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THE DYNAMICS OF THE QUESTION IN THE QUEST FOR GOD

The two questions that Paul asks when he finds himself confronted by God on the road to Damascus are at the heart of every Christian conversion experience, both as event and life-long process :

1. Who are you, Lord? (Acts 22 : 8)
2. What shall I do, Lord? (Acts 22 : 10)

First, he must know who this God is who confronts him; then he must do something about it. Since God is that kind of God, Paul seems to be saying, *therefore*, I must find out and do whatever he commands me to do. To "know" the living God, in the biblical sense, is to live with him in doing his will. Our action must be in response to God's action. We must be with God in doing what he is willing and doing. God loves us; *therefore*, we must love one another (I John 4 : 19). It would be absurd to talk about knowing God if you did not also love your brother :

Anyone who says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, is a liar, since a man who does not love the brother that he can see cannot love God, whom he has never seen. So this is the commandment that he has given us, that anyone who loves God must also love his brother (1 Jn 4 : 20-21).

Our desire to know God is authenticated by our seeking to know and to do his will within the complexity and historical particularities of our intrapersonal, interpersonal, social, national, and international life. We cannot know God apart from all the levels of human life; for through his grace and demand he is operative at every level.

Throughout the New Testament we find that a long passage about God will conclude with a "therefore" which goes on to point out how the knowledge of God is one with seeking to do his will. Sharing his life means doing his will.

In his letter to the Romans, for example, Paul writes eleven "theological" chapters, explaining who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for us. Chapter 12 begins, "I appeal to you *therefore*, my brothers", and Paul

gives a long list of attitudes, practices and characteristics of the way in which Christians are to act: Let love be genuine. Hate what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Bless those who persecute you. Live in harmony with one another. Repay no one evil for evil. And the word "therefore" is the pivot of the whole argument. Because of all these things that I have been writing to you about (for eleven chapters!) are true, Paul is saying in effect, *therefore* this is the way in which you must act fully to experience their true goodness for yourselves.

The letter to the Ephesians offers another example. The first three chapters expound the work of Christ upon the cross. And the fourth begins:

"I *therefore*, a prisoner in the Lord implore you to lead a life worthy of your vocation. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together (4 : 1-3)."

The writer continues with advice about the way life is to be lived *because* of what God has done in Christ. We will know Christ and his Father only when we follow Christ in doing the will of his Father. Another striking example of this truth is found in Paul's letter to the Philippians:

Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (2 : 3-8).

An assertion of what Christ has done is also an assertion of what we must do to know, in the biblical sense, who God is. God has acted in this way toward us, *therefore*, we are to act this way towards others. God loves us, and we shall give that same love to others, if we truly "know" God. One who knows God will not refuse to love one whom God loves. What God wills is what he loves. God is known, in the biblical sense, in doing what he wills or loves. In Jesus Christ we have the ongoing answer of an infinitely knowing and loving God to our ongoing questions, "Who are you"? and "What must I do"? The Christian desire to know the God of

Jesus Christ is a daily quest inspired by the gift of his Spirit to know and to do his will. The Spirit of Jesus Christ and his Father unites and animates the Christian community in its thirst for God and for the accomplishment of his will. It expresses itself in the community's prayer, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done". The community prays that it may increasingly come to know God in faith and acknowledge him as the holy center and meaning of its life. Its prayer expresses its belief that God's purpose is to unite all human hearts under the sovereignty of his love. The life and teaching of Jesus spell out what the Christian community believes the doing of God's will and the coming of his kingdom entails.

The Question-raising God

The biblical narratives are an external expression of the interior life of the interior life of a covenant people. The questions which God raises in these narratives reveal what is going on in the cognitive and affective life of a people at every level: intra-personal, interpersonal, social, national and international. There is no knowing God, in the biblical sense, without experiencing him as a question-raising God at every level of human life. He reveals himself in the questions he raises about our lives. His question-praising reality is experienced wherever and whenever we seriously ask about the ultimate meaning and goodness of our lives. God is as inescapable as his questions. Significantly, God's first word to us in the Bible is a question: "Where are you?" (Gn 3: 9). The covenant people experience God in his question about their identity. Their quest for God begins with their experience of his quest or question for them. To hear his word is to hear his question about the meaning and purpose and goodness of its life. The people of the new covenant hear that question-raising word in Jesus Christ whose first word in the gospels of Luke and John is a question: "Why were you looking for me?" (Lk 2: 49) and "What do you want?" (Jn 1: 38).

From the moment of the Annunciation, God's word is a question-raising event in Luke's Gospel: "She was deeply troubled by these words and asked herself what this greeting could mean" (1: 30); and, "How can this come about, since I am a virgin?" (1: 34). Mary experiences the question-raising mystery of her son when she finds him in the Temple and asks, "My child, why have you done this to us?" (2: 48).

The entire life story of God's incarnate Word challenges us as God's question and answer about our identity. Jesus Christ is the incarnate Ques-

tion and Answer of God about the true goodness and direction of our lives. Even the shortest Gospel, Mark, reflects the tension of the Question that Jesus is for all human life with its no less than 118 questions, of which more than half are raised by Jesus himself.

If the Gospel narrative is the external expression of knowing and loving Christian subjects (the evangelists) in the life-long process of conversion, the questions that pervade it imply that an authentically Christian life is one of loving responsiveness to the question-raising meaning of God at every level of human life. If the Church employs this narrative in its pedagogy for cultivating the gift of God's love in the interests of human transformation (conversion) at every level, it implicitly recognizes the dynamic of the question for learning to know God in the biblical sense as the question-raising Mystery at the heart of all human life. Christian maturation, then, implies fidelity to the question that God raises and to the answer that he gives about the true meaning and goodness of our lives. If God is known by doing his will, the Christian must learn to live in the daily tension of the question, "What is God's will for me?" There is no doing God's will without seeking it in the concreteness and complexity of our lives. (The self-righteous are their own little gods: they evade the question by implicitly identifying God's will with their own self-will).

Being with Jesus, or Christian discipleship, entails following him in learning to live with responding love to the question-raising Mystery (God) at the heart of all human life. It means accepting the Question that is God himself by seeking to know and to do his will. We accept our true and God-given identity in doing his will. The kingdom of God — life under the sovereignty of his love — is coming wherever his will is being done. If God's will is done, all human persons will enjoy the fulfilment of their true interpersonal identity in his kingdom. We are free to reject our God-given identity in favor of self-will where the self is king in its own impersonal kingdom. There is no authentically interpersonal life where the sovereignty of God's love is rejected. Jesus' "thy will, not mine" (Lk 22:42) expresses the radical responsibility to God which grounds freedom for genuinely interpersonal life. His way of the cross reveals his acceptance of his God-given identity as the "Beloved Son"; this is his way of self-transcendence as the Beloved Son that he is glad to be in responding (responsible) love with his Father. His way of the cross reveals how his disciples must accept their God-given identity.

The dynamic of the question in the Gospel narrative is ultimately that of God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given to us (Rm 5 : 5); for the narrative is a symbolic expression an witness to the Christian community's knowledge (in the biblical sense) of that love manifested in Jesus Christ and communicated through his Spirit. The Gospel narrative is implicitly the Christian community's answer to the question, "What does it mean to love God with one's whole heart and whole soul, with all one's mind and all one's strength?" (Mk 12 : 30). What does it mean to fulfill the new commandment of Jesus, "Love one another just as I have loved you" (Jn 15 : 12)? What is God's distinctive way of loving as manifested in Jesus Christ and the believing community that lives in his Spirit? How ought we to respond to that love? What is God doing in my life ?

The Gospel writers employ the dynamic of the question to symbolize the pattern of God's love and its distinctive way of operating in our lives. Love is the central motivation of the question-raising and question-answering dynamic of the Gospel narrative. The Gospel writers implicitly reply to the question, "What is the appropriate response to our being loved by God in Christ and his Spirit?" They present Jesus as the norm that we are to follow for such a response. His "Come, follow me" (Mk 1 : 16) expresses the dynamic of divine initiative and human response at the heart of our transformation in the life-long process of our learning to live in God's love. Following Jesus in response to the grace and demand of God's love constitutes Christian conversion both as event and life-long process. Such conversion always precarious; for we can fall out of love with God. Consequently, we are bid to watch and pray, to make our way in fear and trembling. We can always fail to heed Jesus' invitation to follow him in his self-surrender to his Father's love. His invitation raises the question daily, "Are we following Jesus in response to God's love?". The Gospel narrative was written to raise the question for all Christians at all times: "Are we living in the Spirit of Jesus, leading lives of responding love?" Hearing God's word means hearing his question and responding appropriately. Raising the question implies that no Christian should self-righteously assume that he or she is always following Jesus; for God alone is unquestionably good. Although our lives are the manifestations of God's grace, they are measured by the demands of his intention.

The Church employs the dynamic of the question in the Gospel narrative for its spiritual pedagogy. We must learn to hear the Question and the Answer (God) that is at the heart of every human life to become authentic-

ally human in following Jesus' way of responding love to human and divine others. That Question must always challenge our self-understanding, individually and socially, and norm our decision and action. The Word of God takes the form of the Question and the Answer that is given to us in Jesus Christ and his Spirit. That Word expresses the Spirit of the Father's love that has been given to us and elicits our responding through and in the same Spirit of love to the Question and the Answer that constitutes our God-given identity. Our hearing the Question (in the biblical sense of a loving response to the grace and demand of God) is even now our accepting the Answer that is our God-given interpersonal identity. The just are even now rising in responding love to the Question that is also the Answer to their identity. The dynamic of the question in the Gospel narrative implies the Christian community's grateful response to that enduring love that it knows in its fidelity to the Spirit of the Question and Answer of God.

Every New Testament affirmation about God is implicitly the Christian community's answer of responding love to the Word that is both the Question and Answer of God. Jewish and Christian Scriptures are the expression of responding love inspired by the gift of the Spirit of love for the God who speaks in his Question and Answer. Paul affirms that Jesus Christ is the *Yes* spoken by God in response to the implicit question of Israel: Is God faithful (2 Cor 1: 20). This corresponds to John's doctrine of Christ as the *Amen* (Rv 3: 14). John's doctrine of the Son as the Word of God who is the fulness of truth (Prologue to his Gospel) implies his life of responding love for the Question that is the self-revealing Answer. John's living in the Spirit of love for the Question of God yields the Answer of God. He knows that Spirit (in the biblical sense) in the love that the members of the new covenant community have for one another. On the basis of their loving coresponsibility for one another before the Word-Question-Answer of God, John can affirm that "God is love" (1 Jn 4: 8, 16).

The Father communicates himself by sending his Son (Word) and Spirit (Love). He speaks his Word of truth and Spirit of love, empowering us in the special biblical sense to know him and to accept our true identity. There is no hearing or lived experience of the Father's Word, as Question or Answer, apart from the Spirit of his love through and in which his will becomes our meaningful life-principle. Jesus is known as Lord (1 Cor 12: 3) in the biblical sense only by those whose hearts and minds are governed by the Holy Spirit of his love; his meaning as God's Word is effectively grasped only by those who live in the Spirit of his love for the Father. The

Gospel narrative of the way of the cross implicitly answers the question of Jesus' meaning for us. It symbolizes what it means to have an authentically interpersonal life with God and all others. There is no such life without the self-transcendence of responding love for all others, divine and human.

The dynamic of the question in the Gospel narrative is indispensable for Christian conversion both as event and life-long process of maturation; for there is no human transformation or maturation, at any level, without questions. Because we are neither self-explanatory nor self-sufficient, we must go outside ourselves in self-transcendence for both our meaning and our fulfillment. The quest for both takes the form of the question. The dynamic of our questioning implies that we are not autonomous, but relational beings, seeking the answers correlative to our questions. The same dynamic implies a correspondence of knowing and loving subjects. If we are able and willing to question, there must be others who are able and willing to answer. Our questioning presupposes answerable and responsible (response-able) others. Reciprocity is possible among knowing subjects who are able to question and to answer, and loving subjects who are willing to question and to answer. If persons are knowing and loving subjects, their authenticity is achieved in co-responsibility. Persons are interpersonal or conscious and relational; consequently, the failure to be interpersonal is the failure to be personal. Irresponsibility is the failure to be a knowing and loving subject.

Our personal identity is interpersonal and rooted in co-responsibility. It is defined by those *to* and *for* whom we are responsible (answerable). The Good News of Jesus Christ is the perfection of divine and human co-responsibility. He is the response (Answer) of the knowing and loving Father to our human need for him; and he is the response of perfect human receptivity to and availability for the Father. He is the Good News that God assumes responsibility for the fulfillment of every human life; that God sends his Son and his Spirit for that purpose. He is the Good News of God's responding love to the need of every human person for him, and of man's perfectly corresponding availability for God's love. The interpersonal life of Jesus Christ is the solidarity of God and humankind in corresponding (corresponsible) love. He is both the prayer of all humankind for God and the response of God to that prayer. Significantly, all the evangelists show Jesus, before all the great decisions of his life, spending the night in prayer alone on the mountain.

There is no passivity in Jesus' receptivity, response and listening to his Father. His receptivity is at one and the same time supreme activity, commitment to accept demands, making himself available, and being ready to serve in responding love. Solidarity or corresponsibility with God demands the supreme activity of his self-giving in commitment to his Father's will. At Gethsemane, he prays: "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. But let it be as you, not I, would have it" (Mk 14 : 36).

Always doing what is pleasing to his Father (Jn 8 : 29), Jesus is a knowing and loving subject who corresponsibly collaborates with his Father in giving the new life of their Holy Spirit to all others. Christian discipleship consists in our being with Jesus in his costly and supreme activity of receiving his life from the Father and communicating it to others as fully corresponsibly knowing and loving subjects living in his Spirit. Through the gift of his Spirit we are invited and empowered to share the freedom of Jesus Christ's corresponsibility with the Father and all others. Actively accepting the Holy Spirit as our new life principle, we accept our God-given identity as corresponsibly knowing and loving subjects and the freedom for an authentically interpersonal fulfillment. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are free to share in the interpersonal corresponsibility and life-principle of the knowing and love subject that is Jesus Christ.

The Gospel writers employ the dynamic of the question to evoke the corresponsibility of their readers. They have written their question-raising narratives as a call to corresponsibility with God in Christ and his Spirit for all others. The corresponsibility of new covenant brothers and sisters for one another and all others reveals that of the covenant-creating and covenant-sustaining Spirit of Jesus Christ and his Father. The Spirit of love with which the Son responds to the Father and the Father responds to the Son is made manifest among those who respond to one another with the same love. The Father and the Son are wherever their Spirit is operative in the corresponsibly activity of all who receive it to become covenant-creating and covenant-sustaining persons. Such persons respond to the word, whether as question or answer, that God speaks within their life story by becoming the communicators of faith and hope for others. They communicate complementary aspects of the grace and demand of that word for authentic human development and fulfillment under the sovereignty of God's corresponding love in response to human need. The costly commitment of Christians to God in the service of others both within the realm

of covenant community responsibilities and the world beyond is rooted in the mutual indwelling and self-transcending love of the Father and Son that constitutes the community of Christian faith. The outgoing compassion of Christians for others without limits or conditions bears witness to the indwelling Trinitarian love that is the ultimate source and term of the Christian community's life and that of the world that it is called to serve in corresponsibility with the Three Persons. The giving of new life is the very meaning of the dynamic of the question at the heart of all human life. The meaning of the Gospel is revealed in this dynamic within the realms of our experience, understanding, judgement, decision, and action, where the word of God summons us to corresponsibility. Jesus's first words in Luke (2:49) and John (1:38) are, respectively, the questions: "Why were you looking for me?" and "What do you want?"

Just as in the measure that we advert to our own questioning and proceed to question it, there arises the question of God¹, so too, in the measure that we advert to our being questioned by God and proceed to respond, there arises the question of our authenticity. We achieve authenticity in the self-transcendence whereby we become knowing and loving subjects whose cognition and affectivity are concomitantly experienced in our unrestricted drive to know and to love. In the Gospel narratives, Jesus questions us to stimulate our questioning, reflection, response and conversion to unrestricted loving. Jesus summons us to the unrestricted questioning and loving that would free us from being locked up in ourselves. As the question of God is implicit in all our questioning, so being in love with God is the basic fulfillment of our conscious intentionality as knowing and loving subjects.²

The biblical narrative presents questions for intelligence or understanding, reflecting the life of the people of God asking what and why and how and what for: "When the Israelites saw it (food in the desert), they said to one another, 'What is it?' — for they did not know what it was" (Ex

1. Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), p. 103.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

16:15)³. In the wonder created by Jesus' first miracle, Mark records that "They were dumfounded and began to ask one another, 'What is this?'" (1:27). The occurrence of Mary's questions is striking in Luke: "Why have you treated us like this?" (2:48), and "How can this be . . . When I have no husband?" (1:34). Nathanael asks: "How do you come to know me?" (Jn 1:48). Jesus asks: "If I spoke well, why strike me?" (Jn 18:23). A more reflective attitude indicating the inner tension of inquiry, the dynamism of the search for understanding, occurs when Luke tells us that: "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered over them" (2:19). The word, "ponderd" is the same one he uses for the "discussion of the Jewish rulers on how to handle Peter and John (Acts 4:15), and for the "debate" in which the Athenian philosophers engaged Paul (Acts 17:18). Linked with this is the occurrence of wonder in its milder forms, as when outside the sanctuary "the people were waiting for Zacharias, wondering why he was staying so long inside" (Lk 1:21).

On questions for intelligence and understanding follow questions for reflection, asking whether or not this really is so or that really could be. This question regards truth, what is so. It requires evidence enough to justify a judgment on the matter; it asks which side of a contradiction is right. John presents some instances: "There was much whispering about him in the crowds. 'He is a good man', some said. 'No', said others, 'he is leading the people astray'" (7:12). Later, we have the significant statement: "Thus he caused a split among the people" (7:43). John's affirmation that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31) raises a question for reflection that leads to the split of Christ's followers from Judaism. The high priest challenges Jesus with such a question: "By the

3. Frederick E. Crowe, "Neither Jew nor Greek, but One Human Nature and Operation in All", in *Philippine Studies* 13 (1965), pp. 561-6. In this section, Crowe treats of biblical interest in questions. Crowe comments that questions may be introduced by the same interrogative and show the same grammatical form; but it is the *intention* of the questioner that determines the type of question: Does he intend to put an objection as one contradicting, as one concerned with the truth? or does he intend to ask for explanation as one puzzled and desiring understanding. Crowe assigns Mary's question in Luke 1:34 to the latter type, the Lord's in Matthew 22:45 to the former, but this is for him a matter for exegesis to decide. Generally, he believes that questions put in sarcasm (Jn 1:46) or hostility (Jn 6:43, 52) intend to contradict and regard the level of truth, whereas a more neutral attitude such as that shown by the Jerusalem delegation to the Baptist (Jn 1:25) could pertain to either level. In fact, Crowe believes that the average person freely mingles both levels in confusion, and there is no reason for insisting that a given question must be a pure case of one or the other type (p. 564).

living God I charge you to tell us: Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?" (Mt 26: 63). The same question for reflection is implied in the centurion's affirmation: "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mk 15: 39). Jesus' cross-questioning of the Pharisees provides another instance of the same type of question: "Whose son is he (the Messiah)? 'The son of David, they replied... 'If David calls him 'Lord, 'how can he be David's son?'" (Mt 22: 32-45).

Questions arise in the order of doing as well as knowing. Questions for deliberation arise when we ask whether this or that is worth while, whether it is not just apparently good but truly good, what has objective value. Jesus' "Go and do the same yourself" (Lk 10: 37), and "Mary has chosen the better part" (10: 42), and "...do this and life is yours" (Lk 10: 28) answer questions for deliberation.

Jesus poses questions for identity: "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers? (Mk 3: 33); "What is your name?" (Mk 5: 9); "Who do you say I am?" (Mk 8: 29). He poses questions for intelligence or understanding: "Why are you frightened? Have you still no faith?" (Mk 4: 40); "Where did he get all this? What wisdom is this that has been given him? How does he perform miracles? Isn't he the carpenter, the son of Mary...?" (Mk 6: 2-3). He raises the question about what people are doing and where they are going, about the meaning of their life: "You have eyes, can't you see? You have ears, can't you hear?" (Mk 8: 18) and "Can you see anything?" (Mk 8: 23). Questions define the relationship between the Master and the disciple; for the true understanding of discipleship is correlative to the true understanding of the Master. When Peter acknowledges that Jesus is the Christ and then immediately rejects Jesus' way of suffering and death, he reveals his failure to understand the true meaning of both the Master and discipleship (Mk 8: 27-9: 1). At a deeper level, the failure to grasp Jesus' true meaning is the failure to grasp our own God-given identity. Jesus is the answer of God to the question of what we are called to be. Our sincere engagement with the question is already a form of commitment to the answer. The questions that are most important to us concern the matters that are matters that are dearest to us. There are no such questions apart from the affective power and motivation which sustains them. Love seeks understanding. Love *asks* all she meets, as we read in the Song of Solomon, where she can find her Lover. A loving heart is a questioning heart; an indifferent heart knows no such interest. Even the questions of Jesus' adversaries show that they are not indifferent and are, therefore, at least in touch with the love that could save them.

Our lives are qualified by the quality of the questions that engage us. Preoccupation with trivial questions and concerns trivializes our lives. The Christian community employs its Gospel narrative to learn to live with the most fundamental questions about human life and to respond to them in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The answers to the basic questions that Jesus Christ raises are given to those who are willing to share his life of costly self-transcendence, or way of the cross. The answers to his questions are learned in the authentic corresponsibility of those who live in the Spirit of Jesus Christ within his new covenant community. The new covenant community gives witness to its Lord by becoming the question-raising and answer-giving sacrament of God for the world. The Word of God, both as Question and Answer, is spoken to the world in and through the new covenant community. The Three Persons reveal and communicate their corresponsibility in the life of the new covenant community for all humankind. Covenant love is corresponsibility both among covenant members and between them and all others, human and divine. The covenant love of Jesus Christ is known, in the biblical sense, by those who accept with responding love his brothers and sisters, no less than his Father and Spirit. His interpersonal life of covenant love reveals an interpersonal God as a community of Persons living in responding love and corresponsibly creating and sustaining and fulfilling all humankind through the grace and summons to corresponsibility. Their corresponsibility is the gift and summons for ours. The dynamic of the question is the Gospel narrative represents a corresponsibility of an authentically human life, to "knowing God" (in the biblical sense) in loving all others. The dynamic of the question is an implicit summons to the way of the cross; for, without the costly responding love that is self-transcendence, we cannot become corresponsibility and "know God". Rejection of the cross is radical irresponsibility in the refusal to become seriously engaged with the answer that Jesus offers in the question that he raises about the ultimate meaning and value of human life; for there is no human authenticity apart from self-transcendence in communion with the Spirit of the Father and Son which enables it. The Word that is Question draws us to itself as Answer in the tension of corresponsibility love that the Gospel narrative represents as Jesus Christ's way of the cross. The Spirit of that Word has been given to enable our hearing that Word both as Question (promise) and Answer (fulfilment), as the Alpha and the Omega of every human story. The Spirit is wherever it acts; and it acts in the live of corresponsibility persons responding wholeheartedly to Jesus' commandment of love (Mt 22 : 34-40; Mk 2 : 28-34; Lk 10 : 25-28). The love of God finds

expression in the love of neighbour, and the love of neighbor receives its foundation and energy in the love of God is given to us in the Spirit of the Father and his Son. Wherever that Spirit is being accepted, corresponsable persons are accepting in responding love the Answer to the Question that is the origin and ground and direction and the fulfillment of all human life.

Irresponsibility can be regarded as our futile attempt to give ourselves a meaning that implies our radical rejection of our God-given meaning. We can futilely attempt to take our life stories "out of context" with respect to the Question and Answer that is their ultimate background, ground and foreground. We can attempt to make our own human egos the ultimate context of our human story. To take anything out of context is to lose its true meaning. The rationalizations of a bad conscience express the experience of such a taking-out-of context. The discomfort and unease of a bad conscience is the voice of God recalling us to the true meaning of our life story. Our radical misinterpretation of the universal human story and its ultimate context (God) distorts our grasp of all human stories by taking them out of their true context that which ultimately makes them truly good and meaningful. God alone is the Answer to our quest for our true meaning and goodness. Because God addresses himself to every human being, we are enabled to free, conscious, corresponsable, knowing and loving subjects (persons) whose existence as such is constituted by the endless Answer to the Question that grounds our lives.

Jesus asks ninety-eight different questions in the synoptic gospels. He raises twelve additional questions in his parables. Forty-seven different questions are addressed to Jesus in these Gospels. Of the approximately 157 questions raised in the synoptic gospels, 110 originate with Jesus himself. Even the forty-seven questions addressed to Jesus are occasioned by him. The healing context of many questions suggests their importance in the psycho-therapeutic dialogue of faith and trust. The dynamic of the question lies at the heart of human transformation in the event and life-long process of Christian conversion. Jesus' questions challenge us to growth and development at every level (intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social) under God. A Gnostic pattern is present in the Gospel of Thomas where the emphasis is on Jesus as the one who answers all our questions about mysteries; whereas, in the New Testament, the emphasis is on Jesus as the one who raises questions for our responsible decision and action, calling us to new life, to sell all and to follow him in the self-transcendence of total surrender to God.

Our Questions and Our Desire to Know God

Every act of questioning presupposes the possibility of our finding the truth. Without an implicit "faith" that intelligibility and truth can be found we would not have the courage to seek understanding or to make judgments about the world around us. By the fact that we do ask questions and make judgments (even, for example, "it is a *truth* that there *is* no intelligibility or truth) we give ample evidence that we cannot eradicate our primordial trust in the intelligibility and truth of reality. That we find ourselves spontaneously asking questions is direct evidence for the fact of our having a desire to know the truth.

But there are different types of questions. Some of our questions inquire as to what a thing is or ask about its meaning, intelligibility or significance. This type of question is resolved when we are given an "insight" into the essence of something. If you find yourself asking what the author of this book is trying to convey in this sentences, then this is an example of the first type of question. It may be called a "question for understanding". It will reach its goal when you find yourself saying: "Now I see the point".

But gaining understanding is not the end of the questioning process. For not every insight is in touch with reality. There can be illusory along with realistic understanding. So a second type of question spontaneously arises, and it leads you to ask whether your insights or those of others are *true*. I may see the point that an author is trying to make, but an uneasiness will eventually lead me to ask whether this point is well taken? Is it faithful to the facts of my own experience? Is it based in reality? Is it true? This type of questioning provides evidence that I am not content with mere insight and understanding. Thus I ask: Is it really so? Does this viewpoint correspond with reality? Is it a fact? We may call this second type a "question for reflection" or a "critical question". It is especially our critical questions that give evidence of our desire to know and of our basic discontent with mere understanding. We want to make sure that our insights, hypotheses and theories are true to reality.

Asking a question is possible because we do not yet know the answer. If we knew the answer we would not ask the question in the first place. And yet we know something about what we are questioning in order to ask about it at all. The truth our question is seeking has to be "absent" in order for us to seek it. But at the same time our consciousness has to dwell within the horizon of truth in order for us to inquire about it at all.

In other words, our minds must already have moved into a specific field of knowledge and been influenced by the objects of this field in order for us to ask about what lies within the horizon. I could not seriously desire the truth about myself, others and the world unless the horizon of truth had already encircled my consciousness.

If we know that God means *truth* our affirmation of this ultimate horizon cannot, by definition, be an illusion. For the desire for the truth undercuts all illusions. If we identify "God" with the unrestricted horizon of truth and love towards which our desire to know is directed, we need not fear that our belief is a projection of wishful thinking. If the desire for God is at root the desire for truth, then this desire will not be able to take refuge in illusions or mere thinking. The desire for God coincides with our desire for truth. God is the ultimate horizon of truth which continually activates our desire to ask questions and allows us no peace until we have surrendered to it. God is the ultimate objective of all our questioning. Truth is ultimately a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. As in the case of the "sacred", we both hide from it and seek it at the same time. We know that the truth hurts, but we also intuit that it alone can provide a firm foundation to our lives. The ultimate truth, depth, future, freedom and beauty into whose embrace we are constantly invited consists of an unconditional love that is the *tremendum* from which we flee as well as the *fascinans* that promises us ultimate fulfillment. If we find the elusiveness or depth or "futurity" of truth intolerable, it may be because our strong impulse to master takes precedence over our desire to be grasped by the truth.

Religion may be understood as the conscious decision to move within the truth. It is a rejection of the strong temptation to make truth the object of our will to mastery. It is a surrender to truth as the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* in which alone our freedom and fulfillment lie. Religion is an ongoing conversion to the dimension of the true that transcends the everyday world of fear and all the illusions based on fear. Wherever there is a sincere desire for the truth about ourselves, others and the world there is authentic religion, even if it does not go by that name. The religiousness of this desire for the truth consists of a fundamental trust in the ultimate intelligibility of reality without which we would not have the courage to ask questions and to seek the truth. From the perspective of human consciousness, and longing, religion has its origins essentially in the God given desire for the truth or God himself. The core of religion is an uncompromising passion for the truth.

If mystery is understood merely as a vacuum that begs to be filled with our intellectual achievements and not as an ineffable depth summoning us to surrender ourselves completely to it, then it is hardly adequate as a term for the divine. The gaps in our present understanding and knowledge would better be called *problems* than mysteries. A "problem" can eventually be solved by the application of human ingenuity. Mystery, in contrast to problems, is incapable of any "solution". Mystery becomes more prominent the deeper our questions go and the surer our answers become. Mystery appears to consciousness at the "limit" of our ordinary problem-oriented questions. It reveals itself decisively at the point where we seriously ask what may be called "limit-questions", questions that lie at the "boundary" of our ordinary problem-solving consciousness. For example, while science is dominated by problems for which some resolution or definitive answer is expected, the scientist might find himself eventually asking: Why should I do science at all? Why search for intelligibility in the universe? Similarly, the field of ethics attempts to give answers to our moral dilemmas, but at the limits of ethical investigation there arise such questions as: Why bother about ethics at all? Why be responsible? Why pursue the good life? Why keep promises? Why should we be faithful. Is the universe at heart faithful and trustworthy? If it is not, then why should I worry about fidelity and promise-keeping? At this juncture we have shifted from ethical problems into the realm of the mysterious and unsolvable. Ethics can no more easily answer these limiting questions than science can tell us why we should seek intelligibility in the universe. Another illustration: literary criticism attempts to respond to questions concerning whether a work of literature is aesthetically worthy of our respect. But at the limit of literary criticism there arise questions that it cannot itself address: Why pursue the beautiful? Why bother about aesthetic criteria at all? What is beauty? Again we have moved out of problem and into mystery. Each discipline is specified by the types of questions it raises, the kinds of problems with which it deals. It pursues its questions with a degree of success proportionate to the problems it solves. But at the boundaries of all these various fields of human inquiry we come to an impasse that we cannot get beyond no matter how much intellectual effort we exert. Our problem-solving techniques cannot get us over the encompassing horizon of mystery opened up by our limit-questions. The place of mystery, and hence the appropriate place for the introduction of a specifically religious discourse, is at the limits of our problem-oriented questioning, when our inquiry shifts to another key entirely. At such a point we realize we are asking questions that no human ingenuity will ever solve or "remove". But even

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though we cannot give final solutions to these impossible questions we may still respond (that is, "answer back") to them. This response is appropriately not one of trying to ignore, repress or eliminate them, but rather allowing them to take over our consciousness and pull us into the mystery that lurks on the other side of our problems.

Besides the mysterious questions that arise at the limits of our intellectual life there are also the "boundary experiences" that confront us at the edges of our everyday life. The encounter with suffering, frustration and ultimately death arouses questions of an entirely different sort from those we "normally" ask. Usually we are preoccupied with the ordinary "problems" of life, such as how to pay bills, how to pass a course, etc. In other words "how" questions dominate the ordinary course of our lives. But there are certain "shipwreck" or "earthquake" experiences that occasionally break into the routine of our lives, and when they do we experience the superficiality of our pragmatic "how" questions and the invasion of "why" or "ultimate" questions. Such experiences raise questions that stand at the "limit" of our ordinary consciousness of life, and they can sensitize us to the mystery that always silently accompanies and encompasses our lives. When we are beset by these marginal experiences we ask "ultimate" questions more intently perhaps than before. Can this be all there is to life? Are death and tragedy the final word? Is there any final meaning to my work? Is there an answer to the problem of suffering. Perhaps the questions aroused by tragedy make us most vulnerable to the touch of mystery. Nevertheless, positive and ecstatic moments of deep joy can just as readily transport us beyond the boundaries of pedestrian existence. The feeling of being deeply loved by another or of being entranced by great beauty can also lead us to ask limit-questions. Will love prevail? Is beauty only an illusion? Why cannot these moments last forever? Such questions open us to mystery and lead us to a religious interpretation of the universe. At the "limit" of our ordinary experience and our problem-solving questions we are alerted to the nearness of mystery. We sense that it has been intimately present all along but that it has not entered deeply into our explicit awareness. In limit-experience and limit-questioning we are confronted with the opportunity of making the dimension of mystery the most important and enlivening aspect of our lives.

A Note

Some implications of our questioning and being questioned

God and man meet in the dynamic of the question.

1. First word of God to man is a question in *Genesis 3.9* : an *identity question*.
2. First words of Jesus in *Luke* and *John* are questions : "Why were you looking for me?" (Lk 2 : 49) and "What do you want? (Jn 1 : 38).
3. Questions imply that *we are not self-explanatory, omniscient, self-sufficient*. Our meaning, knowledge, and fulfillment is in and with others.
4. Questions imply *knowing and loving subjects whose interpersonal reality consists in the reciprocity of knowing and loving*. The desire (love) to know motivates the question and the willingness (love) to reply motivates the answer. Without love there would be no motivation for either the question or the answer.
5. Questions imply that personal life is interpersonal, interdependent, reciprocal, and based on *friendship, corresponsibility, communications, community, communion*.
6. Questions imply the need for *self-transcendence* for the attainment of human authenticity in *communications* that are both *truthful and loving*.
7. Questions imply the *humility* of knowing our limits and the *faith and hope* in what is beyond them. *Self-knowledge of a limited self* preconditions questions.
8. Questions are *self-revealing* of the questioner : they reveal the interest (love) and need for truth of the subject. The quality of the question reveals the depth or superficiality of the questioner. We are defined by what we seek.
9. Questions imply that *persons are not transparent* : they must appeal to one another for knowledge and fulfillment. The truth we possess remains opaque or "self-contained" apart from our willingness to communicate/share it.
10. Questions imply response-ability of others : someone is able to respond to my question. The authentically *personal is responsible*. The *irresponsible are impersonal*. The personal is *corresponsible* or reciprocal.
11. Our identity is determined by those who take responsibility for us and by those for whom we take responsibility : by those *to* and *for* whom we are *answerable*.
12. Questions imply the tension between the known unknown and its revelation in the answer re-quested. The *quest* for the answer expresses the tension as a process of search, inquiry, or effort for discovery.
13. Questions imply that we are conscious and relational beings.

14. Question-raising communities are constituted by sharing the same quest for truth. *Fides quaerens intellectum ontologicum, existentialem, socialem, eschatologicam*. The theological community is constituted by a common quest for truth.
15. The two dimensions of love are related to the tension of question-raising and question-answering: *concern* strives for the answer and *complacency* rests in it. (These are technical terms.) Complacency is the ground for concern, inasmuch as it trusts that the answer exists and seeking is based on this assurance.
16. *Corresponsibility* manifests authentically knowing and loving human subjects. *Irresponsibility* manifests unauthentic human subjects, especially with regard to questions addressed to human freedom and decision-making. The failure to become engaged by the question-raising experience of human life reflects unauthenticity.