"*Becoming Beholders* gives the reader amazingly practical advice on how to entice busy and normally reactive college students to change modes and instead learn to be deliberatively reflective. With examples from disciplines as diverse as abstract mathematics and chemistry to communication studies and literature and writing, I walked away with several ideas to transform my teaching and of how to answer a question I've always struggled with: how can my ordinarily secular physics courses become so much more in light of the Catholic intellectual tradition? *Becoming Beholders* helped me conceive of new ways to help my physics students look at nature and the world and see, as Michael Himes, SJ, puts it so eloquently, the omnipresence of grace—'the love that undergirds all that exists.'"

Gintaras Duda
Associate Professor of Physics
Creighton University
2013 Carnegie/CASE US Professor of the Year

"The editors write of the need for spaces where learning has meaning and purpose. Teachers don't create those kinds of spaces with their knowledge of the content or a sophisticated repertoire of pedagogical techniques. They do so with an imagination that sees what and how they teach in a life-enveloping context. That's what these essays showcase. You see how teaching looks when it's infused with a bit of divine perspective."

Maryellen Weimer
Professor Emeritus of Teaching and Learning
Penn State University

Becoming Beholders

Cultivating Sacramental Imagination and Actions in College Classrooms

Edited by
Karen E. Eifler and *Thomas M. Landy*

A Michael Glazier Book

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Preface

The last twenty or so years have seen something of a renaissance in terms of attention to the mission of Catholic higher education and the value of preserving it as a distinctive contribution to the American educational landscape. In many ways, the conversation began by encouraging faculty at Catholic colleges and universities to see themselves not as guests on their campuses but as fully invested stewards and collaborators, sharing in the privilege and responsibility of carrying on the unique charism of the place. As the physical presence of vowed religious men and women diminishes on Catholic campuses, the yearning to keep vivid the visions of the institutions' founding orders in the work of education and formation takes on a new imperative for the lay boards and faculty now in place.

What has been missing for most lay faculty is a clear framework that allows teachers of all disciplines to situate their work in the twin animating spirits of Catholic higher education: immersion in the rich, ancient intellectual tradition and sacramental imagination of Catholicism. For indeed, more than anything, sacramentality is a religious *imagination*, offering a perspective on one's discipline and its value. It is a deeply Catholic perspective on the world, one that sees God manifest throughout the natural, created world.

Catholics may be accustomed to think in terms of just seven sacraments, but underlying these seven sacraments is the staggering possibility that God might communicate God's self through the water of baptism, or the oil of anointing, or the bread of the Eucharist. Sacramentality conceives of God as active in, and through, the material world. To some religious sensibilities, that claim might seem blasphemous—for them, the Creator is radically higher than—and different from—a world that might be variously seen as simply fallen or profane. But in terms of a sacramental imagination, learning to see, learning to pay attention—teaching students to become beholders—is a fundamental religious good,

and a primary educational task. "Learning to see" means learning to see a thing, or a person, or a social system in all its complexity, as it is. Botanists, poets, historians, nutritionists, and art historians all seek to untangle the webs of their disciplines with students in unique ways, and each field has its own distinct "grammar" and "syntax" to be mastered for genuine understandings to coalesce. While the disciplines and courses taught at Catholic colleges and universities are overwhelmingly, and appropriately, nontheological, approaching that enterprise through a sacramental imagination provides connective tissue that can lend a crucial kind of unity to any course of study. Undertaken in the context of sacramentality, students receive a cohesive, vigorous, and ultimately positive approach to their world, rather than a disconnected amalgam of classes.

But professors cannot teach what they do not know; this is as true of a sacramental worldview as it is of biochemistry. As Catholic higher education confronts tectonic shifts in every conceivable aspect, it behooves us to heed these words of Eric Hoffer, who borrowed substantively from the Rabbi Jesus: "In times of change, the learners will inherit the earth, while the learned will find themselves marvelously equipped for a world that no longer exists."

This book is intended for learners in all disciplines who find themselves, perhaps a bit surprised, embarking on a teaching career at a Catholic college or university. They might be in their first few terms of an assistant professorship, slogging through the usual battle simply to stay a chapter or two ahead of their students. Or they might be well on their road to tenure and pondering the fuzzy question of their "fit with institutional mission," understanding perfectly well how their theology faculty colleagues contribute to the Catholic nature of the place they are establishing a career, but less clear on what they might bring as a teacher of mathematics or psychology. Even with tenure secured, thoughtful veteran faculty can find themselves in the relatively luxurious position of embarking on new phases in their careers as elders of the local community, charged with inculcating a sense of mission and possibility in their young colleagues. Still others grow restless for new ways of approaching the 112th iteration of a survey course.

As student populations change and higher education is increasingly under pressure to prove its value in the face of crushing tuition costs, it is not unusual for later-career academics to reconsider their roles in the classroom. Reflective practitioners look at the heavy-lidded, slouched posture of their students, who seem to be saying "go ahead and teach

me; I dare you," and assert influence in the only place they can: their own efforts. Rarely do college faculty members outside schools and departments of education receive formal pedagogical training as part of their doctoral programs. While some may wear this as a badge of distinction, the growing numbers of centers for teaching excellence on campuses across the country suggest that a large percentage of college faculty hunger for resources to help them hone their effectiveness in the classroom. Even more profoundly, they may seek not simply to discharge their teaching responsibilities more competently, but to create for their students and themselves a space of meaning and purpose. This volume is for the latter. Operating under the assumption that Christ is refracted in every academic discipline, we have assembled a collection of essays from nearly every corridor of the academy. Each contributor is a successful teacher within their discipline, and this will come through in their practical pedagogical suggestions. On the one hand, it is clear that these people know their students and the content they were hired to teach through and through. On the other hand, and more saliently, these professors, who comprise the entire faith spectrum—cradle Catholics, members of other and of no religious or spiritual traditions—provide a rich array of answers to crucial questions:

> "OK, I buy the premise that I share some responsibility for participating in the Catholic mission of my institution. How can *what* and *how* I teach contribute to that?"
>
> "I think I may actually be beginning to grasp what my Vice President for Catholic Mission and Identity means when he talks about a 'sacramental worldview.' If God can be found in all things, that must mean God is present in my literature course. What are the implications for engaging my students in the quest to find God there? How about in my research methods course?"
>
> "No one ever taught me my discipline with the intention of nurturing a sacramental worldview, so I have no models to draw upon, even though I want to do this thing. And it's well-known that, for better or worse, teachers teach as they were taught—so what are some practical ways I can become bilingual in these secular and religious languages, and help my own students do the same?"

The burgeoning of service learning has made the venerable tenets of Catholic social teaching familiar to many faculty on college and university campuses. Even in our nation's deeply partisan political milieu, the

prophetic and Gospel exhortations to feed the hungry and clothe the naked are not hard sells in Catholic institutions. For many newcomers to Catholicism, Catholic social teaching is the perfect "appetizer course," inviting further explorations of the other rich dimensions of Catholic intellectual and spiritual life. Many faculty on Catholic campuses have, with relative ease and even a good deal of relish, incorporated service learning projects into their academic curricula. The prevalence of service learning as a gateway into Catholic traditions is reflected here in the presence of three essays that detail particular service learning projects that have been folded into academic enterprises. The authors of those pieces provide helpful details on how they have provided the intellectual scaffolding to move their students beyond the considerable power of experiential learning into understanding the graced nature of that work, fostering links between the human logic of social justice and the divine nature of looking at those we serve through a sacramental lens.

Each essay was selected for its ability to illuminate in very practical ways Gerard Manley Hopkins's ever-startling insight from his poem "Hurrahing In Harvest" that lends its name to the entire volume: "These things, these things were here and but the beholder/ Wanting; which two when they once meet/The heart rears wings bold and bolder/ And hurls for him, O half hurls earth for him off under his feet." We take it as given that teachers at Catholic colleges and universities are stakeholders in the quest to nurture in their students the capacity to become beholders themselves. Further, we have found teachers who realized that the capacity to do so, like the Divine Presence itself, is always there, wanting only a beholder to see and share it. In other words, the strategies unpacked in these essays are not divine revelations that can only be understood by fellow preternaturally gifted teachers. Rather, each author has unfolded for all readers a particular, straightforward practice for anyone teaching in a Catholic institution.

This is not to suggest that the volume contains recipes that, if followed faithfully, will result in perfect realization of the end goals. Great teaching does have an inchoate sense of grace to it, and each practitioner will render results unique to herself and the content area in which the idea is implemented. But for readers interested in finding assignments, ways of approaching texts or manners of interacting with learners that have been successful in helping nurture a sacramental worldview, this volume will be a useful tool. And while each piece reflects the expertise of a single discipline, readers should also find that most of the ideas are portable to other content areas, with a few disciplinary tweaks. As "all

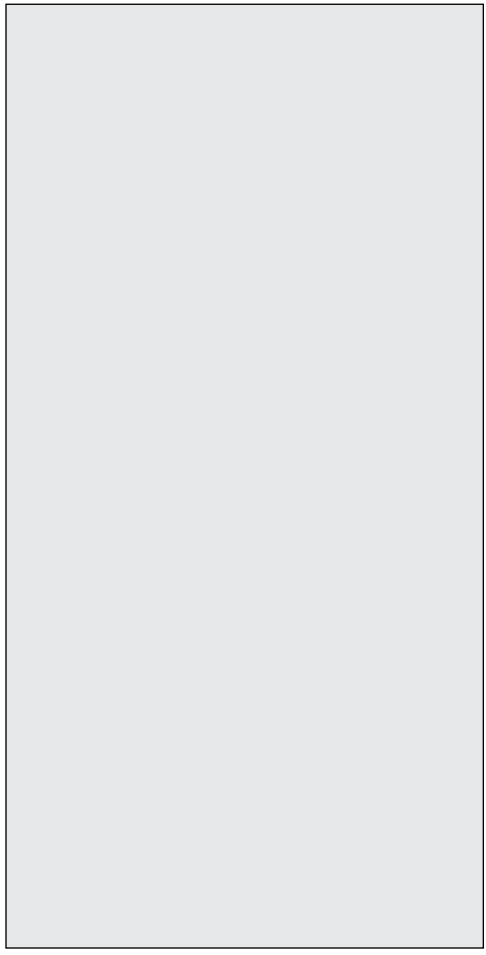
of us are smarter than one of us," it would be useful to read essays as a member of a faculty reading group and weave in a discussion as to how a given pedagogical strategy related in this volume might be adapted in a different department. We recommend doing this over wine and cheese. Still other readers may find the principal value here is simply giving them the language to comprehend what is meant by the daunting exhortation to teach from the perspective of a sacramental worldview, to contribute to the mission of their institution as a chemist, mathematician, or linguist.

Finally, this collection of essays is not intended to promulgate indoctrination or evangelization. It is not religious education, catechesis, or spiritual development. The intellectual integrity of calculus, social sciences, and the humanities is fully respected in each piece, even as the authors suggest that in any area of human learning, there is more going on than meets the eye. Catholic institutions of higher education are in a unique position to tap into that "something more," which we have labeled as sacramentality, the potential finding of God in all things. At the same time, we echo the hope of St. Paul that in exploring our own disciplines through a sacramental lens, it will not lessen our intellectual acuity but rather allow us to approach knowledge, mystery, the Divine Presence "in a manner that is worthy of thinking beings" (Rom 12:1).

Karen E. Eifler and Thomas M. Landy
February 2014

Part 1

The Sacramental Imagination as a Theological Perspective



Finding God in All Things: A Sacramental Worldview and Its Effects[1]

Michael J. Himes

What is it that makes Catholicism Catholic? There are, after all, many ways of being Christian: the rich Orthodox traditions, the Anglican tradition, the Lutheran tradition, the Reformed traditions, and the Evangelical traditions, to name the most obvious. All of these traditions have wonderfully wise, insightful, powerful things to tell us about Christianity. And there is the Catholic tradition. What has Catholicism to tell about Christianity? What makes Catholicism Catholic? I suggest that the most important answer to that question is the sacramental principle. I must offer a provisional statement of the sacramental principle, one which will, I hope, become clearer as we go on: the sacramental principle means that what is always and everywhere the case must be noticed, accepted, and celebrated somewhere sometime. What is always and everywhere true must be brought to our attention and be embraced (or rejected) in some concrete experience at some particular time and place.

Talking about God

To explain why I think that this sacramental principle is so important, I must ask your indulgence while I lay some deep foundations. Consider the word "God." "God" is the theological shorthand that we use to

[1] This essay first appeared in *As Leaven in the World: Essays on Faith, Vocation, and the Intellectual Life*, ed. Thomas M. Landy (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2001).

designate the Mystery which grounds and undergirds all that exists. One could call it something else, if one likes, but "God" is handy. It is short, three letters, one syllable, it has been around for a good while, and it has the advantage of familiarity, so let us use it. If we are talking about God, the ultimate Mystery, that which grounds all that exists, then we are speaking about that which is itself not grounded on or in anything else. The ultimate Mystery is *ultimate*, not itself dependent on another. Everything that exists and is not that ultimate Mystery is the universe. Thus we cannot account for the universe's existence in such way that it is understood as giving something necessary to God.

I teach at Boston College, a Jesuit university. Perhaps for that reason, I think in this context of the familiar Jesuit motto, *Ad majorem Dei gloriam*, "For the greater glory of God." As a description of the motive of our actions, that motto is very powerful and very challenging, indeed. But it ought not be taken as a theological statement, i.e., a statement which tells us something about God. God does not need greater glory; God has tons of glory. God is never going to use up all the glory God has. God has closets full of it. God does not require creatures to tell God that God is great. Presumably God has noticed. God does not need us to glorify God. Why does anything other than God, i.e., the universe, exist? Not so that it can give something to God but so that God can give something to it. The universe (or, as we more often call it in religious language, creation) exists as the recipient of a gift.

What is it that God, the ultimate Mystery, gives to creation, the universe whose being is grounded in that Mystery? There are only two possibilities: either God gives something other than God, which would simply be more of the universe, another creature, or God gives God. Here is the great Christian claim about the universe's origin in Mystery: creation exists so that God can give God's self to it. Creation exists so that God can communicate God's self to creation. That gift of self is what is meant by *agape*, love. Creation exists because it is the object of love. Love, agape, is the only ground for its existence. So deep is this claim in the Christian tradition that Christianity actually insists that it is the least wrong way to understand what we mean by the Mystery which grounds and surrounds all that exists.

I tell beginning students that theology, certainly Christian theology, is always done between two poles. One pole is probably best summed up by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The final proposition in the only book published by Wittgenstein during his lifetime, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (you may have seen the film) is arguably the most famous single sentence

in twentieth-century philosophy: "of that about which we can say nothing, let us be silent." If I may paraphrase less elegantly, "if you don't know what you're talking about, shut up." That is an enormously important religious counsel. If God is Mystery, then let us not natter on about God like we know what we are talking about.

A great problem of religious language and imagery is that we use it too confidently. We speak as if what we are talking about—God—is perfectly clear and fully intelligible. Any language about God which is perfectly clear is certainly wrong. We are, after all, daring to speak about ultimate Mystery, and whatever we say, we must not under pain of blasphemy lose a profound sense of awe before the Mystery that undergirds all that exists. The first commandment of the Decalogue in both Exodus and Deuteronomy is not to fabricate any image of God: "I am the Lord, your God, you shall have no strange gods before me; you shall make no graven images of me." That is a commandment to be taken to heart by all religiously interested people, because it counsels against the too easy idolatry of religious language. For we all make images of God. For several pages now I have been referring to "God," yet I suspect that no one reading this has stopped to ask, "Who is he talking about?" We begin with some idea of what the word means or might mean. When I say the word "God," something goes on in your mind. Now, however wonderful, however deep, rich, powerful, consoling, however philosophically informed, however metaphysically precise, however traditionally grounded, however scripturally sound, however magisterially orthodox, whatever that idea in your mind is, it is not God. And that is the most important thing to know about God: that what you have in your mind when you hear or speak the word "God" is an image of God, and the first commandment is against the making of images of God. So we must be very cautious not to confuse what we think when we hear or speak the word "God," with God.

The second commandment of the Decalogue, of course, flows directly from the first. The second commandment, as you recall, is, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." We have done terrible things to this commandment. We have diminished it into a commandment against profanity: "Don't use bad language." (Should you be asked what Himes's position is on profanity, you can answer that I am against it. But I strongly suspect that Moses had more on his mind at Sinai than how colorfully the Israelites were swearing at the foot of the mountain.)

The second commandment is not about profanity. It states the obvious consequence of the first commandment: do not take the name of God in

vain. Do not talk about God like you know what you are talking about. Far from a commandment against profanity, it is a warning against overconfident theology and too-simple preaching. We need to be very, very cautious about how we use the word "God" because, much more often than not, we use it in vain. If one speaks of Mystery, one must acknowledge that finally one does not know what one is talking about. Wittgenstein's caution is immensely important.

This caution, however, must be balanced by another pole. And the statement of that other pole I borrow from T. S. Eliot. (Eliot was talking about poetry, but I think I can borrow the statement and apply it to religious language without distorting it too much.) Eliot wrote that there are some things about which we can say nothing and before which we dare not keep silent. There are some things about which we know in advance that whatever we say will ultimately be inadequate. But these issues that are so important, so crucial, that we dare not say nothing. Let me offer an image taken from a Woody Allen film. (I am a New Yorker, indeed, a Brooklynite, by origin. All New Yorkers have an immediate affinity with Woody Allen films. Elsewhere people think Woody Allen makes comedies; New Yorkers know Woody Allen makes documentaries. He sets up a camera on the Upper West Side and films what is going on. The rest of the world thinks it is funny; New Yorkers know it is life.)

In one of his films, *Manhattan*, Allen plays a man in love with a younger woman. One night, while on a horse and carriage ride, the woman asks him if he loves her. The Allen character answers yes, but immediately catches himself and adds "I lllllove you. No, no. I looooove you." He proceeds to go through a dozen different ways of saying precisely the same three words. Why? The point of the scene is, I think, that the moment he says those three words, "I love you," he knows how hopelessly inadequate they are. They are such a cliché, so banal. They have been so used and misused and overused in the English language that to say "I love you" does not begin to convey what this man wants to say to that woman. Were Wittgenstein looking over Allen's script, he would have advised him to end the film at that point. If it cannot be said, be silent. If you do not know how something can be said correctly, do not say it. But Eliot wisely knows that there are some things that are so important you dare not keep silent. You know that you cannot say, "I love you," in any way that is adequate, but you also know that you cannot simply be silent, that you have to try to say something, however badly. There are those things so important that one cannot be silent about them. This is preeminently true when we speak of God.

At this point I should add a caution. When the Christian tradition speaks of God, it does not mean a great big person out there somewhere, older, wiser, and stronger than you and I. That is Zeus, not God. One can baptize Zeus, but Zeus always remains Zeus. A baptized Zeus is not what a Christian means when he or she talks about God. I often tell students that to demonstrate that the Christian statements about God are ways of answering the question, "Do you think that there are meaning, purpose, and direction to your life, and do you think that you are not the one who decides that meaning, purpose, and direction?" That question, however it is answered, is the question of God. Does my life have meaning, and if so, do I create and impose that meaning or do I discover it? How you answer that question is how you answer the God question. It is an unavoidable question. One cannot dismiss it as too difficult or impossible of final and sufficient resolution and so decline to ask it. One cannot not ask that question, implicitly or explicitly. It cannot be answered finally, but it is too impossible not to answer it in some way. That is where we find ourselves in religious language, language about Mystery. Theology, like all religious language, is caught between Wittgenstein's caution and Eliot's insight.

How, then, do we talk about God, recognizing that we cannot speak of God adequately but must say something? We do what the great users of language, poets, do when trying to say the unsayable: we pile up metaphors. Let me use my favorite example of this from Shakespeare, certainly by anyone's standard a great user of language. I call to your recollection act 5, scene 5 of *Macbeth*. Macbeth's world is falling apart. The English and the Scottish rebels are drawing closer to Dunsinane. As Macbeth gives his frantic orders for defending the castle, there comes a scream from offstage. To learn the cause of the cry he sends his servant who shortly returns and announces, "The queen, my lord, is dead." Then Shakespeare does what he often does at such moments in his plays: he has a character say that he cannot speak about the crisis. For example, Hamlet dies saying that "the rest is silence." Othello kills himself while talking about an irrelevant action long ago in Aleppo. King Lear's last words dissolve into sound and rhythm.

When Macbeth hears of the death of his wife, he says, more to himself than to his servant, "She should have died hereafter;/ There would have been a time for such a word." There are no words for Lady Macbeth's death, at least not at that moment. He cannot talk about it. But, of course, he does. He launches into his great soliloquy: "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow / Creeps in this petty pace from day to day . . ." And we

come to the extraordinary moment when Macbeth says, "Life is . . ." Realize what the death of this woman means to this man. She was not only his wife; she was the only other human being who shares the guilt, the only other person who knows all the horror—and she is gone. Macbeth is now utterly alone, alone as few, if any, are ever alone. So the loneliest human being in the world is about to tell us what life is like for him. How does he do it? He gives us three metaphors. "Life's but a walking shadow." A shadow, nothing, merely the absence of light. But a walking shadow—animated nothingness. Hold that image in mind. Shift your angle of vision, as it were. Life is also "a poor player/ That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/ And then is heard no more." A bad actor—Shakespeare had probably known many. An actor who gets onstage and flubs his lines and muffs his gestures and bumps into the props. The audience wants him to get off so that the play can go on; he exits and they forget him.

Hold that image in mind, too. Shift your perspective to still another angle. Life is "a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,/ Signifying nothing." I suspect that most of us, if not all, have had the experience of being harangued by someone who was overwrought and out of control, who spluttered on about—what? Something, nothing, whatever it was, we did not understand it. A moment of pure frustration. A tale full of sound and fury told by an idiot. (Teachers have probably had such experiences. Believe me, anyone who has spent any time in ministry knows what it is like to be buttonholed by someone who carries on at length about something that apparently means a great deal to him or her and that remains thoroughly impenetrable to the captive listener.) Three images. Draw out the lines of those three perspectives and, where they intersect, that is how life looks to the loneliest human being on earth. When trying to say the unsayable, we pile metaphor on metaphor on metaphor. Shakespeare, of course, does it better than the rest of us.

That is precisely what we do in religious language when we try to speak about God. And so we say that God is creator, judge, parent, spouse, shepherd, king, lawgiver, rock, leader in battle, savior, and on and on. We pile image on image on image on image, metaphor after metaphor after metaphor. But there must be some control on these metaphors. After all, some ways of describing God are simply abhorrent to the Christian tradition, e.g., God is evil, or God is hatred. Is there some fundamental metaphor for God according to the Christian tradition which can provide a guideline for talking about God, a metaphor with which all other metaphors must be in accord in order to be deemed acceptable? Granted, no way of talking about God is the fully adequate

way, so is there some way of talking about God that is less hopelessly inadequate than other ways? The Christian tradition says yes. There is a fundamental metaphor for talking about God with which all the other metaphors we use for God must fit. (I suspect, by the way, that this idea of a fundamental metaphor for ultimate Mystery is applicable to all great religious traditions, but at this moment we are interested in Christianity, especially in its Catholic form.) The fundamental metaphor for God in the Christian tradition is suggested over and over again in the New Testament but finds its clearest, sharpest, most succinct statement in one of the last documents of the New Testament collection written, what we call the First Letter of John, at 4:8 and again at 16: "God is love."

A Fundamental Metaphor for God

But this love which is offered as the fundamental metaphor for God is a peculiar kind of love, *agape*. This is not the usual Greek word for "love" in the New Testament era. That would be *eros,* a perfectly fine word and a marvelous concept, but not the one which early Christians chose as the metaphor for the ultimate Mystery. *Eros* is a love that seeks satisfaction from the person or thing loved. Thus it clearly includes what most of us think of first when we hear of erotic love, i.e., sexual love. But it also means what we refer to in English when we say "I love that movie" or "I love playing tennis." These are instances of what the Greek-speaking world called erotic love because the lover finds satisfaction and pleasure in that which is loved. There is certainly nothing wrong with *eros*; it is simply something other than *agape*. *Agape* is love to which satisfaction is irrelevant. The lover seeks nothing from the beloved, not even gratitude. The lover simply gives the lover's self to the beloved. Rather than "love," which has become a word with so many (probably too many) uses in English, I prefer to translate *agape* as "self-gift," the gift of the self to the other asking nothing in response. *Agape* is pure gift of self to the other. This is what the Christian tradition claims is the least wrong metaphor for God.

The whole Christian doctrinal tradition is an expansion of this fundamental claim, that God, the ultimate Mystery which undergirds the existence of all that is, is least wrongly thought of as pure and perfect self-gift. I might exemplify this at great length, but you will be thrilled to know I shall not. But we should note that, while the fundamental Christian metaphor for God is *agape*, pure other-directed love, "love" is not the name of a person but rather of a relationship among persons. So

we are saying that the least wrong way to think about God, the foundational mystery that grounds and surrounds all that exists, is not first and foremost as a person but as a relationship. You may well think that this is a bizarre claim, and in many ways it is. But I am sure that it is scarcely a claim which you have not heard before, although perhaps not in quite these words. In fact, among Christians—certainly Catholic Christians—we make this claim all the time. We often affirm that we do or say something "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." When we do so, we assert that God is to be thought of first not as "the one," but as the relatedness of "the three." The central point of the doctrine of the trinity is that God is least wrongly understood as a relationship, as an eternal explosion of love.

When he wrote *De Trinitate*, Saint Augustine acknowledged that the church had language for the Trinity from the New Testament itself. At the end of the Gospel of Saint Matthew (28:19), we find the command to go out and baptize all nations "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." But Augustine suggested that however biblically rooted such language may be, it is not especially helpful in trying to show the meaning of the Trinity for people's lives. After all, he reasoned, if we are created in the image and likeness of God and God is Triune, then ought we not be able to see traces of the Trinity in our own experience? So he set out to find alternate terminology that might better convey the meaning of the Trinity. He came up with two sets of terms that he seems to have particularly liked, and I must confess I like them too.

Augustine suggested that perhaps more useful for teaching and preaching than "Father, Son, Spirit," might be "Giver, Recipient, and Gift given," or as yet another alternative, "Lover, Beloved, and the Love between them." This is what Christians mean when they talk about God: from all eternity the Mystery at the root of all that exists is endless self-gift, endless outpouring of self; for all eternity the Mystery is endless acceptance of the gift of that outpouring and rejoicing in it; and for all eternity the Mystery is the outpouring. God is the Lover, the Beloved, and the Love between them, the Giver, the Recipient and the Gift given. When we use the word "God," the Mystery that grounds and surrounds all that exists, we speak of the infinite and eternal explosion of self-gift.

That allows me to pose another question: why does God create? Think with me for a moment about the question that Martin Heidegger maintained was the beginning of all metaphysics, i.e., of all accounts of how things finally fit together: why is there being rather than nothing? There are many ways in which that question has been answered, many meta-

physical ways. The Christian tradition's answer, as I understand it, is, "Because it is loved." The reason that anything exists is that it is the object of love. All things that are, are loved into being. The fundamental ground for anything is that it is called into being because God loves it. As I noted earlier, the universe gives nothing to God, rather God gives something to it, namely, God's self. Why? Because God gets a kick out of it. Because that what God is like: overflowing love. Please notice: I am speaking about the reason *anything* exists, not only *anyone*. This overflowing love is the reason not only for your existence and mine but for the existence of the chair on which you are sitting and the pen you are holding, the existence of the leaves on the trees and your pet cat and your favorite rhododendron and the farthest supernova. It is the ground of the existence of the universe, everything that ever has, ever will, or ever can exist. Why does anything exist rather than nothing, in Heidegger's question? The Christian tradition's answer is because it is loved.

What makes us unique as human beings (at least, as far as we know) is that we are the point in creation that can acknowledge that we are infinitely loved and either accept or reject it. We can embrace being loved or deny and turn away from it. This podium at which I am standing cannot know that it is loved; it cannot accept or refuse being loved. It is, however, as truly and perfectly loved as I am. Please notice: everything is loved perfectly because God, being God, does nothing imperfectly. God is God and therefore always acts in a Godlike way, which is to say, God does everything perfectly. God does not love a little today and a bit more tomorrow and perhaps a bit less the day after. It is simply not the case that God loved you on Tuesday, but then on Wednesday you sinned, so God loved you less, but then on Thursday you repented, so God loves you again. That is pure mythology. God has been reduced to Zeus or Odin. God loves everything in a Godlike way, perfectly, completely, one hundred percent. Not every creature can know and accept this love. The podium is loved perfectly, and so is Himes. The difference is that Himes knows it and the podium does not. Sometimes Himes accepts it, and sometimes, tragically, he refuses it. But God remains God.

Nothing you can do can make God not love you. If there were, then you would be more powerful than God in that you could cause God to change. I sometimes use this image when I preach. It ruffles some feathers, but feather-ruffling is by no means a bad thing to do in the pulpit. Let me dare to make a claim about how things look from God's perspective: from God's point of view, there is no difference between Mary and Satan; God loves them both perfectly. The difference is on the side of the two creatures: Mary is thrilled and Satan hates it. In the *Summa Contra*

Gentiles, Saint Thomas Aquinas raises a question: if God is everywhere, is God in hell? His answer is that, indeed, God is in hell. Of course, his next question is, "And what is God doing there?" Thomas's answer is that God is in hell loving the damned. The damned may not love God, but the damned cannot make God not love them. Since perfect love—which is the least wrong metaphor for God—is the reason for our being, the opposite of being loved by God is not damnation, but nonbeing. Not to be loved by God is not to exist. Everything that is, to the extent that it is, is loved.

The Sacramental Principle

Let me introduce another piece of theological shorthand: grace. "Grace" is the word by which we traditionally designate the *agape* of God outside the Trinity, the *agape* of God calling all things into being. In Christian theology grace is the self-giving of God outside the Trinity bringing all things into being. With the introduction of that word, I want to turn our attention to a difficulty. Consideration of the difficulty for a moment will lead us back to the sacramental principle. If the agapic love of God or grace is omnipresent, if everything is loved or engraced, if everything we are and everything we encounter is rooted in grace, grace may go unnoticed. What is omnipresent is more often than not unnoticed. For example, the whole time you have been reading this, you have been blinking. Now, unless this essay has been preternaturally boring, you have not been counting your blinks. After all, who thinks about blinking?

This example first struck me a few years ago when I was hit with a bout of Bell's palsy. The left side of my face froze, and one of the consequences was that my left eye could not blink. Throughout the day, I had periodically to hold my left eyelid down, and at night I taped the eye shut. One becomes very conscious of blinking when one cannot do it. I never thought about it at all until Bell's palsy called my attention to it. What one does all the time, one seldom, if ever, thinks about. What is always there gets little or no attention. You never think about the oxygen in a room until the air starts to become stale. You do not think about your heart beating, although if it stopped, we would notice as you slump to the floor. So if grace is omnipresent, grace is likely to go unnoticed. We require occasions when grace is called to our attention, when it is made concrete for us, when that which is always the case is made present in such a way that we cannot help but notice it and may either accept or

reject it and, if we accept it, celebrate it. Let me remind you of my preliminary description of what I called the sacramental principle: that which is always and everywhere the case must be noticed, accepted, and celebrated somewhere, sometime.

In the Catholic tradition we call the occasions when grace is made effectively present for us sacraments. I am not referring here primarily to the seven great public rituals that Catholics celebrate (although I am by no means excluding them). By "sacrament" I mean any person, place, thing or event, any sight, sound, taste, touch, or smell that causes us to notice the love which supports all that exists, that undergirds your being and mine and the being of everything about us. How many such sacraments are there? The number is virtually infinite, as many as there are things in the universe. There is nothing that cannot be a sacrament, absolutely nothing—even, as St. Augustine observed, sin. Within the context of repentance, sin can become an occasion when one discovers how deeply loved one is. This is what he meant by calling the sin of Adam and Eve *felix culpa*, a happy fault, a phrase which the church still sings in the Easter Proclamation every Holy Saturday. There is nothing that cannot become a sacrament for someone, absolutely nothing.

We all have our personal sacraments. For all of you who are married, I hope that one of the deepest, richest, most profound experiences of the fundamental love which undergirds being is your spouse. For those who are parents, I hope that your children are such experiences. To your neighbors they may be the little pests who live next door, but to you they are sacraments. We all have our own array of sacraments that are absolutely necessary for us.

This, by the way, is an important element in Catholic liturgy. The fundamental principle of Catholic liturgy is that everything and the kitchen sink have a place within it. Why? Because everything is potentially sacred. Everything is engraced. So everything is fair game for liturgy. So we sing, we dance, we parade, we wave banners, we ring bells, we play organs, we blow horns, we sound trumpets, and sometimes, we are still and silent. We eat, we drink, we bathe you in water, we pour oil on you, we put you to bed when you get married and into the earth when you die. We waft incense, we hang paintings, we put up mosaics, we erect statues, we construct extraordinary buildings and illumine them through stained glass. We appeal to sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. Historically the principle on which the liturgy operated was, "If it works, throw it in." The reason for such inclusiveness is the deep Catholic conviction that nothing is by definition profane. Everything is potentially sacramental.

The great nineteenth-century English Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins has an especially beautiful phrase for this. It is a line in one of his best-known and most frequently anthologized poems, "Hurrahing in Harvest." At the time of the poem, Hopkins was teaching at a Jesuit boys' school in Wales. At the opening of the poem it is the fall and Hopkins is disheartened by the disappearance of the summer's beauty and the coming onset of winter. But he begins to consider the clouds scudding across the sky, the way the wind blows off the Irish Sea at that time of year in Wales, the joy of people bringing in the harvest and the changing color of the leaves. How beautiful it all is, yet he does not notice it while he worries about what is gone and dreads what has not come. All the while, he fails to notice what is here at the moment. In what is, in my opinion, the single most beautiful statement in English of the Catholic sacramental principle (and Hopkins was Catholic to the tips of his fingers), the poet wrote, "These things, these things were here and but the beholder/ Wanting." The leaves have not suddenly changed their colors at that moment, nor has the sky been transformed. All that beauty was already there. What changed? Hopkins. The splendor was there, but he did not notice it. He has become a beholder and sees what is there to be seen. The whole Catholic sacramental life is a training to be beholders. Catholic liturgy is a lifelong pedagogy to bring us to see what is there, to behold what is always present, in the conviction that if we truly see and fully appreciate what is there, whether we use the language or not, we will be encountering grace. We will see the love which undergirds all that exists.

Those who have been fortunate to have seen the film *Babette's Feast* might recall how the little band of Lutheran sectarians learn to appreciate what has been placed there before them by the French chef, Babette. They learn to savor the taste, the aroma, the color of the food and drink, and in discovering the goodness of the physical world are led to reconciliation with one another. At the end of the extraordinary meal, they go outside into the little square of the village where they have stood countless times. They look up at the stars, join hands and begin to sing. At one marvelous, closing moment, one of the two elderly sisters says to the other, "The stars look very close tonight," and the other replies, "Maybe they are every night." That night they could see what was there every night because Babette's feast had made them beholders. That is what sacramentality does.

But what has all this to do with education and the intellectual's vocation? As a Catholic and an educator, I think that it may suggest a very

important perspective on education. If we accept what I have said about the sacramental principle, then anything that awakens, enlivens, and expands the imagination, opens the vision, enriches the sensitivity of any human being is a religious act. Although we may not use this language, education is or can be training in sacramental beholding.

At the very beginning of the century just ended, one of the most profoundly Catholic people of the twentieth century, Baron Friedrich von Hügel was invited to give a talk to a Christian students' association at Oxford. (Despite the Austrian name he was, in fact, an Englishman. His father had been an Austrian and a baron of the Holy Roman Empire, but his mother was a Scot. He was brought up in England and English was his first language.) In his lecture to this group of presumably earnest Christian students, von Hügel spoke of asceticism, self-discipline, as a traditionally important part of the Christian life. He asked a rhetorical question: who is the most striking example of asceticism in the nineteenth century, which had just ended? I suspect that his answer must have shocked those sober young Christian gentlemen in Oxford, for he said that he thought, beyond doubt, the great example of asceticism in the nineteenth century had been Charles Darwin. Darwin, according to von Hügel, had with immense discipline, over a long period of time, subordinated his extraordinarily keen, powerful intellect and astonishing energy to the painstaking observation of the varieties of barnacles and the shapes of pigeons' bills. With astonishing clarity and intensity, Darwin had forced himself to observe what was there. And that, claimed von Hügel, is what asceticism is all about. Asceticism is not self-denial in order to please a mildly sadistic deity. Its goal is to discipline oneself sufficiently so that one can move beyond one's hopes, dreams, fears, wants, and expectations to see what is, in fact, there.

Asceticism is a training to see reality, not what I expect, hope, or fear to see. I have often told students that the point of asceticism is to stop looking in the mirror long enough that one might look out the window, to stop gazing at oneself long enough to see something else. The Catholic conviction is that if we see what is there to be seen, we will discover grace, the love that undergirds all that exists. The ascetic beholds the omnipresence of grace.

Where do people today learn that kind of self-discipline? There are, I think, many ways in which life teaches us asceticism. Marriage is a splendid school of self-discipline for those who live it well and wisely, as is parenthood. Paying off the mortgage and managing one's credit cards can be excellent paths of ascetical training. They are all ways of coming

to grips with what is there, not what we would like to be there. And certainly one of the most rigorous and effective ways of self-discipline is science. Following von Hügel's claim about Darwin, I suggest that there is a profoundly sacramental dimension to all the sciences because they are all a form of training in intellectual self-discipline. After all, we often call our fields of study "disciplines." When we study anything, we discipline ourselves.

Anything that expands the imagination, enriches the vision, liberates the will, frees the vision, and disciplines the attention, is a profoundly religious act. Indeed, so convinced am I of this that I could have come at this same point from an entirely different angle from the way I have done so thus far. I could have developed this same conclusion starting from a consideration of what Christians mean by the incarnation. Catholics try to hold this belief radically, insisting that in Christ, God does not merely seem to be human or act in a human way, but has *become* human. In the words of an ancient hymn quoted in Philippians 2:6-11, he has become human as all human beings are human, that he is like us in all things except sin.

The Catholic tradition has recognized that if this radical claim of the incarnation is true, then you and I and God share humanity in common! Therefore, to become like God, we should be as fully human as we can. Thus whatever enriches and deepens our humanity, whatever makes us braver, wiser, more intelligent, more responsible, freer, more loving, makes us holy, i.e., like God. Thus education, which certainly should aim at making human beings braver, wiser, more intelligent, more responsible, freer, and more loving, is a work of sanctification. This is why the Christian community has always been involved in education and not only in catechetics. A good Catholic university or college is not a place where we allow people to study mathematics or history or literature so that we can get them to sit through a religion course. We do not admit people to the business school so that we can require them to take a minimum number of credits in theology. Any and every field of study is ultimately religious in nature if everything rests on grace and humanity is shared with God in Christ.

This sacramental conviction shapes Catholicism at its best. Of course, Catholicism is not always at its best. It therefore does not always act in accord with its sacramental vision. But were we all to require ourselves to live up to our best vision all the time, who of us would have gotten out of bed this morning? Still, at its best and wisest, Catholicism is shaped by the conviction that grace lies at the root of all reality. And if that con-

viction is true, all the humanities as well as all the sciences become religious enterprises.

Let me offer a closing image. In the *Divine Comedy*, you will recall that Dante allots hell, purgatory, and heaven thirty-three cantos each. The whole of the great poem is completed with a hundredth canto in which Dante attempts to do what Wittgenstein would have told him he should not even try, to describe to the reader the vision of God. In the ninety-ninth canto of the poem, the thirty-third of the *Paradiso*, Beatrice has conducted Dante to the highest circle of heaven. She points him toward Bernard of Clairvaux, a symbol of all that was richest and best in the spiritual tradition of the Middle Ages. Looking in awe at Bernard, Dante realizes that Bernard is gazing steadily across at someone else, and he follows Bernard's gaze to Mary. And he is overwhelmed with the sight of Mary until he sees that she has her look fixed steadily upward. Dante follows Mary's glance and beholds at the end of canto 99 the vision of God. In canto 100, he tries to do the undoable. Needless to say he fails, but Dante's failures are more interesting than almost anyone else's successes. He says that he was dazzled by a light which blinds him initially. But as the intense light burns his eyes, it heals them so that he begins to discern that the light is actually the interaction of three concentric globes of three colors, his image for the Trinity. As his eyes were simultaneously seared and strengthened, he could look into the very depth of the light, and there he saw one exactly like himself. In one of the greatest statements of the Catholic humanist tradition, Dante saw that, as a result of the incarnation, at the heart of God is one like him and you and me. And so, in the great final line of the great poem, the line to which the whole *Divine Comedy* has been leading, his recognition of *"l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle,"* "the love that moves the sun and other stars." This is Dante's statement of the sacramental principle: the universe, the sun and all the stars, is grounded and governed by love. It exists because of infinite self-gift. That is what enlivens the Catholic tradition at its best.