

A handbook for life in an accelerating world



By  
Vladimir Felzmann

# **Life Squared**

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**Vladimir Felzmann**

**[a.k.a Father Vlad]**

**Cover design and graphics, unless otherwise stated, by John Moffett, Fr Vlad's nephew**

## **LIFE SQUARED**

### **'A handbook for life in an accelerating world'**

#### **Contents**

*Ciao.*

Short Cuts - Acronym Bookmark.

Toolboxes:

1. Looking is believing	SONG
2. Why on earth am I? - PIES Heart	Self
3. Beside myself are others –TD	Others
4. Slow down – Zebras crossing	Nature
5. Believing is seeing something bigger than myself	God
6. Doing the right thing	Ethics
7. In a mirror darkly	Time
8. Undying love	Death
9. Don't panic, plan	Road map

LS First Aid Kit

.....  
Appendix A - Author's CV

Appendix B – JP2F4S [Toolbox 9-9]

Appendix C – The future

## **Vlad's Acronyms for 'Life Squared'**

### **Book Mark**

**BOMB:** the Beyondness, Otherness,  
Mystery and Beauty  
contained within the word 'spirituality'.

← Cut along this line

**IVR:** our Identity, Values and Roles.  
life's three fundamental question:  
1 Who am I?  
2 What am I worth? – what is anything  
worth?  
3 Why am I on earth? Why on earth am I?  
For what purpose?

To create a Bookmark

**Heart Model – or Heart**  
helping me respect and understand others  
whose faces and bodies carry their 'self'  
within

**MOB:** Refers to Nature as  
Mysterious, Organic and Borrowed  
[given back to God at death]

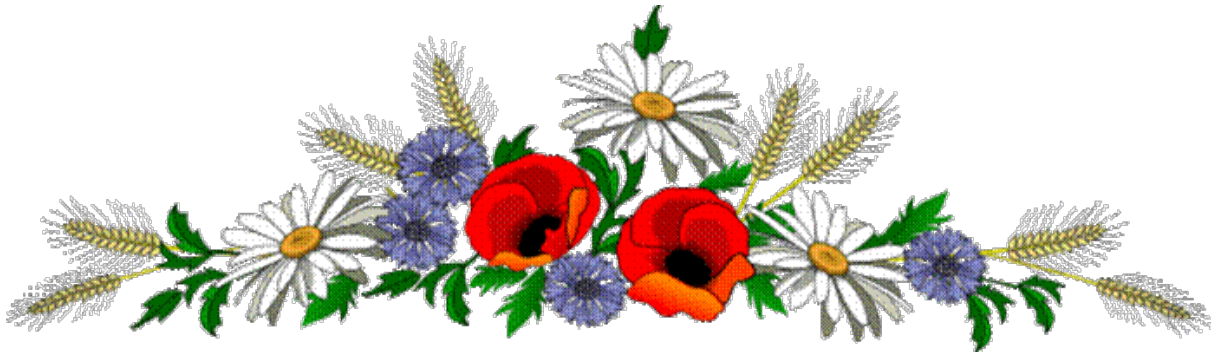
**NORD:** Nest of Russian Dolls  
TD: Temporal nest of Russian Dolls  
SD: Spatial nest of Russian Dolls.

**PIES:** the four dimensions  
of our one holistic life:  
the Physical, Intellectual,  
Emotional and Spiritual.

**RAFS:** To love is to  
Respect, Appreciate, Forgive and Serve.

**TAPS:**  
Topics for prayer  
and the reasons I celebrate Mass:  
Thanking, Asking, Praising  
and saying Sorry.

**VTW:** Vlad's Theocentric Wheel



**Ciao**

### **Life Squared – Introduction**

On offer is a leg up in your life with my life experiences, stories I have picked up and lessons learned along my life on this planet. I hope they may stimulate you to recalibrate the values that will shape your life, perhaps avoiding some of the mistakes I made, and benefit from the lessons these have taught me.

As I have aged, I was tempted to call it “an old-timer’s philosophy of life’. Life has been full of challenges. This is where I have arrived.

Twin motives urged me to write this book. I wanted to find out what I really thought about life. Writing this book has crystallised my experiences. I now know better what I have learned and think. I also dreamt of passing those lessons on to future generations. Both of these fit under the aegis of my life’s ambition: “To help God make this world a better place.”

Life Squared [LS] is Ubuntu. Good for you. Good for me. (\*) Given our interconnectedness as parts of one organic unity, I use Ubuntu as a shorthand for “What is good for you is good for me. What is good for me is good for you.”

Whatever is good for my heart or liver or kidney is good for me. Every part of me is me.

How your life unfolds only time will tell. Up to middle age, you will be naturally and rightly preoccupied with climbing, achieving and establishing your identity. You will make mistakes. These will teach you how best to live the rest of your life. Though life’s problems cannot be solved, they can be outgrown.

As we shall see, good ethical behaviour is enlightened self-interest in action.

Without asking for it, we received life. It is up to us to live it well and help others if they ask.

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(\*) Ubuntu – is a Southern African word standing for humanity or fellow feeling. It underpinned Nelson Mandela’s ‘Peace and Reconciliation’ philosophy and political strategy.

I readily admit that this book is a conglomerate. It carries stories, historical events, encouragements, warnings, opinions, acronyms and reflections on my life. (\*)

As you will see, life has taught me that hope and self-confidence are the parents of success.

There are many self-help books on library shelves – and on the www. I wrote this in 2017-8 as a build-up to 2019: my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, golden jubilee of priesthood and 20 years of life as a monsignor, a Prelate of Honour.

In case you are wondering, I was born 1939 in Prague. In 1946, I came with my mother, nanny, two sisters and one brother to London to live with my father, a diplomat. I attended a south London Grammar School, and went on to study Civil Engineering, with a post-graduate year in structures. Later I discovered I had a vocation to the priesthood so, aged 30, having obtained my Doctorate in Theology in Rome, I was ordained priest. [Full CV in Appendix A]

Life Squared aims to help you with your self-development: what the Germans call *Bildung* and educationalists in the UK refer to as ‘Character Development’.

See me as a personal trainer who is there to challenge and inspire you to develop your full potential. The lessons life has gradually taught me, might help you learn earlier and faster how to tackle your own life.

I will refer to you as Dear Reader - DR - in my attempt to shape the content of this book into a discussion rather than offer my ideas in dry-statement format. ‘Life Squared’ aims to offer a dialogue to help you shape and hone your own ideas.

I, Mgr. Vladimir Felzmann, AKA Fr Vlad, am from your Grandparents’ generation. We were not nearly as cautious as your generation. [When I was a teenager, health & safety was a small cloud on the distant horizon] However, judging by what I have seen over my seventy-nine + years, though expressed in many different ways, the needs of every generation remain essentially the same.

Unless you live in a very small community, perhaps a village, you will live in a fragmented society and sense isolation compounded by an erosion of norms which guided you at school. You will also discover how tricky it is to reach the inner recesses of another’s mind.

Though the context of your life is accelerating, at its core, for better or for worse, human nature does not change. Life’s questions remain the same across human history.

How and when we reach out for the answers varies across generations and our Global City’s cultures. It seems to me that the life-skills – call them virtues – we need to succeed, remain radically unchanged.

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(\*) If you are familiar with the Christian Bible – or indeed the Jewish Tanakh – you will understand why I call it ‘my pauper’s Original Testament’.

These virtues have been around for thousands of years. However, as the age of the ingredients you use to bake a cake do not determine the age of that cake, the way you confect your character is brand new to you.

The way ahead is not a Roman road. Prepare yourself for the unexpected. It will meander, uphill and down dale. To stay ahead of your world's culture-curve, you will need to keep moving fast.

Every life is different – indeed unique - yet we all have to face similar issues and challenges. You, DR, have to make your own track. The context of your life is – and will be – very different from mine. As we move on in this century, our UK culture is moving from production and consumption to sharing and caring priorities. Using my experiences as a foundation might help you develop your own strategy for responding to whatever life throws at you. It is up to you to play as well as you can whatever hand life has dealt you. No excuses.

While I am a digital immigrant, you, born after 1980, are a digital native. Your generation is far more IT-savvy than mine. On the other hand, yours will have issues with student debt, job insecurity, Artificial Intelligence, getting onto the housing ladder and changing jobs as they come and go. Challenges my generation did not have to face.

Not just technologies are evolving at an accelerating rate. There are accelerating changes in medicine, economics and nature. Now, under the Papacy of Francis, even in The Vatican!. Relentless changes in attitudes accelerate across the UK. You may have noticed how fast we are becoming a throwaway culture. Smart phones must be instant. There is never enough time. So much feels transient. Some people feel that the only stable element in their life is the person they see in the mirror.

Our world is now being shaped by political cynicism, fake news, anti-colonialism, anti-plastics, anti-queues at bus stops, feminism – feelings discussed as much as politics - gender and transgender rights, artificial intelligence, and veganism. I suspect you can lengthen this list.

Society is overtly hostile to Christianity, covertly hostile to anyone who believes in a Creator God and is a member of the three Abrahamic religions.

Like it or not, *C'est la vie* in 2019 and most probably for the years ahead. So, why not take a serious look at preparations for your life's journey?

Why the title?

An officer, before his convoy moves on, asks his sergeant “All fuelled up and ready to go?” and the Sargent. replies: “Yes Sir! All squared.” “Right, let's crack on.”

Then, you may have noticed that whenever you meet someone, your life - and his or hers - is multiplied by a life: Life<sup>2</sup>. [LS]

When preparing couples for their marriage, I say that married life is a bit like a journey from North Africa to Johannesburg. The first few miles of metalled highway are not typical of what lies ahead.

In life, there are more roundabouts – with any number of exits – rather than binary crossroads. Wise to have a reliable Satnav – an ethical system with its educated conscience – on board.

Wise to load into your vehicle the equipment you will need to cross deserts, rivers, swamps and savannahs, avoiding the fauna – mosquito to elephant-size - capable of terminating your life. Events may startle you to reflection and self-examination.

As it has turned out, my life has been dedicated to communication; sharing my experiences – and their meaning - with all sorts, especially the young. I was stimulated to write this book, bringing together my developing understanding of life, by that common refrain of my generation and older: “Now, that I am coming to the end of my life, I have finally learned how to live.”

LS aims to highlight three questions that are somewhere there within your heart: ‘Where do I go?’ ‘Why should I go there?’ And ‘How may I get there?’

As we shall see, there is a difference between reality and our take on it, our perception. Reality is there. It is up to us how we see and understand it. To stimulate and challenge you, DR, some of my views are beyond the pale of RC orthodoxy.

As I approach the end of my life and am squared for my birth into eternity - and seeing the face of God - I have written this to help you, DR, to be squared for your own journey through space-time – in which everything moves and on our tiny planet much is accelerating - well before you are my age.

As teenagers – I remember – we thought we were experiencing feelings no one had ever had before. Parents were from another planet. We felt we were explorers of virgin territories. No one could teach us anything about life. We had to find out for ourselves. You, I hope, are brighter.

My aim is to furnish you, with nine toolboxes of ideas – and a First Aid Kit - based on my experiences. When faced with your own challenges, you may dip into them and cope better than I managed.

You will make mistakes, as we all do. However, if you tackle these creatively, they will help you grow.

Having left school and a community you have known for years, you are entering a far larger pond. You will come across many intelligent people who share neither your world-views nor your value-systems. These will test your convictions, your faith. You will realise – sooner rather than later – that arguing about faith tends to generate more heat than light. Sparring intellectually with others will sharpen your own convictions. My teaching and pastoral work has certainly sharpened mine.

Life Squared is not exhaustive. For example, as I have no experience of online dating - and very little exposure to Social Media - you will have to look elsewhere for advice on that. There is very little on drugs and sex. You will have handled these topics while still at school. The topics I do touch upon are in the Index.

We are the way we are. All we can do is to do all we can to become the best version of ourselves. Suggesting how anyone should live his or her life is a ridiculous thing to do. Offering lessons learned - often the hard way - as guidelines for consideration, seems a decent thing to do. Hence this book.

To go beyond your comfort zone is - by definition - never pleasant. But, as sportspeople know, vital if we are to improve. We all need motivation powerful enough to overcome lethargy and fear. This book may challenge you. I hope it inspires and motivates you to keep on keeping on until you reach your own Johannesburg.

Communication has its enduring challenges. Before delivering a homily, talk or meditation, my inner, private prayer is, "If it comes out wrong, may it go in right."

There are currently, the experts tell us, some 7k languages - mostly mutually unintelligible - around our Global City. I hope my language of life, with its own unique accent will make sense to you as time goes by.

I know how hard it is, at your age, to imagine being fifty let alone eighty years old. You will shape your life by your beliefs, your choices, your efforts and mistakes as well as much beyond your control. Climate change, natural disasters, political upheavals and illnesses will influence how you live.

I have structured Life Squared on the SONG of my life: my Self, Others, Nature and God: my destination.

This book comes with its Vade-Mecum Acronym Bookmark to help you sort out the acronyms I use. As time has gone by, I have developed these to help my fading memory. I hope they may help you.

Toolbox 1, The Road ahead - sets out my stall on:

A. Faith – what that portmanteau word means to me and why it is faith in all its connotations – that shapes our lives.

B. Reality – what there is within and around us

C. Communication – how to express ourselves to share our inner world.

Clearly, these elements are inter-related.

Toolbox 2 is an Instruction Manual, for when you hear noises in your vehicle. On offer is my model of The Land of The Heart.

Rather than the traditional mind-body-spirit paradigm of our humanity – for reasons you will see - it works with the PIES, the Physical, Intellectual, Emotional and Spiritual dimensions of life.

Toolbox 3 focuses on people around me. Others.

Toolbox 4 looks at Nature; the whole of Creation, space-time.

Toolbox 5 reveals how I see ‘something bigger than myself’: God.

Toolbox 6 examines ethics. Doing the right thing.

Toolbox 7 glances at how I see Time.

Toolbox 8 deals with death

Toolbox 9 offers you a road map to fulfilment.

Then there is a First Aid Kit with repentance, reconciliation and forgiveness when things go wrong.

Finally, I include a set of Appendixes: A, my CV – to help you see where I have gathered my experiences; B, The Values-virtues I integrated into John Paul 2 Foundation 4 Sport [JP2F4S] I launched in 2011 and C, to entertain you, my view of the future. [My teenage eyes read many a prediction for 2000CE. All turned out to be wide of the mark]

The book is not set in concrete. Any suggestions for improvements will be most welcome – as long as you get back to me while I still am with you on earth.

A warning! This is not a novel. Do not attempt to read it in one sitting. Take a chapter – or just one paragraph at a time. You need space to work out what matters to you and why.

Currently, you can reach me at [vladimirfelzmann@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:vladimirfelzmann@rcdow.org.uk).

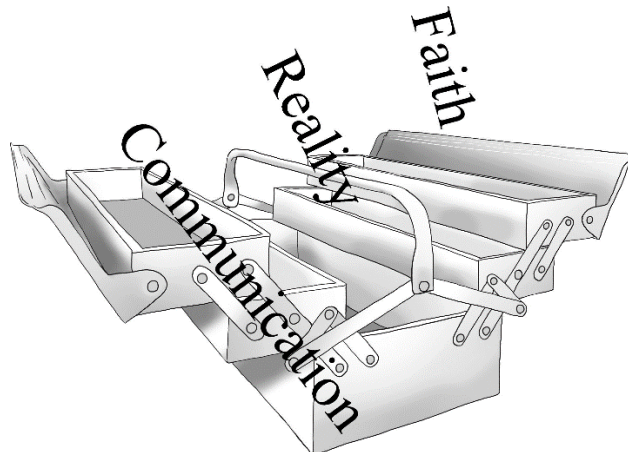
**Bon Appétit, DR.**

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PS

By the way ‘Ciao’ - a metamorphose of ‘schiavo’- does not mean ‘hello’. It actually means ‘I am your slave: ‘at your service – for free.’

"Dr Livingstone, I presume", said Henry Morton Stanley in Africa, 1871.



In our mother's womb, at some stage, we begin to experience sensations that affect our lives. Gradually, after birth, constantly showered by sense data, we try to make sense out of it all. We interpret and judge reality as we meet it through our five plus senses. We develop our faith: the way we see the world.

Therefore, 'faith' seems to me to be a good starting point.

Misunderstandings about faith, a word that means different things to different people, has had a massive impact throughout history. Not all of it benign. For a start, 'faith' is not a verb. It is a noun. The verb is 'to believe'

There are at least four meanings/connotations packed into that word Faith: trust, perception, values and commitment.

There is: 1. Trust-faith

"I believe you". I trust you are telling me the truth. You are honestly trying to recall and communicate the facts as you experienced them. i.e. my 'truth' = my perception of reality. (\*)

You may pass on 'hear-say'. However, that has its problems. The source may be tainted. Hence, unlikely to be accepted in a court of law. (\*\*)

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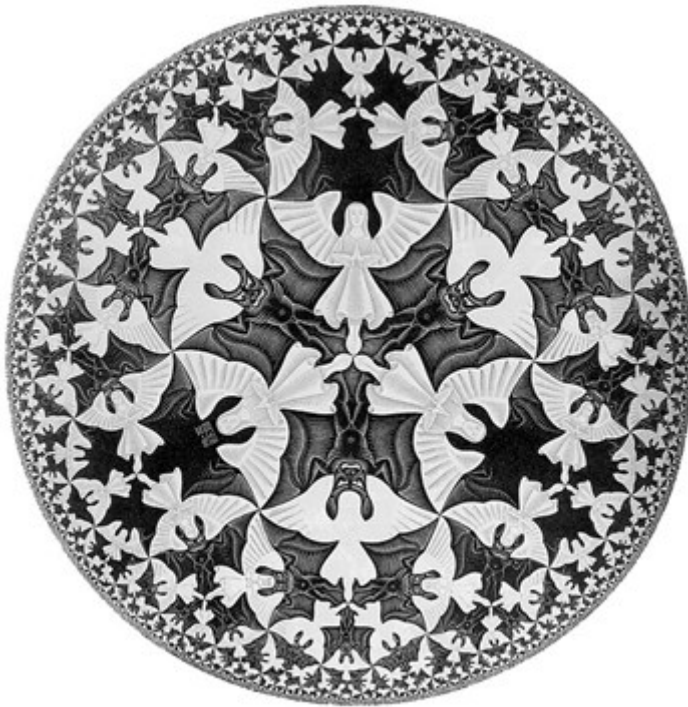
(\*) Recalling that truth, that perception - as under oath in a law court - has its problems. Memories have a nasty habit of playing tricks or fading away.

(\*\*) So, whenever you are writing an essay or article, go to the original text rather than using quotations in a later piece. Typos do tend to sneak in!

2. Perception-faith [which undoubtedly everyone has]

“Land Ahoy!” ‘Oops, sorry. It’s just a cloud.’ “This food looks yummy. Urgh! It tastes horrible.” Though you, DR, could be a Martian, I believe you are human.

What do you see in this drawing by the Dutch artist MC Escher?



Devils or angels? Maybe both?

As you may have already realised, DR, much of life is a Rorschach Test. [Worth a Google if the word is unfamiliar]

I have chosen the lens through which I view the world. Inevitably, you will do the same, DR. It is up to you to decide the filter through which you would like to see the world. [More on this in TB2]. It is up to you to decide how to respond to whatever you find facing you each day. People are people. Fact. How you see them, how you treat them is up to you and your education, enlightenment and virtues.

Notice the difference between looking and seeing, DR. Looking is turning one’s eyes to a certain object; a physical activity. Seeing is believing by processing, interpreting and finding the meaning in information contained in light as it strikes our retina.

This perception is influenced by our emotions, past experiences and time that we dedicate to that looking. We all know that it is easy to look at something or someone and not to see them, or to look at something and see only what we know to look for, or what we want to see, or what we remember or indeed imagine.

My eyebrows rocketed when I heard that a priest had told our mutual friend, then Bishop, Vincent Nichols, that he, Adrian, was very happy at All Saints Pastoral Centre and that I was

not at all as hard as he had imagined. Me? Hard? Without an honest mutual friend, it is not easy to find out what people think of you, DR.

Perceptions of reality come in many textures: realism, romanticism, idealism, intuitive, imaginative, and creative. Religious ideas inspire - for better or worse - billions of your contemporaries.

Science, which for many atheists is their religion, has turned its assumptions into the dogma of materialism and its progeny of reductionism, second law of thermodynamics and the non-evolution of the laws of nature.

To labour that point, *imagine a building site: four workers doing the same job.*

*Curious, a young lad comes up and asks them what they are doing*

*Looking bored, the first replies, "I am mixing concrete. Can't you see?"*

*The second points his finger "I am building a house."*

*The third, slapping his pocket, "I am earning a living."*

*Then the fourth, smiling, slightly bashful, "I am helping God build a home for a family."*

**Are the answers arbitrary, DR? Are they all 'right'? Which of those four views would you like to have?**

Everyone - thanks to his or her nature and nurture - has his or her own take on life. You will soon discover how vastly different these can be. (\*) We see as we are. If, as we shall see in TB2, your heart is ruled by love, you will see the world through that optic of love. As you face the rest of your life, is it not worthwhile trying to discover the point of your life: why you are here?

Fiction makes sense. Real life, motivated by emotions and passions, rarely does. Reality will, like it or not, shape your life, DR.

**Are you a realist? Are you curious to get to the facts? Or do you prefer to live in a Walter Mitty imaginary world?**

The more I know, the more I know I do not know. Moreover, I don't know what I do not know. Asking questions, seeking answers keeps life fascinating.

It is wise to come to terms with what is there and learn to live with it: accept what you cannot change, change what you can and want to change and - to avoid frustration and depression or anger - learn to know the difference. We will see more on this in Toolbox 4 on Nature.

The present is hectic and not easily decipherable. The future is opaque. Only with hindsight may we discern the grooves that led us to where we now find ourselves.

**Have you, DR, ever thought that when you are in a room with just one other, there are in fact six people present?**

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(\*)Some people worry about their teeth. Others could not care less. Some are elegant and for them style is vital. Others are happy and contented as a mess. Variety, occasionally the spice, is certainly a fact of life.

When you are in a room with just one friend, there are, in fact at least six people present:

You and your friend as seen by you .....	2
You and your friend as perceived by your friend.....	2
You and your friend as God sees you both.....	<u>2</u>
	6

Given my background and faith, it is the final pair that for me is paramount. Not surprisingly, my favourite Psalm is number 139. If only I could see myself as God sees me! The real me.

We see as we are. We are as we have related with the SONG of our life. If we are angry, we project our anger. Perhaps even seeing God as angry. How we make sense of life, the way we see things, are constantly in flux. We change. Our neighbourhood changes. Our minds are, it seems to me, the flamingos, reality the hedgehogs in Alice's Wonderland. Imagination infiltrates communications distorting, yet perhaps enriching, reality.

Imagine a tree standing in the middle of a field. A column of artists shuffle past. Each getting their take on that tree with different media. Which is more accurate? True? A photo, a pastel, an acrylic, an ink drawing, a collage? The list goes on.

### **Which is more 'true' DR? What do you think?**

Living in a Global City (\*) may be at times ethically confusing and financially threatening - but it is never dull.

We see as we feel. Whenever there is war, there are casualties of war. Each country has its own take on these. It seems to me that while the USA celebrates them, the UK commemorates them and Germany mourns.

Communication is food for the mind as protein and carbs are food for the body. Faced with a plate of delicious food when you are hungry whets the appetite. If seasick - or fevered - that same plate of food becomes nauseating. When I am relaxed, music is a balm; an irritant, when I am exhausted. As with food and music, so with perception.

### **Have you, DR, noticed how differently things look after a relaxing holiday?**

Though the word was not in my vocabulary until recently, semiotics – the study of signs and symbols and their use or interpretation – gripped my imagination early on in life, probably in 1944 when my family were living in Prague.

*Having taken the funicular railway to the top of Petrin hill, our parents took my two sisters and me to the Prague Hall of Mirrors. As we moved along and bobbed up and down, those mirrors distorted the way we saw ourselves. We laughed and giggled but it made me – even*

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(\*) Never a 'Global Village'. Villages tend to have homogenous cultures. Our world certainly does not.

*at that age – think. How do I really look? How do people see me? What shapes the way we see things and interpret our experiences?*

*Then while teaching RE in 1976, I will never forget that fifteen-year-old boy's reaction to my wise words that 'we should see God more like our father, not as a judge or enforcement officer'. His hand shot up. He blurted out "If God is like my father, then he is a bastard." The class hushed. Not a sound. I then said that he should see God as his best mate who will never, ever, let him down or grass him up.*

*At break-time, I took him aside. He explained why he had blurted out his truth. His father was a drunkard who, when alcohol-fuelled, slapped his mother, made his son take off his dad's boots and threw his homework out of their high-rise flat's window. He was illiterate and saw his son's education as a threat.*

Ever since then, before entering a classroom – and nowadays before launching into my homily at mass - as I mentioned in Ciao - I whisper a little prayer to myself: "If it comes out wrong, may it go in right."

Reality is one thing. Perception, our take on reality, is something else. Perceptions are dynamic. They are much more than merely seesaw. What we see impacts on how we see. Bear in mind how standpoints shape optics of perception. Just think of the water between England and France.

The English call it English Channel, the French *La Manche* and the Germans *Armel Kanal*. For the UK, it is a defensive moat. For the French and Germans a nuisance that had hindered their erstwhile ambitions of conquest. As they say, one man's trash is another man's treasure.

It is good to hear what is said, but do bear in mind who is saying it.

**With so much 'false truth' being peddled by politicians and the media, being sceptical can be healthy, DR. Why not check sources and other points of view before making up your own mind?**

Looking back over my life, I can see how my views of just about everything have changed – and how my priorities have altered.

Bear in mind that everyone around you has their own way of seeing things. Rather than our human propensity to say, "I know what you mean" I prefer to go with "I think I know what you mean." There is a difference. [More on this in the next Toolbox.]

Off the record, DR, all too often the person speaking does not really know what they are in fact thinking, not until they have said it.

When thinking about what there is, bear in mind that life is paradoxical. Go easy with the disjunctives either/or. Life is home, work, and play. I am a teacher and student, a priest and a man. I mean, God is three and one, Jesus is man and God, Mary is virgin and mother. I am both good and bad. There is nature and there is nurture. Though influenced by our DNA and education, we are responsible for our choices. The list goes on! As we shall see.

**Have a think, DR, how many conjunctions do you see around you?**

When René Descartes [1596 – 1650], pronounced his famous, “*Cogito ergo sum*”. “I think, therefore I am,” he did not mean that he thought himself into existence. Rather, because he could think, he must be there to be able to think. Reflecting on his thinking, he could be sure that he was indeed alive. Subsequently, people less bright than him came to conclude that thinking created reality.

However, our imagination, as we shall see, is able - up to a point – not only to alter but to create that reality. Seeing is one thing, believing is something else. What is there is there. How we see it, what it means to us, is up to us and our ‘perception faith’.

*Years ago, when still a teacher, I took a minibus of boys to Snowdonia. Having climbed a peak, we could see our minibus down in the valley. Suddenly a cloud rolled in. We could not see further than our feet. However, as time was pressing and it was getting cold, we started down the path we could just see - towards the minibus that had disappeared. It had been there. It was still there. So we got there. No problem. End of story*

A reminder in space of Newman’s [Now Blessed John Henry Newman’s] attitude to time with his “Lead kindly light ... one step enough for me”

If you, DR, close your eyes, the world around you does not change. However, if you start walking with your eyes closed, it might change you. That is why I try to be a realist.

Because it is so important, when you are talking with people, do bear in mind that reality is NOT the same as perception.

When I launched SPEC [Ref. Appendix A], to help young people realise the difference, I hung up two maps of the world side by side. One was from the 16<sup>th</sup> the other from the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first showed what explorers thought was there, the second as we see it now

If walking along in the dark, I cannot see a hole in the ground, it does not mean it is not there. Therefore, “beware the unseen hole in the ground – or in any argument!”

To live and learn is to change for the better. To live without learning is to change for the worse. I see the past as a rehearsal for the present. If you can, try to stay focused on the here and now. Try to be present in the present; even if you bear in mind the past and keep one eye on the future. It is in the present - as in gift - of the present – as in a moment - that you are in fact alive.

Studying history will enable you to see how humanity’s perception of astronomy, biology. Psychology, science and technology, even religion, social structures and so much else has altered and is altering ever faster. As mentioned in Ciao, everything is accelerating.

Something similar – on a far shorter time-scale of course - has happened in my life. Something similar will happen to you. Be prepared to expect, accept and embrace the unexpected!

We can choose what we want to view – and how. We can choose to be positive or negative. It is for you to decide the prisms through which you want to view the world, and the spectacles you are going to wear.

To see how different the world looks from there, why not spend half a day in a wheelchair? It will help you empathise with the excluded: people on the economic, geographical and social peripheries of the world. It will also let you see what it is that elite Para-Olympians

have achieved. Moreover, you will realise how still imperfect is the infrastructure for people with disabilities. (\*)

Our media daily brings us appalling images of those who bleed, grieve and limp on the edges of the world. It is all too easy to look away. Try not to. I suggest you keep looking. Your life will be enriched. You will be grateful for what you have.

You can choose what you want to achieve, then use the methods, the tools you need, to succeed, to overcome the obstacles there are in your way.

Realities, perceived as truth, can be physical, psychological, arithmetical, geometrical and spiritual. Known or unknown, these realities were always there. In 1774, Joseph Priestley finally discovered oxygen, which had been there in the air for some 2.3 billion years.

The world is an astonishing place; so remarkable that, as we shall see, it can be explained as non-accidental. It is, however, under an accelerating threat due to climate change and pollution by plastic. Still beautiful, but ever more vulnerable. And, as you will see in Appendix C No.21, with some thought provoking possibilities.

**How do you, DR, see the world? To clarify it in your own mind, why not write down five adjectives. Use a pencil, easier to change them as you read on.**

It helped them appreciate not only their own eyesight but also the character of people who are visually impaired. Or, indeed, totally blind.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_

However, you – like all of us – see things through filters that our nature and nurture have shaped. For example, the way you see this book – how much you get out of it – will be unique to you.

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(\*) Having experienced what Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) manages to achieve, when I set up SPEC – the Residential Peer-Educational Centre I set up and ran at All Saints Pastoral Centre – we would blindfold our young guests. To pass through an obstacle course they had to rely on instructions shouted to them from the side-lines.

Your friends will see it differently. Worth discussing your thoughts to shape and sharpen your own views, perhaps changing them as you dialogue with your friends.

**Who are the people with whom you can share your inner life? Why not make a list, DR?**

Name	Subject
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	

Why allow yourself to be browbeaten by our secular culture into regarding materialism [more on this as we go along] as unassailable? There is far more to see that hits your retina.

The world is intelligible. It does make sense, though areas of it are beyond the reach of logic - and of words; hence our need for music, dance and art. The world is mysterious, exciting. There is always more waiting for you to discover. One life is not enough to know it all!

People are even more mysterious than nature. Whenever I hear someone say, "I know you" I wonder, "Do you?" I hardly know myself.

Identity is not the same as personality. I might know who you are, but how are you inside? . The Heart, the Self, are something else – as we shall see in Toolbox 2.

Keeping it to myself, I think, 'I don't really know anyone. Just more or less about them. Each of us is a mystery. You know about me. I know about you. Not the real you, not the real me. Only God knows us as we really are.'

Moreover, we change right across our PIES. Consider how you were when you left your primary/prep school and moved on into the Big School? Imagine how you will be – your values and life-style – when you are thirty. Why not write them down and then read that list when you reach that age? It could be fun.

Values	Virtues
1	
2	
3	

4

5

6

7

Given my background and role in life, I decided I would always try to see others as in some way better than me. They can always teach me something. Some people I have met - all too many- take the opposite view.

**How about you, DR? How do you try to see people?**

The Paradoxes of Perception.

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair,”  
A Tale of Two Cities [1859] by Charles Dickens.

The plot centres on the years leading up to the French Revolution and culminates in the Jacobin Reign of Terror. It can be applied to any year or day. It is, for me at least, forever fresh. Ambiguity riddles reality as well as art. Take this picture.



Taken 15 August 2018, (\*) it shows Cafod's Sister Clara from Zambia, amongst the shoes outside Westminster Cathedral to highlight the plight of refugees *Credit: Stefan Rousseau/PA*

Reality is ambivalent, paradoxical and ironical. The Calvary cross is defeat and victory. Death is end of one life yet the start of another. Every ending is a new beginning. The ancient Chinese story of the young man who falls off his horse and breaks a leg reminds me of the ambiguity of most events.

*Falling off a horse, he breaks a leg. Is a broken leg good or bad?*

*It saves him from conscription and he stays behind in the village. Is that good or bad?*

*While the army is away fighting, bandits raid the village and he suffers serious burns.*

*Is that good or bad?*

*A beautiful girl nurses him. He falls in love with her. Is that good or bad?*

*They marry. Is that good or bad?*

*And so the story moves on.*

Strengths are weaknesses; weaknesses can become strengths – as we shall see. To whet your curiosity, just a few examples shaped by the different prisms through which people look at life, seem to contradict each other.

1. Absence makes the heart grow fonder. Out of sight, out of mind.

2. Better safe than sorry. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

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(\*) Before being revealed, the purpose of this 'work of art' split opinions. Some saw it as a sign of everyone leaving the Church. Others, more optimistically, imagined it meant that people had been sent out of the church to preach – to live - the Gospel.

3. **Nobody goes to that restaurant; it is too crowded.**

4. Opposites attract. Birds of a feather flock together.

5. The pen is mightier than the sword. Actions speak louder than words.

6. The early bird catches the worm. The second mouse gets the cheese.

7. You cannot teach an old dog new tricks. You are never too old to learn.

In fact, it was the Pope's "Share the Journey" refugee campaign that inspired the artist to show support.

**Looking back over your life, DR, have you jumped to conclusions, which you later realised, were not as bad as they had seemed?**

For more fun, go to end of this TB and see Appendix 1

People not only see the same things differently, but they evaluate them differently. For example, I do not see beauty in body-piercing, tattoos, bling and so many other things purchased, occasionally at great price, which clearly make those carrying them proud and happy.

Then there are magicians. They open our eyes to the unexpected, often the apparently impossible. They remind me that God has many things 'up his sleeve'; often, very unlikely.

You, DR, will probably have noticed how science and medicine have developed over the ages. Knowledge and understanding do not sit still. They are always on the move; currently picking up speed. Sprinting.

Whatever the facts, perceptions – and hence actions - are always coloured by culture and technology. (\*) I thank God I have lived with our current views on medical treatments, democratic equality and freedom of thought and speech.

'This Is Not a Pipe' is a painting by the Belgian surrealist painter René Magritte. It is a real painting of a real pipe but a pipe it is not – except in our mind's eye.

Now, DR, a silly story making a serious point.

*Once upon a time, there was a man working for the Post Office whose job was to process all the mail that had illegible addresses.*

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(\*) It seems to me silly and unfair to dismiss someone like Rudyard Kipling for being an imperialist. Or, indeed, criticise William Shakespeare for his misogynistic views in "Love's Labour Lost"

*One day, a letter came addressed in a shaky handwriting to God, with no actual address.*

*He thought he should open it.*

*The letter read:*

*Dear God,*

*I am an 83-year-old widow, living on a very small pension. Yesterday someone stole my purse. It had £100 in it, which was all the money I had until my next pension payment.*

*Next Sunday is Christmas, and I had invited two of my friends over for dinner.*

*Without that money, I have nothing to buy food with, have no family to turn to, and you are my only hope. Can you please help me?*

*Sincerely,*

*Edna .*

*The postal worker was touched. He showed the letter to all the other workers. Each one dug into his or her wallet and came up with a few pounds each!*

*By the time he made the rounds, he had collected £95, which they put into an envelope and sent to the woman.*

*The rest of the day, all the workers felt a warm glow thinking of Edna and the dinner she would be able to share with her friends.*

*Christmas came and went.*

*A few days later, another letter came from the same old woman to God. All the workers gathered around while the letter was opened.*

*It read:*

*Dear God,*

*How can I ever thank you enough for what you did for me?*

*Because of your gift of love, I was able to fix a glorious dinner for my friends.*

*We had a very nice day and I told my friends of your wonderful gift.*

*By the way, there was £5 missing.*

*I think it might have been those robbing b-st-rds at the post office. !!*

*Sincerely,*

*Edna*

**Have you, DR, through lack of information ever jumped to the wrong conclusions?**

I certainly can. The earliest I remember was when as a boy I fell through ice I imagined was thicker. Luckily, the water below was shallow. It was a cool lesson in taking care before stepping off solid ground.

When I was young – naïve, you might say - I admit I was too impetuous in trusting people.

I believed that, apart from the Nazis, people were trustworthy, honest and essentially good.  
(\*)

Now, I know that not all that glitters is gold. To get a clearer picture of who somebody really is takes time. As you will discover, some people are great actors and a few are even confidence tricksters.

### **What about you DR? How do you see yourself – and our paradoxical humanity?**

However, apart from sense-data, I know – I cannot deny for reasons you will see as we go along – there are the invisible, the spiritual, the meta-material realities that have affected my life.

I am confident that there is reality beyond - above and below - the tangent of my perception.

Whenever the weather is murky, I remind myself that the sun is always shining, even though unseen. Clouds do not quench its light and heat. They merely prevent me from benefiting from that radiance. This belief enables me to accept that there is a reality beyond the physical sense data: “Faith as acceptance of things unseen” [Heb 11, 1]. This ‘comprehensive-radical- transcendental faith’[CRTF] enables me to see – perhaps a better word is sense - the giver in the gift, the creator in creation, the love in the beloved. It accepts there must be a singer behind a song heard on the radio. This comprehensive-radical faith is a gift – a grace - of an intuitive resonance with an unseen presence: the absolute infinite within yet beyond the limits of our human existence.

Having ultimately come from God, everything is sacred for those who have the eyes of this CRTF. space-time has not just four but five dimensions: height, width and depth of space plus time plus the sacred. Life ‘to the full [John 10,10] lives in all five.

While space-time accelerates, the sacred/divine offers us a safe, stable and joyful foothold for life. Divine love underpins everything. “I do love you, believe me.” “I do believe you love me.” I know I cannot prove it but it is true. It is real.

### **Have you, DR, realised that the two most important things in life we cannot prove?**

They are of course, love and our own death. Intuition enables me to accept love. Experience and history broadcast my mortality.

Bear in mind that some people are blind. Some are colour-blind. Some are spiritually blind: blind to the divine presence in space-time. I offer you an amber, if not a red light warning –

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(\*) *Omnia munda mundis*, “to the pure, all things are pure” [Ref. Epistle of Paul to Titus, 1:15]

A short story based on "The Country of the Blind" by H. G. Wells – that I adapted when I started taking retreats many years ago.

*The scene: The Andes, 1928. A single-engined plane, carrying Airmail is flying west. Suddenly clouds smother it. It crash-lands in the snow. The pilot, the only person on that plane, crawls out of the cockpit. He is bruised but otherwise unhurt. He covers himself with the postbags and waits for the cloud to move on. He falls asleep.*

*When he wakes up the sun is out. The snow brilliant white. He has no sunglasses. Knowing civilisation is somewhere west, he starts to make his way there. Fatigue and snow blindness sap his strength. Just before he passes out he realises he is rolling down into a valley.*

*When he wakes up, his eyes are bandaged. He is in a hospital bed. Doctors and nurses are there talking and caring for him very carefully.*

*A week later, taking off his bandages he realises he can see. He gets out of bed to explore the hospital. He notices that all the staff and patients are eyeless. Their eye sockets are empty.*

*That is why, looking after me, everyone was moving so slowly and gently. All they have is a highly developed sense of touch.*

*One morning he sees the doctors and the nurse that is looking after him in a huddle. After the ward round moves on, the nurse, having got rather fond of our pilot, returns.*

*She tells him that the medical team are worried. "You are moving far too fast. They think it must be due to the two pumps you have on either side of your upper nose. They are going to operate tomorrow."*

*Finding his clothes, our pilot silently slips out of the hospital and finds a way to climb out of that valley. He lives to tell the tale of the benign scientists who were keen to make him one of their own. THE END.*

The gift of this Comprehensive-Faith, enabling me to sense God's presence everywhere is, at times, uncomfortable. I suspect, DR, you can imagine why. For me, it is a challenge. I cannot take my global neighbourhood for granted. For me, this faith is an upper rather than a downer (\*).

We cannot track consciousness, meaning and purpose back to the material world. They are beyond the remit of science.

For me, there is sufficient evidence to conclude there is a spiritual dimension to creation and that reality is more mysterious than materialists dare to image.

*A few months ago, a young woman, who had been with her father as he died in Poole, returned home to Claygate, South London. She noticed that her kitchen clock had stopped at exactly the moment her father had died. She was not surprised. The same thing had happened when her mother had died some three years earlier.*

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(\*) Karl Marx claimed that religion was the opium of the people. When I was young, it felt much more like Bensedrine. Now, perhaps I would say it is more like cocaine. [Not that I have ever personally tried either! Honest.]

**Have you, DR, come across something similar? Any ideas on how these events might have happened?**

I know there is what tends to be called ‘a sixth sense’ and extrasensory perception. [ESP].

The Hon. Greville Howard - a dear, now deceased, friend of mine, who worked in India before WW2 – related how, because his clients could read his mind, he had been warned never to think of the real price he could offer when making a deal. Thinking of lower prices reaped him financial rewards.

Before you, DR, think he was a dreamer, he ended the war as Lt Commander in the Wavy-Navy, (\*) served as Mayor of Westminster from 1946 to 1947 and as Member of Parliament for St Ives from 1950 until he stood down at the 1966 general election. Greville died in September 1987, aged 78, never having changed the story of his time in India.

Sight – looking at someone - is not only passive. It is also active. Reliable sources have informed me that snipers know that if they keep their sights on a target for more than a few seconds their target is prone to take evasive action.

Our consciousness, our ability to visualise the future and shape our aims, to feel responsible, to decide and change choices and feel ethical guilt, all vector my belief in the spiritual dimension of reality.

Abstract thoughts, creativity, imagination – Michelangelo, having in his mind the shape of a statue he was working on to release from that block of marble – are more than material.

Denying the spiritual grounds our humanity. The spiritual frees us to fly and delight in life before and after death. The liturgy of requiem masses reminds me that ‘at death, life is changed, not ended’. Hence my hope that you will not allow your life to be restricted by materialist-liberals but fly; soaring high, as you travel on through time to your eternal destiny.

**Why not dare to be different, DR? Why not dare to live life to the full?**

Materialists use ‘reductionism’ to argue that the mental is just biochemical, which is physical, is, to me as an engineer and theologian, utter intellectual flannel. (\*\*)

I see reality as sacramental: the physical containing the spiritual. The giver is in the gift. The song we hear is there not only on the vocal chords but also in the memory of that singer of that song. More on this in Toolbox 5.

A *Weltgeist*, [worth a Google, DR] though unseen, influences human lives.

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(\*) The Royal Naval Reserve [RNR] with officer ranks identified by strips of interwoven – wavy – sleeve chain.

(\*\*) More on this at the end of this Toolbox in Appendix 1-A

Think charismatic personalities. What is it they radiate? It does seem to be more than merely corporeal.

Abstract, immaterial ideas, crystallised and expressed in words, enable communication through material space-time to reach another's immaterial mind. Fascinating stuff, DR!

A relationship of love - or for that matter hatred - transcends 'out of sight, out of mind'. I can love - or hate - people in New Zealand and they may sense I do.

Repeatedly a friend has Skyped me from Australia, just as I was thinking of him. "Your name just crossed my mind," he said. There is, for me at least, enough anecdotal evidence for ESP and spiritual communication.

*In 1947, a friend of my father came to stay with us in Putney, London SW15. He came with one of twin daughters. The other twin was in New York with her mother. Suddenly one evening the girl screamed with pain saying her left leg hurt. There was no sign of trauma.*

*A week later a letter arrived from NY informing her father that her twin sister had been in a traffic accident that had broken her left leg.*

Given the time difference, that accident was perfectly synchronised with the pain in her sister's leg in London. I leave you, DR, to draw your own conclusions.

*When I was in Rome, from 1965 to 69, studying theology, the only means of communicating with my mother in London was snail-mail. We wrote fortnightly letters. Though my writing did not change – I typed the letters – and the message were always up-beat. When I was in fact feeling low, my mother complained of bad health and even suggested moving into a care home. Whenever I felt better, she felt better and abandoned any notion of moving home. Finally, in February 1996 while I was at 'le Planning' in Lourdes, preparing for our Diocesan Pilgrimage that July, I woke up feeling as though I had the flu. I had no temperature, just no energy. I felt utterly drained. [NO, I had not been boozing the night before] Arriving back in London the next day, I discovered my mother had died the day before.*

How many times I have witnessed how mothers can pick up - though miles away - how their children feel. Dogs know when their master or mistress is on their way home long before there is any engine noise a mile or two down the road. There is hard evidence that horses, sensing the weakness of a bridge, have saved the lives of their riders. A peaceful or troubling presence in a building – more often picked up by dogs than by humans – carries an emotional-spiritual reality through time.

In the Galapagos, sea lions herd yellow-fin tuna, like dogs herd sheep, to trap them in the shallows. Unless one is a dogmatic liberal-materialist, it seems churlish to deny their teamwork is a spiritual reality.

Research in California - where else? – has gathered evidence that praying for people, who do not know they are being prayed for, does improve their well-being.

As far as we now know, there are four fundamental forces governing matter throughout the universe. There is electromagnetism, gravity, the strong force and the weak force. The weak force enables things to fall apart, decay. Three of these forces, the electromagnetic, the strong and the weak are there, generating atoms. Spatially, these are almost entirely non-material relationships. (\*) Who can say how the spiritual influences these forces?

Perhaps it is prayer and positive thinking that nudges them into changing their behaviour. Maybe that is how ‘miraculous cures’ happen. I leave it to you to work out your own ideas.

Over the many years I ran our Young Adults and then our Diocesan Pilgrimages to Lourdes, I have seen people, as I put it, ‘loved back into health’. Who knows how? Perhaps some psychosomatic factors may have played their part.

### **When you, DR, encounter the inexplicable, how do you react? Why?**

As you might image, given my background and trade, I believe the supreme spiritual reality is God.

### **What about you DR?**

Before you answer that, how would you describe what you mean by the word ‘God’? Put that on hold. My view on this you will meet in Toolbox 5.

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(\*) The Rutherford–Bohr model depicts the atom as a small, positively charged nucleus surrounded by electrons that travel in circular orbits around the nucleus - similar to the structure of the Solar System, but with attraction provided by electrostatic forces rather than gravity.

### 3. Values-Faith

Good or bad, we all have a system of values in which we believe. “I believe in exercise, in friendship, in hard work.” “I believe in getting my own way, no matter what.” “I believe in helping my neighbour.”(\*)

Proof of the pudding is in the eating. Performance can monitor the veracity of those statements.

Values-faith has its Alpha and Omega constituencies. There are the idealists with their philanthropy and even altruism. Moreover, there are the survivalist-pragmatists, whose only binding ethic is not being caught. (\*\*)

People of no religion do have values. Even if they would hate to admit it, they do have a values-faith. Many are secular humanists. They make humanity their ‘god’.

Challenging the European ‘fair play’ ethos, many Latin American football teams are not at all shy in admitting they aim to use every technique they can get past the referee. Whenever there are corner kicks, wresting dangerous players to the ground seems, to them, perfectly justified.

A culture’s – a society’s – values change. When I was your age, honour, telling the truth, chastity and loyalty were in the Premier League of virtues. Nowadays, I suspect that you will have seen diversity, equality and human rights – and for some, sensitive-ecology – to have taken their place. For what it’s worth, Christ’s ‘Gospel Values’, rooted in the Beatitudes, have been my North Star as I have tried to live the virtues that make these values visible. More on this in TB 6.

And finally there is

### 4. Commitment-Faith

A belief in, may be a commitment to someone. “I believe in you. I will put my money into your business” says an investment banker. “I believe in you, I commit myself to you” promises a couple on their wedding day. I am a priest because I believe in - I am in - God.

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(\*) I often think what if our fellow Christians lived this values-faith. What a difference it would make to all concerned.

(\*\*) A Premier League Chaplain confided in me that he was worried he had not approached its Senior Management Group when, having asked the 16 year olds in its Academy as they were coming in for lunch, he had heard “Simulation”: the magic to trick referees into believing they had been tripped in the penalty box. Most of the lads will not end up playing footy. The cheating-magic skills to earn penalties is likely to spill into the commerce and business cultures where they will work.

A story.

*A young couple take their five-year old boy on a post-New Year break to a remote cottage in the Yorkshire Dales. Before retiring to bed, they tuck Jimmy into bed in the first floor bedroom, leaving the bedroom door open. As it is bitterly cold, dad piles logs onto the open fire downstairs where they will be sleeping.*

*A few hours later, a burning smell awakens Mum and Dad. A log had rolled out of the fireplace and set the wooden stairs alight.*

*They open the front door and go out into the cold darkness.*

*Looking up they see Jimmy silhouetted at his bedroom window which Jimmy manages to open.*

*The flames, sucked up by the draft light up the background.*

*Dad shouts " Jump, Jimmy, I'll catch you."*

*"But Dad I can't see you!"*

*"Don't worry. Jump. I can see you"*

*Jimmy jumps and is gently caught by dad. Mum and Dad hug him tight. They spend the rest of the night in the car with its engine running.*

*End of Story.*

**I see myself as Jimmy. God as my dad. How about you, DR?**

You will come across God-blind people. They cannot accept that there is a creator God.  
[More on this in Toolbox 5]

Our culture is currently veering ever further towards materialism, consumerism and individualism. Beware of these mirages of fulfilment. You do not want to die of spiritual thirst.

While aiming high for life at its best, stay courteous with people who have a different take on life. Nevertheless, DR, be prepared to enrich their lives if they ask for help. It is important.

### **Reality:**

What and how anything exists and is 'real' has stimulated my fast-fading grey cells.

## **If ‘faith’ is a complex word, what about ‘reality’ DR, reality across the PIES?**

Reality is iridescent. (\*)

By reality, I mean ‘what there is’ – known or unknown – within and around me: the whole of the SONG: my Self, Others, Nature - which is organic and spiritual - and God.

Humanity has evolved to tell the real from the false. After all, the false, if taken as real, can cause much harm to both relationships and health. If you feel you have a lump and pretend it is not there, who can guess the outcome? Propaganda distorts perceptions of reality. The WW1 medal awarded to soldier-survivors with its “The Great War for Civilisation” is a grotesque case in point. Was Germany – with its Beethoven, Durer, Goethe, Gutenberg and Martin Luther - less civilised than the British Empire?

It takes time to get a true grip on reality and say ‘I have the truth’. To claim to have ‘the whole truth’ is, to my way of thinking, arrogance. Our truth approximates. I accept I have to respect the mystery of creation. It is indeed foolish to deny that mystery is there. Only God, who is outside as well as inside creation, can see everything 360 degrees, 24/7.

For me, much of reality is a mystery. Not like a detective story, more like an island with a high mountain rising up beyond the clouds. We know next to nothing about what lies beneath the ocean’s surface and about those clouds. We just have to accept that some very large parts of reality are beyond our ken until we are born into eternity at death.

I subscribe to Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle (\*\*). We cannot know the position, vector and velocity of any object - any molecule – at the same time. You and I are many molecules, as is anything around you.

Seen or ignored, understood or mysterious, the context of our lives is far richer than anything science can touch. Like it or not, if it is there, it is there.

Thinking about reality, hoping to change some it, perhaps experimenting with parts of it you, DR, may invent many things that will become real enough to affect space-time and life. Something better than Capitalism – or a cure for the common cold - would be brilliant.

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(\*) If this a new word, for you, DR, it means, “showing luminous colours that seem to change when something is seen from different angles.”

(\*\*) If you have not studied physics, do Google that. It will help you get a better grip on ‘perception’.

Try to see the world as it is, not as you have been told, it is. I will share with you my view if that will help. For my sanity, I reduce 'reality' to just four categories:

1. The objective,
2. The culturally-contingent,
3. The personally generated
4. The imagined – including Alternative Truth.

President Donald Trump brought this 'imaginary reality' into the Media spotlight. When I was younger, we called it a lie.

### Objective Reality

- A. Material-Molecular
- B. Spiritual-Relational

Although some deny it and it can be depressing, there is - as we saw in Ciao - a growing consensus among experts that much of reality is accelerating.

To repeat, because it is so important, DR, do bear in mind that seen or unseen, what is there is there. Think gravity. Think dark energy. Think love.

Of course, much of reality unknown by us may be practically irrelevant. As was my sister's £5 [Mind you, DR, it was 1959. Who knows how much that would be in today's money? My sister was very generous!]

*On Friday after Easter, my fellow-student Bill drove me to Spode House - near Rugeley, Staffordshire - for a Cath Soc. Conference. However, on Sunday evening when we were due to return to London, in spite of many efforts of various kinds, Bill's car would not start.*

*Lacking funds for a train, I had to hitchhike.*

*As I arrived home in Dulwich, in the early hours of Monday, my mother and my sister Jarmila were in the kitchen waiting there for me. [After all, DR, I was only twenty years old.]*

*I told the story of what had happened.*

*"Why didn't you take the train?" Inquired my sister.*

*"No cash." I replied.*

*"Look inside your right-side back-pocket!"*

Now, I never put money there. There, it all too easily can be nicked.

*I put two fingers down that pocket and pulled out a £5 note – far more than enough for the train fare from Spode to London.*

*Jarmila explained how she had slipped it in as we hugged goodbye.*

Anonymous generosity, I do love, DR! However, just one layer of denim prevented me from taking that train. A lesson taught. Moreover, learned. God, it seems to me, is a bit like that fiver. He does not make his presence felt. It is up to us to find him.

A. There is the material-molecular: all the atoms in the universe.

Atoms, largely consisting of relationships, generate my SON: my Self, Others and Nature.

Creation, I am convinced, is much more organic than it is a machine. Everything in it is interrelated. Those organic interrelationships, a bit like the molecules in my body, mean that what is good for one organ, is good for the whole body. Realising solidarity with others and nature is Ubuntu. [In line with the RC social teaching on ‘The Common Good’.]

When people say, “That was providential”, they are noticing this organic feedback there within creation. There is dark energy, dark matter and gravity. There are Black Holes. There are electrons and alpha particles and so much more we cannot prove or see but whose existence, we infer from their effects. All this still offers science and technology much into which to get its teeth.

**Might you, DR, be interested in a career of scientific research?**

B. There is the spiritual-relational.

Remember, DR? “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” [*Hamlet* (1.5.167-8)] Creation’s spectrum goes way beyond the visible and scientifically monitor-able.

There are dowzers, with their abilities to use a divining rod to search for underground water or minerals. There are spiritual energies - poltergeists - who manifest their presence by knockings and breaking crockery and throwing food around.

Occasionally, at the request of desperate people, I have exorcised a building. These exorcisms had an effect. They brought peace. A fact I cannot explain or deny.

Clearly, there are relationships within flocks of birds and shoals of fish about which we know very little. There are, I am convinced, mysterious creatures – identified as ‘angels, archangels, thrones and dominions and the hosts and powers of heaven’ – which have affected my life. There are biorhythms and SAD [Worth a Google?] which influencing my abilities. There are families, tribes and nations bonded by invisible links. We cannot prove

the existence of, say, market forces – more emotional than rational – yet they do seem to be there. Of course, you may ignore them. Their impact, however, you will not be able to avoid.

There is the intuitive and ESP. Now, technology has caught up with psychiatry. Thanks to ever-improving, brain-scanning techniques we can now observe the physical impact of these spiritual relationships.

It is, DR, a great new field ready for research.. Psychiatry has got physical.

Moreover, do not forget mathematics. Mathematical realities, abstracted from the physical world, exist in the mind. They are certainly real enough to have enabled science and technology to accelerate.

There is your personal spiritual reality; fully known only to God. In a stable and enduring community, you are eventually seen for what and how you are. Stuck in a monastic community or in a family, you cannot forever hide. If you ever consider becoming a teacher, be aware that all those pairs of eyes, lesson after lesson, will eventually suss you out.

Being honest about yourself is never easy. We humans have a vast capacity for self-deception. Trust me. I know! To avoid self-knowledge, some people never marry. Others divorce, as their real self gradually emerges.

I hope, DR that you do dare to step out into the light by spending time, alone with yourself, in silence, perhaps on a retreat. Contemplation [traditional word for deep reflective thought] will help you to see yourself as God sees you, lovingly, warts and all. Realising your authentic self will furnish you with a firm foothold for the rest of your life.

### **Might Psychology or Psychiatry interest you, DR?**

#### **2. Culturally Contingent Reality.**

There are social structures – including PLCs in the UK, called Corporations in the USA [legal fictions, really] – human rights, laws, currencies, Royal Succession and hierarchies that are real yet mythical, in the sense they can be changed - or eliminated - by a change in politics. Death is no myth. The ‘glory of dying for king and country’ is.

Human structures, such as man + woman = family, communities generating a borough - or a country - can come under attack and even be destroyed or metamorphosed into something new. Empires come and go. National frontiers dance their way across swathes of land, all too often accompanied by blood shedding. The history of humanity around the globe can teach us much. Good to read a book like ‘History of the World’ by Andrew Marr.

Then there are artistic creations, works of fiction, novels, plays, operas that really affect lives. They must be, in some way, real; at least by their impact. There are the legislative, judiciary and executive branches of government; the ecclesial and military organisations; there are educational systems and qualifications; laws and regulations; there are wars and conflicts and so much more that you and I, DR, have to face, survive and through them – with them – and even thrive.

Much of what people took for granted as realities are human-generated myths. Think Monarchy in France, unexpectedly replaced through the 1789-99 Revolution by the Sovereignty of the People. Think Indian castes, religious hierarchies; even corporations and capitalism based on credit.

Imagination can be powerful. When enough people have a shared imagination, countries, states, legal systems, PLCs – and even the whole financial global structures - are deemed as real. Until they change. Do not be surprised by the unexpected, DR.

Homosexuality used to be a crime. For many, the Divine Right of Kings used to be self-evident; so 'real' it caused massive conflicts and vast swathes of deaths. Here in the UK, DR, we take for granted the reality of capitalism, human rights and sexual equality. Not every country accepts the reality of the last two of these.

**For which - if any - of these would you, DR, be prepared to fight? Are there any you would like to change – or see changed? Might you fancy going into politics?**

### 3. Personally-Generated Narratives.

If you think something is real, subjectively it is real: your lover, your enemy, even your guilt. We generate – we create - imaginary fears and dreams, some of which might be nightmarish. We generate ambitions and our own standards.

**How ‘real’ are these? Can you, DR, change yours?**

Literature, music and dance, created by human minds, are all real. They may be used to inspire us or to serve as escape avenues to imaginary worlds: respites from reality. Immersed in a good book, we feel a boring and banal journey seems to take no time at all. Living in a TV soap – or The Archers on steam radio - assuages current worries and seems to enrich lives.

**How about you DR, are these for you escapes from reality or relaxations to help you face reality?**

Stories – think Robin Hood, the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Exodus and Moses - may be based of history. They may be purely fictional (\*), invented, imagined by authors or playwrights. They may have mythical origins, explaining experiences of fate, destiny and life journeys. Think the Odyssey, think the first three books of the Bible.

There are fables such as Aesop's, teaching morality and George Orwell's 'Animal Farm' the dangers of some political ideas. In addition, there are parables motivating *metanoia*: a change of heart to a better view of life.

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(\*) As I write, the latest theory is that King Arthur and all his splendid knights are utterly fictitious. There is no evidence that they ever existed.

When our hearts beat faster, cortisol surges and our bodies prepare for action. It is up to me, and you DR, to decide whether we are excited or nervous. You and I are captains of our own ship. Deciding that you are excited rather than nervous will improve your performance. Try it, DR!

**You, DR, can decide whether you are an optimist or a pessimist.**

Both, looking at the same chessboard of life, see it differently. The optimist concentrates on the white squares. The pessimist on the black. It seems that it is their DNA that is - up to a point – responsible for sunny dispositions as well as wet-blankets.

I might feel and think that I am beloved. That imagined or real relationship of appreciation and respect, whether imagined or real, can change my life.

Love, like a legal contract, unites the “I” with the “You” generating a spiritual and very ‘real’ “We”. That ‘We’ may or may not endure.

Therefore, I distinguish between intuitive certainty and scientific certainty. The history of science, medicine, the judiciary and astronomy shows that both can get it wrong.

You can choose your livelihood and the ethical system you hope to live up to. You can choose your friends ; though you not your family you might choose to make your friends, or not!

You are certainly there. Yet I know I have no idea how you see yourself, and the contents of your Heart. My lack of knowledge cannot undermine objective reality. It is vital for you to accept your current ignorance in science, technologies, medicine and relationships.

Doing that might encourage you to press on towards the horizon of full-knowledge. Never reaching it, you will leave a rich wake behind as you travel on towards that goal.

**Might that mystery encourage you, DR, to become a scientist, doctor – or whatever?**

#### 4. Alternative Truths.

These used to be called lies. Lies they still are.

Thanks to the social media, politicians effectively peddle lies. Given that, by definition, half of any country is below average in intelligence, it has worked. [Ref Donald Trump’s victory in 2016]

The ‘father of lies’ is not a new *dramatis persona* [Ref Jn 8, 44]. Do not allow the media to ‘wind you up’ into believing what they say. To be sceptical is not cynical. Let the dust settle. Seek other sources of information before reaching a conclusion and reacting.

## Reality Unseen.

In an out-of-print book "Wildfire" by Sonia Johnson - radical feminist, candidate for President of the USA (1984) - you may read that *"Several hundred years ago, Magellan and his men sailed into a harbour in the Tierra del Fuego islands in their tall ships, put down their anchors, and rowed ashore in rowboats.*

*A few days later, the shaman called islanders together and she said, "I'm going to tell you something preposterous, so get ready. Those men could not have come across all that open sea in the little boats they landed on our beach in. That means -- and this is the preposterous part -- that there have to be big boats out there in the harbour."*

*Everyone turned to look. All they could see was the shimmering blue water. "Really?" they asked. "Really," she answered.*

Why do you think that the Tierra del Fuegians could not see the ships, with their white sails sparkling in the sun? The ships were so "real" after all. However, they were not real to those who had no place for them in their worldview. They could not see them because reality is what people expected to see in the "harbour". All too easily, reality is what we believe we will see when we look. Typically, when young, what we have been told to believe is true. Curiosity is a sign of maturity. So, DR, do keep questioning. Become your own woman or man.

## **Communication**

We have two eyes, two ears and one mouth. We, DR, do well to use them in that proportion.

Communication is as fascinating as is reality. Trying to let others know what is inside my heart and head, I wrestle to find the right words to say exactly what I mean. I also try to put myself into the head and heart of those with whom I communicate.

As we shall see in the next Toolbox, your feelings do influence your thinking and this clearly affects your decisions and thus actions. In communications, strong feelings can generate more heat than light.

Whenever you feel passionate about anything and write that email or letter, WhatsApp, Twitter, or whatever, put it on hold. Sleep on it. Anger, fear and jealousy can cloud your judgement. Next day, you might want to change some of the adjectives and adverbs, if not the texture of the whole thing. Communications cannot be unsent. Do not jeopardise your future by unwise use of social media.

## **Why allow Trolls and other nasties to diminish your self-esteem, DR?**

Try to ignore what people you do not know or whose opinion you do not value think, say or write. As with feral dogs, their bark is worse than their bite.

As I am sure you will have already discovered, DR, communication has many problems, sometimes generating disastrous results. WW1 was triggered off - in part - by politicians

reading the French '*nous demandons*' not as a question but an order and in a huff released the taps of that blood-bath.

In any communication, there are four elements: the communicator, the receiver, the medium of communication and the context.

Optimally, it is best to KISS communication: to Keep It Short, Simple. (\*) As an engineer, I try to use the minimum to achieve maximum effect. I try to be precise in my speech. Worth doing the same, DR.

The medium colours communication. So does its context!

When you want to write to someone, ask yourself 'to whom am I writing?'(\*\*) You never know for sure how people will pick up what you say. A lot depends on not only their background but also how they are feeling and what they think of you.

What is best? Twitter or email, poem or prose, or even a hand-written letter?

Whenever you hear an order, ask yourself "Is it a child or a thug holding a sub-machine gun? A beggar or a doctor in white?"

With communication as with most things in life, it is never too late to learn. However, it may take time for you to master the art of letting other people have your way.

I cannot forget my appointment as Head Boy at Clapham College. I had to give a welcoming speech. I was terrified, battling with my low self-esteem. Public speaking seemed scarier than telling my dad I had failed an exam, something that was that sky high on the Richter scale of my terror. Now public speaking is well within my comfort-zone.

Thanks to a lovely woman at Westminster Cathedral - now with God in eternity - who very kindly mentioned that waving my hands distracted her attention, I tend to hold the lectern while I preach a homily, or keep my hands in my pockets when giving a talk.

Whenever you are asked to speak in public, eventually it will happen, bear in mind Vlad's ten-point plan.

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(\*) "I wanted to send you a short letter, but I do not have the time so this longer one will have to do" as Mark Twain, more or less, wrote.

(\*\*) Keep humour out of communications with people whom you do not know. I have not forgotten being instructed never to try to be funny in public exams. "You never know the mood in which the examiner will be when reading your paper!"

1. Know your audience as well as you can.
2. Consult with your mentor how best to be entertaining, energetic and educational.
3. Bring humour into your speech right from the start. Self-deprecating humour is the best. Humour is a great medium to get hard facts through to others.

Cardinal Basil Hume taught me that when, giving an after-dinner speech at The Athenaeum to top judiciary, he started off with, "I feel like a stray cat that has wandered into Crufts Championship Finals." He had their full and affectionate attention for the rest of the evening.

4. Give space for the audience to enjoy their laughter. Do not kill the joke by rushing in to tell the next one.
5. Use props. One of my favourites is the 'golf-ball, sand and coffee in jar' to demonstrate that you can, in fact, pack many more things into a day than you first might think. The order is key. First, you fill it with golf balls. Is it full? Looks like it. Then you pour in sand, which fills the spaces between the spheres. The jar is clearly full. However, there is always enough space for a couple of cups of coffee.

The important things come first, then the urgent, and finally the relaxing cup of coffee.

6. Say what you mean. Mean what you say. [That might take a bit of preparation time!]
7. Do not be afraid to trust your intuition.

Couples who have been together for a long time can gather huge amounts of information just by looking at each other. They read the silence. To avoid an early relationship-fracture, I encourage newly married couples to repeat important points they make to ensure they are understood accurately.

8. Keep an eye on the sub-text of a conversation.

Back in 1975, as a school chaplain, I learnt that you need to listen to sense what is meant, not merely, what is said.

*One lunch break a twelve-year-old came to me and showed me a new fountain pen. "It's great, isn't it father." Sensing something, I answered, "How is your family?" "Oh, my dad died last night." The pen was his thin end of the wedge. I took the funeral soon afterwards.*

9. To minimise problems, never over-estimate the intelligence and memory of your audience.

I cannot forget being told that in a military teaching manual it clearly states:

'Tell them what you are going to tell them.

Tell them.

Tell them what you told them,'

To make sure they know what you want them to know.

10. Check that your instructions are understood. You might find it helpful to ask a person to summarise what they think you said, before they engage gear and move into action.

*Etched in my memory is the lunch break on that building site. A young lad asked if he could get the ganger anything. "Twenty Players – or anything. Please. "The lad came back with a packet of sausage rolls. His 'anything'.*

Learn the difference between being assertive and confrontational.

Idealists, be they Jesus of Nazareth or Mahatma Gandhi, did not imagine the unexpected consequences of their teachings. Think Inquisition and the Crusades. Think India and Pakistan squabbling lethally over Kashmir. We shall return to these issues.

Learning other languages enables you to communicate with other cultures. It not only enriches your vocabulary, it helps you see how others think.

"I am hungry, thirsty" in Spanish is "*Tengo* – I have - hunger, thirst: *hambre, sed.*" English does not have one word for the Spanish *cariño* nor the French *sympathique* – far more than 'nice'. However, neither of these languages carries a word for 'gentleman'.

The English "No stopping" is translated into the more aggressive French "*Défense de stationner.*" I wonder why, DR?

You may have already realised the value of speaking or writing about what you are thinking. Words enable feelings to crystalize into thoughts. Sharing your thoughts clarifies your ideas. Dialogue, a conversation in which you are open to new ideas, enhances your thoughts. That is what - ideally- university education is all about: dialogue.

Dialoguing through the written word or speaking nowadays on Skype or WhatsApp with those who are older and younger, from other parts of the world, from other faiths and disciplines, enables you to travel everywhere without moving. Great for the environment. Electronic dialogue has a healthy carbon footprint.

**How many Skype/WhatsApp contacts from around the world do you have, DR?**

They can be fun as well as educational. Seeing faces reduces chances of grooming!

The medium carries a part of the message. You will have heard and thought a lot about the strengths and weaknesses of social media so I will say just one thing. Whatever you place there is there for every year of your life – and then some.

Bear in mind, DR, that words, the most complex, arbitrary and symbolic forms of communication, often mean one thing to the speaker and something quite different to the listener.

Analogy is an inescapable reality in communication. Whenever you tackle your feelings or try to explain anything about God, you have to use that over-used phrase "It's like...."

Words, when used to communicate the more mysterious realities, merely touch tangentially what is in fact there.

Never forget that we use language in different ways, for different purposes. Crudely, in two modes: for information and motivation.

Mothers often threaten their children with ‘If you do that, I will chop off your fingers...I will kill you’ to motivate them to behave safely. Were these statements deemed ‘informative’ they would be verbal assaults. Everyone a crime! Whenever you dip into the Bible, bear in mind that most of it was written to motivate, not to teach history, even if, until relatively recently, this was not how most churchmen saw it.

Appearances and even accents tend to skew the way people pick up what you are saying – what you are trying to say. We shall see more on this in TB 3.

It's is easy to find words to express and describe the negative in life. We can talk about pain, failure, disappointment and grief for a long, long time. However, whenever we try to communicate our best experiences, we all too soon end up with ‘wow, great, awesome, beautiful, gorgeous...like, know what I mean?’ The best experiences seem to slip beyond the reach of words.

How to say what I really mean? How to know what I really mean until I say it? What words to use? What images to conjure up? What stories to use that will resonate, motivate and communicate? The answers to these you, DR, will gradually learn as you journey on through life.

Experiences of, say, fear, thirst, embarrassment and pain are never identical. “I think I know what you mean” is healthier, less arrogant, than “I know what you mean.”

Then, while the plane flies on, as condensation trails, memories evaporate. People soon forget what you said. However, they will never forget how you made them feel.

How I deal with these challenges, you, DR, will see in the next Toolbox.

## APPENDIX 1-A

To help you shape your own take on life, I wanted to state – as an appendix – that rather than allowing myself to be browbeaten into accepting the current overarching reductionist philosophy of materialism, I prefer to see the PIES in the natural order of creation.

The Physical is like the earth on which we walk. It can be tackled by science.

The Intellectual is like the air through which, thanks to aeronautics, we can fly. It enables imaginations to fan out and create art in its many forms.

The Emotional is like water through which we can swim.

The Spiritual is relational. In Nature – as we shall see - everything is inter-connected.

Behind the ‘the butterfly effect’ - that a butterfly flapping its wings can cause a typhoon - is the suspicion that small things can have non-linear impacts on a complex system. Of course, a single act like the butterfly flapping its wings cannot cause a typhoon. Small events can, however, serve as catalysts.

Our consciousness and intentionality – perhaps our yearning for the infinite, our quest for the divine, for God – can enable us to change so much. Love can motivate beautiful actions.

On the other hand, as a single rogue cell can end up causing death by cancer, succumbing to a temptation can end in chaos.. Little things can mean a lot.

Together - whatever our colour, shape, feelings and faith – in all its connotations and forms - the PIES make us human.