuitions of the truth that would come to me in the middle of the night, or while out on a long run, or when alone in meditation. I came to value my personal experience of Christ. Ambivalence marked my every day for months and months on end, not in a particularly noisy or otherwise obvious manner, but internally. I recall one moment vividly. Standing over the kitchen sink, washing pots and pans, struggling quietly, I looked out the window and barely was able to hold back my anger, my tears. I uttered solidly and softly, "Damn it, why don't you just leave me alone for a while!" Yet, I accepted God's timing. As my appreciation for prayer as the conscious realization of the presence of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit grew, some of the dualities began to collapse, the paradoxes merged a bit, and the balm of clarity spread.

This is the stuff of my "mid-life crisis," compounded by some oddly unworthy anointing to the vocation of spiritual exploration. I was only thirty-seven at the time, which seemed a bit early for such confusion. Be that as it may, this necessary crucible of doubt must be navigated if one is to proceed on the way. A competent spiritual director is a clear survivor, no matter how scathed, of this season of ambivalence.

What should I want in life, out of life, for life, from life? What was I willing to let go of in order to be found by Christ? Where would I put my heart, my passion, my security, my friends, my family, my love? These questions, and more, needed answers if I was to survive.

On November 26, 1960, Dag Hammarskjöld penned this Gethsemani poem, and something in it evokes out of my soul the heaviness, the willing resignation, the burden that became mine alone to bear, the silence, the betrayal of the kiss, the judgment and the Judge, the rightness of love. We are to let go of everything if we are to receive everything.

The moon was caught in the branches:
Bound by its vow,
My heart was heavy.

Naked against the night
The trees slept. "Nevertheless,
Not as I will . . . ."

The burden remained mine:
They could not hear my call,
And all was silence.

Soon, now, the torches, the kiss:
Soon the gray of dawn
In the Judgment Hall.
What will their love help there?
There, the question is only
If I love them.

Suffering is, I have come to learn, the necessary companion of desiring God alone. It is very hard to face that to which one is attached through the senses, to ask for release, and to move off freely into the nothing with only faith. God alone, who knows me more deeply than I know myself, is alone my comfort. Suffering brings me to God; yet, while hugging it close, there is a kind of suffering in this world which I must also embrace. In 1987 I founded Local Group 325 of Amnesty International. Human rights are everyone's right; and as a believer, I continue to feel compelled to act forthrightly.

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My colleague Carl Schroeder and I began in 1985 to have breakfast together every Monday morning at Arnie's Restaurant on West Leonard Street in Grand Rapids. Carl too is a pilgrim, although one who manages content so differently than I. We kept this fellowship up faithfully for three years or so, broken only by the inconvenience of his and Lucille's move to nearby Holland. We became each other's spiritual director, even though we had no such label to put upon our relationship at the time. We began to talk and think and wonder together about God's activity within our lives. It was a moment of life-giving centeredness within the tumult that came forth from me as I tore at the windows which constricted my vision. We began to read Christian mystics from all ages. Then, late in 1986, an important sense of vocation arrived.

We wondered together, Carl and I, just what all these mystics were talking about. The question became, and still is, "If we take the various reports left behind by all these Christian mystics, reports of their personal pilgrimages into communion with God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, what would their journeys hold in common?" Carl and I covenanted then and there, in Arnie's Restaurant, to write a book together on the experience of God. We have been working on it steadily ever since, through numerous revisions. This is nothing that can be written about any quicker than it can be experienced and integrated. It is slow going, this business of sanctified conversion.

I should also mention that I arrived at a critical point of professional clarification during this time. My opinion here is rather unique; and while it is understood by some, it is supported by few. I believe that if anyone is to be a professional counselor, he or she should be appropriately licensed
and credentialed as a professional mental health therapist. If one is to be a spiritual midwife, then the appropriate vocation is spiritual direction. There are professional therapists who should be charged with the task of helping people to become real self-actualized persons. There are spiritual directors who should help people to become true self-transcendent persons. There are some gifted to do both. The distinctions became clear enough for me to resign my membership in the American Association of Pastoral Counselors, an organization which I found to be hopelessly deadlocked in its effort to integrate the two, continually at the expense of spiritual direction.

Roger Shoup, who was the senior minister of Central Reformed Church in 1986, was another blessed messenger sent to me by God. Roger, while in a bookstore in Detroit, picked up a book by Joel Goldsmith, *A Parenthesis in Eternity: Living the Mystical Life*. Roger thumbed through the book for fifteen minutes, and bought it for me. Rubber bands hold it together today. I have read Goldsmith's more than twenty books. Joel was born a Jew, became a Christian Scientist, and then just himself. His writing awakens me to truths that I have considered before, been taught before, have professed before, but have not apprehended before. He evokes the intuitive side of my personality. Is Goldsmith orthodox? Wrong question. Have I realized the truth through his writings? Right question.

At this point it was still Carl and I, but with a growing list of dear friends with whom we shared the journey: Augustine, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Juliana of Norwich, Count Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, Friedrich Von Hugel, Rufus Jones, Brother Lawrence, Francis of Assisi, Watchman Nee, Howard Thurman, Teilhard de Chardin, Joel Goldsmith, Thomas Merton, Morton Kelsey, Henri Nouwen, Douglas Steere, Evelyn Underhill, Frank Laubach, Agnes Sanford, Glenn Clark, A.W. Tozer, Hannah Hurdard . . . the list is long indeed. Our hope is that our book, when published, will introduce about forty of these friends to you in a way that will give form and substance to your own journey. Suffice it to say at this point, that without them, I would have thought I was absolutely crazy. I belonged with them and felt absolutely isolated from all but a few people around me.

In the summer of 1988, I found myself in particularly acute turmoil; I was bored with my routine and in need of something deeper and different. As from beyond, the solution came to me bringing me instant relief. For thirteen years I had worked out of a lovely, but dark and noisy, first floor office. So, I moved to the second floor where the space is bright and, by remodeling an adjacent porch, I had sun and solitude, up and away from ordinary office traffic. I am very fortunate to be permitted to spend fifty hours a week in such a tranquil setting.
This journey is about a shift in consciousness, an alteration in my awareness of reality. Jesus said that his kingship was not of this world. As our consciousness is converted into Christ's, there are major paradigm shifts that take place. Our map becomes enriched. Our perceptions, both sensual and intuitive, explode through the commonplace to the intricate oneness that binds every distinct piece into a divinely ordered, synergistic whole. Gradually, step by precious step, I have come to travel a very small part of the distance between belief and knowledge. Doubt is the path through the forest of unrest; suffering is my dearest companion and sage. Hope encourages all along the way. At every breakthrough, the joy is sublime.

This world is a part of the kingdom of God, just a part. The laws of this world are predictable. All its laws are part of the laws of the kingdom. My self has gone through some transformations. I have come to acknowledge that through applying the behavioral sciences, one is able to move from being a false-self to a real-self. And, through spiritual direction, one is able to move from being a real-self to a True-Self. Ah, you ask, what is the difference? Awakening to what always was, that is the difference. Realization of the truth of my life comes as I release control of it and enter into a living prayer. To do so is to come face-to-face with my attachments, with the addictions that hold me fast to this world in which my self is ever attempting to be in control. Grace frees me from my addictions. My life goes on secure in the knowledge that God will bring me freely to desire what God desires for me.

Carl and I found ourselves frustrated with our worship experience at Central Reformed Church during 1986, and so, with permission of consistory, we began a monthly vespers service. Its character is different from the regular morning worship. We have communion from a common loaf and cup at every service, and sing to guitar accompaniment. We use a songbook developed by Franciscan John Michael Talbot, whose music has meant so much to me. Occasionally we enjoy pieces from Taize, the monastic Protestant community in France. We have a time each month for healing prayers. Rather than the sanctuary, we gather in the church's parlor. Except for our candlelight service at Christmas, it is always a group of about twelve to twenty: just the right size, always somebody new, a third from other churches and denominations. I have been liturgist at Vespers for the last year and a half, and now share the expanding experience with a liturgy committee composed of regular worshipers, some of whom come from other denominations and churches.

My own personal encounter with the Spirit is greatly enhanced by a little portion of land tended by Gene and Mary Herr, a Mennonite couple who care for the Hermitage outside of Three Rivers, an hour or so south
of Grand Rapids. Every six or eight weeks, I travel to the Hermitage for a day of silence. Gene is my current spiritual director. He walks with me in caring honesty, and I try to do so with him. The Hermitage is a well of inspiration, with its one-hundred-year-old barn, St. Joseph's, a hut in the woods, and about sixty acres of fields and trees. It is holy ground, and it is a special place where I go for a sabbath. In the spring of 1990, I decided to invite some friends along with me on my days of retreat; and since then, with but rare exception, I have up to four friends as companions. Many have taken to the sabbath experience and continue on their own.

There are so many special friends who have been a part of this. I hope you understand that you cannot, absolutely cannot, travel alone. Without the community, without someone to serve as a spiritual director, the siren call will surely lead you to the cliffs. One such helpful shipmate has been Karen Rafferty. Her journey has been ordinary and extraordinary; from abuse and neglect to that of a Third Order Franciscan. Our family has adopted Karen, and she has adopted us. Praise be to God.

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Let me tell you about a dream. In the spring of 1990, I gathered with others at Camp Geneva for a two-day retreat with Don Postema. It was a glorious time of worship. Jan and I attended together, along with many of those who have journeyed with me these last years. A gathering of saints around me. Saturday night, sleeping in my own bed beside my wife, I had a most unusual dream. I seldom remember my dreams, and never have nightmares. I share this directly from my journal:

4/23/90
At 4:00 a.m. I woke up w/a nightmare. In a bus, crowded or full, the driver pulled over & got out at a phone to call in. Without him, as he was on the phone, the bus & all the passengers moved down & around the corner—200 yards. We didn't know what was happening. In a short time the driver returned & walked around the bus, looking it over, in a sort of dream state. At urging, I went to the front door & called for him as he went around & out of sight. I was standing in the front when a bolt of red light "zapped me" & I was being electrocuted. I woke up with a silent scream, my mouth was open & I was trembling—but my mind was clear. I looked at the clock, was frightened, and I crossed my index fingers and began repeating "God loves me; God loves us all" over and over again & it became a
mantra of sorts. I thought that Satan was trying to get me & I refused him, knowingly, intentionally—I just focused on God's love. At 4:44 I looked again at the clock, felt calm, reviewed this all so I could remember it . . . and fell back asleep.

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A word also needs to be said about where I am with the Bible and with corporate worship. Baron Frederick von Hugel, in the introduction to his two-volume work on Katherine of Genoa, speaks eloquently about three essential elements of religion. He maintains that we move from a faith grounded in our history, to one that is subjected to reason, then to one that is experientially based, hopefully to find finally a balance between the three. Both Bible study and worship have followed all three steps, and it is balance that I am after now. For much of the last decade I have hardly read the Bible at all. It was one of those pieces of my life I had to shed before I could allow it to be injected into the veins of my very soul. I now read from the Jerusalem Bible, 1966 edition, with the apocrypha. It looks and sounds different from the book which I spent so much time with historically, and rationally. Similarly, with worship I have made some shifts. Sunday mornings at Central are not very much different from those that I grew up with. Not very different at all. That is okay, really. It makes sense. But now I worship with others in other places. St. Jude's Roman Catholic Church is a five-minute walk from our home. Marywood and the Dominicans are a five-minute drive from my office. There is something mystical in the mass, in kneeling to kiss the feet of Jesus on Good Friday, in chanting prayers of confession, and singing the Psalms. I am more balanced, history-reason-experience, if I occasionally attend a mass. "The lovers of God have no religion but God alone."

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In early 1989 the first person to come to me intentionally for a relationship of spiritual direction arrived. At the time I had only the vaguest idea about the whole concept. I quickly read some, and discovered that the process of direction was a natural extension of what I had been doing in therapy for fifteen years. Since then others, both men and women from various faith communities, have come on an individual basis. I also have had the distinct pleasure of being a spiritual midwife first to one group of eight companions beginning in 1990, and now a second group in 1991. These
folks have taken a real gamble with me, trusting me to help them find God's direction. Where all of this will go, I have no idea. On my better days I don't even care. That is a giant step for me.

I should also mention that Stan Rock was kind enough to have invited me to teach one course for him during his 1989-1990 sabbatical leave from Western Theological Seminary. I taught a modified version of his basic course in pastoral care, and tried to introduce some of the basic distinctions between pastoral counseling and spiritual direction. From the reactions I received from various students, it became obvious that this was fairly new, and fairly intriguing, information. The whole experience was challenging, and rewarding. In the fall of 1990, I taught an elective in pastoral counseling at Calvin Theological Seminary. There, with a smaller group, we engaged around spiritual direction for four of the ten weeks we were together, realizing that to do so required a major shift in their customary way of doing theology.

When I started with the Marriage and Family Center, beginning my career as a private practice therapist, I built my practice by "hustling my wares" through workshops and classes on all manner of subjects related to family life. Well folks, I have been the featured speaker at my last PTA meeting! I have covenanted with God to stick to my mission, and my mission is clear at this point.

Stephen Covey's popular book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* is a veritable gold mine of wisdom for anyone earnestly wishing to travel from falsehood to reality, and from reality to Truth; from false-self, to real-self, to True-Self. I would recommend this book to everyone. Habit number two has to do with the "first creation," that which happens in the mind. We must first have some representation, some map, of where we are going so that as we set out on the spiritual journey we can manage life effectively. As with any corporation, family, or church, says Covey, so it is with every individual: We all need to have a well-defined "mission statement," which may be synonymous with one's divine direction. As I have taken spiritual formation seriously, so have I taken Covey's suggestions to heart. I have written my own mission statement, and I share it now with the hope that you will be encouraged to articulate your own.

**MY MISSION** is to explore, map, and then to guide others into the kingdom of God.

It is a mission desired and designed for me by God, and so it is imperative that my mission be regularly rediscerned, acknowledging and welcoming God's continued transformation of my life, and of life about me.
It is a mission that gives intentional focus
to how I live in each of my roles, helping me to
limit my commitment to those activities
which realize God's mission for my life.

For me to "explore" is for me to . . .
listen to the voice of God in all that I do
with my senses
and with my spirit
to discern the voice of God, the divine direction
as distinct from that of other spirits
and as distinct from my own will
and to submit myself completely to God's mission
thereby allowing my conscious transformation
from a life lived
in this world to the kingdom of God.

For me to "map" is for me to . . .
oberse the process of shifting paradigms
in all spheres of life
and to record as a scribe the wisdom given me in forms
that are as practical as possible
and yet as poetic as possible.

For me to "guide others" is for me to . . .
share the wisdom by sharing my records
only with those who ask
and always as a humble instrument of God
encouraging in others their very own
faithful listening, discerning, and submitting
to God's will for their own lives.

I will do this guiding as an instrument of God
In my role as a spiritual director . . .
allowing it to naturally unfold in each
and all of my other roles
for this is my primary and central role in life
and that which gives essential shape to how
I function . . .

In my role as husband . . .
In my role as father . . .
In my role as therapist . . .
In my role as executive director . . .
In my role as teacher and writer . . .
And in my role as friend . . .

If it sounds rather noble and idealistic, it is meant to be. A mission statement is designed to inspire, just like God's direction for your life is meant to inspire you, to fill you with an awareness of a meaning and purpose that has been given to you, that is always being given to you, and that when followed will make all the difference not only in this world, but in the kingdom as well. One's spiritual direction becomes that around which one is centered, that to which one becomes loyal, and that from which the very substance of life is drawn. Worth, in some manner, is authentically realized in following one's spiritual direction with integrity; it is derived from both faith felt and action done, which, of course, are identical.

* * * *

During these last five years, I have been particularly preoccupied with trying to understand the process of spiritual formation and the process of spiritual direction. In the former, the quest is to be open and available to God's movement in life, to listen, discern, and submit to divine direction, and, in so doing, to move beyond what Abraham Maslow referred to as "self-actualization" to self-transcendence. "I have been crucified with Christ, and I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20, JB). There is no more meaningful way to live. In the latter, the process of spiritual direction, the task is to be in a relationship with another person in caring honesty, assisting another to reflect on his or her experience of God in light of who God is calling them to be. Less directional than Carl Roger's non-directive therapy, spiritual direction is about compassionately helping another to listen, discern, and submit to God's direction.

* * * *

Below is a poem penned by myself. As I have said, the process of spiritual formation has been my calling. Many times in recent years, I moved through the window of reality and thought I saw life very clearly. But not until last December, while on retreat at the Hermitage, did the model fall into place comfortably for me. Mine is notably different from the one proposed by James Fowler, whose contemporary work I commend to you. His is more developmental and typically masculine; mine more purely process and, I imagine, more feminine. Nothing is ever the last
word. Oh, how silly such a thought would be! But my model is the product of my listening and my discernment, and to a much lesser degree, my submission.

**BLESSED HUNGER**

1. God, the beginning, between, and end has graced us all with a hunger deep within our souls Blessed Hunger Truly, blessed Hunger

2. Yet, a hunger that is hard to live with for its pangs are painful deep within our souls Blessed Pain Truly, blessed Pain

3. Search, over, in, and around this world seeking something, searching deep within our souls Blessed Searching Truly, blessed Searching

4. Lost, we become lost in reflections shadows and illusions deep within our souls Blessed Illusions Truly, blessed Illusions

5. Dead, end, fearful of only a dead end haunted by the fear of nothing deep within our souls Blessed Nothing Truly, blessed Nothing

6. Hope, words of hope and promised love Experiences and touches of assurance deep within our souls Blessed Assurance Truly, blessed Assurance
7. Go, letting go of each and every attachment
   Opening our hearts, releasing
   deep within our souls
   Blessed Releasing
   Truly, blessed Releasing

8. Filling, into our nothing comes everything
   it is the indwelling of Christ, the Holy
   deep within our souls
   Blessed Holy
   Truly, blessed Holy

9. New, and fresh and different and alive with life
   Everything has been miraculously transformed
   deep within our souls
   Blessed Transformation
   Truly, blessed Transformation

10. Speak, utter a witness with head, and heart, and hand
    Work out the new vision of the new life
    deep within our souls
    Blessed New Life
    Truly, blessed New Life

11. Spiral, unbroken spiral, visited again and again
    God, yet, search, lost, dead, hope, go,
    filling, new, speak
    deepening with our souls
    Blessed Hunger
    Truly, blessed Hunger

* * * *

I have learned that the belonging achieved through conformity to anyone's expectations is not intimacy with Christ. Such conformity is always instrumental; it is never meant to be terminal. Follow the experiences of the biblical characters and you will observe the work of the Spirit in direct, personal, and intimate relationship. It is the experience of God alone that converts.

There are two words engraved in the stone arch over the gate leading to the garden here at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, Kentucky, where I have been led both to finish this story, and to participate in the
The two words read in their simplicity and completeness, "GOD ALONE."

For so many years, my history, my background in the Christian church, my seminary training—all of these—have been like a cell to which I clung for security. In many important ways, they still are. Yet now I understand that it is not the Bible that I am to worship, nor the cross, nor doctrine, nor liturgy, nor church order, but GOD ALONE. It is in all of this that I meet GOD ALONE in Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is the Giver, not the gift, that is to be my beloved. If we love with sincerity of heart, God will reveal the secrets of wisdom, and the world will be renewed.

Stay the course, my friend, that begins in GOD ALONE and ends in GOD ALONE. Traverse through time, which de Chardin somewhere describes as grace and circumstances acting upon your will. Follow GOD ALONE from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Ruth and Mary; to Christ, the apostles, and the tested order of the church. But remember, follow GOD ALONE.

The Cistercian monks about me have been called to a life of intimacy and isolation, as have the other retreatants in the guesthouse with me. Yesterday, while walking in the woods, I met Brother Renae, here for forty-one years. I asked him what he had learned in that time. Quickly he smiled and said, "To be happy." We chatted, vowed to pray for each other, and on parting with a wave, he said, "Every encounter is for eternity."

We all are just one person, in one place, at one moment, for one reason, in one way; GOD ALONE. Here it is that we are the colors of the sanctuary and garden, the fragrances of multitudes of flowers and vast freshly cut fields. The textures of skin and stone, bark, bread, and wine. The sounds of laughter, confession, chant, silence, birds and bells. All of it is GOD ALONE. Praise the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever.

ENDNOTES


5 From Darkness to Light (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 27f.

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