

## **RM 6 - The Science and Faith relationship**

All humans have faith, it's just a question of in what in whom.

Scientists have faith. They believe effects have causes.

It seems that positive spirituality, a bit as those long-range acoustic devices used to deter pirates and disperse crowds, is unpalatable to angry spirits.

Thanks to the evidence across the PIES, I am convinced there is The One we call God.

For some powerful intellects – such as Blaise Pascal – there is a tendency to fragment the PIES of life and even put in opposition the God of the 'I', the God of the philosopher and the God of 'E' in Scripture: the God of the heart.

Whenever someone asks me why I believe in God, thinking of the PIES, I answer, as the Italians would put it: "I cannot not accept the reality of a Creator".

Given my engineering background, and thus aware of the importance of risk-analysis in reducing catastrophes, I am a sceptic. However, I am open to, for me, the irresistible evidence across the PIES that behind and within it all, there is God.

As St Paul wrote to the Romans, "Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So, they are without excuse; "for though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools. (Romans 1:20-22)

It seems to me that that initial singularity, The Big Bang, with which it seems the universe started, was all so supremely-finely balanced that now, some 13.7 billion years later, we can say: "here we are".

There is the filigree-perfection of design and development on the cosmic, the macro and the micro – as well as the sub-atomic - structure of the universe. I stand in awe at the faith of someone who ponders the hand, the mind, the eye, the heart; our capacity to wonder, grieve and love and still says it all developed from a mindless mess of energy, a Mega Bang, some 13.7 billion years ago.

Our DNA is a work of sublime genius. I started life as two cells and - after 9 months in my mother's womb, came out as ten trillion cells and a hundred trillion bacteria. All these make 'me', a fabulously-complex system of interrelated, functional-components, with our consciousness and ability to think, to find intentionality and meaning, to imagine, feel, work and pray; relating with others. Where did my consciousness, conscience - and heart's restlessness for more - come from? (You, and I, are made up of around 7,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 (7-octillion) atoms, organised into organs. Not bad, Eh?)

Creation is far too sublimely put together for that to have happened 'just like that'. The semiotics of our DNA say to me there is a design-genius behind it all. The double helix, the

twisted-ladder structure of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) could not have happened ‘just like that’.

Denying a designer flies in the face of that very rare virtue, common-sense.

**Have you met any atheists who, having studied our DNA, honestly conclude there is no God?**

It is easier on my mind to accept there is in the One we call God, with a magnificently sublime, immensely imaginative, artistic-scientific mind, than to believe it all happened by chance.

I believe that as gravity, God is everywhere. A metaphor for God is Dark Energy. Thanks to its effects, though it must always have been there, serious scientists accepted the existence of DE only in 1998. (Who knows what still awaits our discovery?)

For the universe to be the way it is, they believe that there is dark matter and dark energy about which they know nothing except that it affects gravity.

Scientists have calculated, thanks to their faith that DM, a hypothetical form of matter, makes up 85% of the universe. DE is 68% of the universe. In fact, it seems, only 5% of the universe is made of familiar atomic matter. We are a part of a cosmic mystery.

Atheist scientists have a massive faith. Far stronger than mine.

For me, as an engineer – and a priest - there is compelling evidence of a magnificent intellect and imagination directing evolution from the planet earth’s almost entirely molten magma 4.5 billion years ago. Over the course of a few hundred million years, the planet began to cool and oceans of liquid water formed. But how was our ear, our eye, our brain – our female ova and male sperm - take shape from that?

Whatever lacks intelligence cannot evolve towards a higher, more complicated, end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with imagination and intelligence. This being we call God.

As definitions of an organ vary, the number of organs we have also varies. However, most people agree we have five vital organs: the brain, the heart, the liver, the lungs and the kidneys. You do not have to be a doctor or nurse to realise that every organ is a work of genius. Primeval sludge was never a genius, no matter how many lightning bolts may have struck it into complexity.

I have come to believe in ‘Creation’s programmed evolution’ from the Big bang to now.

No one seriously doubts the existence of gravity, energy, consciousness and life. No one can – yet - explain what these really are.

Until someone produces evidence enough to change my mind, I am what people might call a 'Design-directed Evolutionist'. Moreover, proud of it. Grateful for my four years at Imperial College, London and my four years at the Lateran University, Rome.

The spirit in my body and God the Holy Spirit in creation chime in my imagination.

When I ponder the universe, I feel I am like a dog in front of a TV. I see and hear but have no idea why the picture and sounds, the actions and the plots are there.

Some people find this programmed evolution impossible to imagine because of the immensity of its time-scale. Whenever I hear this – and I first heard it from a Reader at the School of Mines at Imperial College when on a field trip to Shepton Mallet with its fascinating geology - I think of a painter friend of mine who, using Flemish Renaissance techniques took months to finish a painting. He had to let each glaze dry fully before he could take the next step forward. For a billion years read a day, and in a fortnight, there you are, back at the Big Bang. For each glaze read species.

We now see ourselves, not as the centre of creation, but as a tiny, blue dot within an unimaginably vast universe.

Beauty and love are the telescopes and microscopes to the divine.

My faith is not strong enough to believe that the whole of my body, with its myriad of coordinated intricate bodily organs, was there by chance when my parents' sperm and ovum met.

**How would you explain to a young child where the universe came from? Why is it here? Who cased It? For what purpose? Science needs faith to answer these questions.**

That something like the complicated structure of a human eye evolved without any Designer-directed evolution beggars belief. It stretches credulity well beyond breaking point. Take the human ear. Or the human brain. How can these be products of random energy inputs into a primeval sludge on planet earth?

Our mind is far more mysterious than our brain with its 86 billion neurons structured to enable me to think and write, imagine, dream and remember; intuitively sense what is there before I can even say what I think or am going to do.

Atheists believe that our eyes, ears , brains, our female ova and male sperm arrived in their current shapes and contents by pure chance.

My four years at imperial college prevent me from being able accept that. For me, there must be a superb intelligent and massively imaginative cause. The one we call our Creator God.

*Credo ut intelligam* (alternatively spelled *Credo ut intellegam*) is Latin for "I believe so that I may understand" and is a maxim of Anselm of Canterbury (Proslogion, 1), which is based on a saying of Augustine of Hippo (*crede ut intellegas*, "believe so that you may understand") .

Belief and reason can hold hands.

In Anselm's writing, it is placed in juxtaposition to its converse, *intellego ut credam* ("I think so that I may believe"), when he says *Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam* ("I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but rather, I believe in order that I may understand").

It is often associated with Anselm's other famous phrase *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith seeking understanding"). Augustine understood the saying to mean that a person must believe in something in order to know anything about God.

From half way through the fourth century CE (Common Era; what used to be called AD 'Anno Domini'. BC, Before Christ is now BCE, Before Common Era.), for a millennium and half, the Catholic Christian Church strove to be the Alpha in everything from faith to politics to science. The Papacy believed its God-given role was to control everything.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of December, 1864 pope Pius IX published The Syllabus of errors which branded freedom of the press and freedom of association as intrinsically evil, condemned human reason without any reference to God and socialism and social ownership of the means of production with an emphasis on democratic control.

Papa, the Pope, was the only real adult. The laity were deemed childlike, there to accept papal authority.

It was only in 1895 that Rome agreed it was OK for Catholics to attend English Universities. In the following year catholic chaplaincies were set up in Oxford and Cambridge.

Gradually, along a very hard road as science progressed, The Vatican has learned the limitations of its authority and its authentic role. It learnt to accept that science, with its own belief systems, was beyond its remit. Facts are facts, whatever these may be. Faith cannot change the facts.

Nicolaus Copernicus proposed his theory that the planets revolved around the sun in the 1500s, when most people believed that Earth was the centre of the universe.

Galileo Galilei's discoveries in January 1610 included four moons revolving around Jupiter. He also found that the telescope showed many more stars than are visible with the naked eye. These discoveries were earthshaking, and Galileo quickly produced a little book, *Sidereus Nuncius* (The Sidereal Messenger), in which he described the movement of the Moon, Jupiter's moons, Venus, and sunspots. These supported the idea that the Sun - not the Earth - was the centre of the Universe.

However, in April 1633 he was tried and condemned by the Roman Catholic Inquisition. Galileo agreed to plead guilty in exchange for a lighter sentence. Put under house arrest indefinitely by Pope Urban VIII, Galileo spent the rest of his days at his villa in Arcetri, near Florence, before dying on January 8, 1642.

Bear in mind, torture and the death penalty – as well as corporal punishment – spare the rod, spoil the child – were the norm throughout Europe. Civilisations evolve. Thank God.

In 1957, public doubts about high profile cases such as Timothy Evans and Derek Bentley eventually led to the 1957 Homicide Act that reduced the categories of murder that could be punishable by death. In 1965, the death penalty for murder in Britain was suspended for five years and in 1969 this was made permanent. The science of jurisprudence - the study of the theory or philosophy of law, the science or philosophy of law, the examination of the application of laws played its part in changing the beliefs - The Faith - of most citizens.

The science of psychology put an end to Corporal punishment. The Council of Europe stated: "Corporal punishment conveys the wrong message to children and can cause serious physical and psychological harm to a child. Corporal punishment, if directed at an adult, would constitute criminal assault." Corporal punishment was prohibited in all state-supported education in 1986. The prohibition was extended to cover private schools in England and Wales in 1998, in Scotland in 2000, and in Northern Ireland in 2003.

When asked if humanity has a common belief, I have to give the sad answer, money: the myth of cash. Whatever anyone's political position or perception faith in other areas of life, money is deemed valuable, worth striving - even fighting - for. Hence, "blessed are the meek" – who want no possessions but can enjoy the beauty in art galleries, museums and the countryside. (Lk, 6, 20) is radically counter cultural. However, the man who took it seriously is seen by just about everyone as a saint. Francis of Assisi is admired as a great human who cared for what matters: nature and human solidarity.

Archaeology and scripture scholars – these past 150 years - have made it clear that the Bible was not a scientific handbook. Science and thus anthropology ( the study of human biological and physiological evolution) are outside its remit and authority.

Of course, the Church has its role in shaping morality so as to protect humanity from some of the less salubrious technologies science has spawned. – and teach virtues that enable folk to enjoy life to the full, life at its best. The church, if it is to be Christlike, cannot be a gated community. It knows what is good – and what is bad – for our human lives. Hence its opposition to euthanasia.

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I see no necessary conflicts between science and faith, as long as each stay in its own territory and does not wander off into the other's domain.

Science is for causes. The questions it asks are what? How? Where? And occasionally when?

Faith is for purposes. Its questions are why? Why are we here? By whom are we here? What for? What is the purpose of our existence? Our life? Who is behind and within it all? Why should we act the way we have learned to act in order to stay with God?

Science cannot understand 'why?' It is not its role; it does not have the instruments to do so. Even though, with fingerprints, retina scans and DNA, it might hope to discover 'by whom?'

Fundamentalists – who believe that every word in the Original Testament is descriptive, historical - still believe in monogenesis: A posh word for 'the theory that humans are all descended from a single pair of ancestors.

However, there is a growing, now overwhelming consensus that – as we saw on the 27<sup>th</sup> January - the first three Chapters of Genesis are a motivational myth rather than a historical narrative.

(If you missed that talk, you can pick it up on my website fathervlad.com. – fathervlad as one word all lower case. There you will find podcasts of all my talks.)

Given the current evidence, it seems probable that the first humans – homo habilis, handyman - started walking and flaking crude stone tools some 2.5 million years ago in east and south Africa. (Who knows what new and earlier evidence of our earliest ancestors may yet be discovered and where.)

In Eternity, before the Big Bang – were that ever possible! - God would have had infinite possibilities. Creating Creation, God’s love limited his power, in parallel with the Incarnation when, for our benefit, God voluntarily surrendered His power [Phil 2, 6-11]. God loves creation and thus not only appreciates it but also respects it.

‘Respecting’ implies ‘not tinkering’, ‘not messing about’ with what you have created. It means letting ‘the other, in this case, the whole of space-time, be as it is, even if that means tectonic plates shifting, molecules and body cells turning sour or wild.

God’s love obliges Him to allow evil.

Respecting creation, God’s love cannot prevent car bombs, suicide bombers, earthquakes, storms, floods and famines, bush fires and torture. The instant God created, the consequences of that act gripped God. Any relationship of lover and the beloved enhances yet constrains both. That one day, I hope and pray, you, DR will experience and realise.

Interdependence frees yet binds across the PIES of life. In love, you are never alone. You have to think of the beloved.

God whispers to the whole of Creation: “I love you too much to bully you. I will never force you. I am there, with you, in your suffering.”

It seems to me that if we see reality as a cylinder – as a can of Pepsi or Red Bull

Each discipline looks at it from a different perspective.

Theology looks at it vertically – it’s a circle, science horizontally and it’s a rectangle.



The two disciplines can be - and for me they are - mutually enhancing letting us see the fuller picture. Science squares the circle. Faith embraces the rectangle.

Science researches facts to get an ever-tighter grip on reality. Faith strives to interpret these to see how best they can affect our lives; trying to protect humanity from technology’s nefarious possibilities such as nuclear energy and genetic engineering.

A sub-section: Miracles.

1. I define 'miracle' as "any activity or outcome perceived as coming from God".
  2. I do not believe in oxymoronic realities. ('a figure of speech containing words that seem to contradict each other.) God does NOT make the impossible happen.
  3. Creation is stranger than we imagine and the psychosomatic in particular – the relationship and mutual effects of our PIES of life – is a mystery with yet many unanswered questions.
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It is a funny old world. I have never come across anyone who, having just fallen in love, getting glandular fever or even the flu. On the other hand, when jilted and abandoned, their immune-system weakened, many succumb to all sorts of illnesses.

4. 'Positive thinking' about others in prayer does have mysterious effects. I have witnessed how, in Lourdes, engulfed in loving care and attention, people have been healed.

TLC, as NH Trusts know, accelerates healing and recovery. Hence beds for a parent in children's wards.

5. Even though the effectiveness of their procedures is there, mind-readers and 'alternative medicines' seem, currently, to be beyond the reach of science. [Maybe as China opens up its cultural and medicinal secrets, we may come across evidence that might convince the sceptics; well, perhaps a few.]

6. Modern medicine can only predict probabilities of outcomes and 'one-offs' do occur. As they are inexplicable they are often deemed 'miraculous'.

7. The 'placebo effect' is sometimes as powerful as any chemical intervention. When US army surgeon Henry Beecher ran out of morphine, he told his patients that the saline drip he had inserted was morphine. They believed him and felt no pain during their operation. The power of the brain is, as the Americans would say – awesome.

8. Given the vast number of factors influencing a medical outcome, causality is nigh on impossible to ascertain scientifically. My praying to someone who might one day be canonised does not exclude prayers to other holy people by persons unknown.

Research in California – where else? – has shown that when sick people are - unknowingly by them - prayed for, they benefit. Humanity is – as we know – like a body. Its parts are interconnected and mutually influence each other.

9. The more we know about medicine, the more we know we do not know.

10. A prayer to St Anthony, for example, by someone trying to find something, may somehow release sub-conscious blocks and enable the person to 'see' what was there 'unseen' for any number of unknown psychological reasons.

11. Empathy, at its most sublime, can end up in 'stigmata' where the lover identifies totally with the pain of the beloved and bears in his or her own body marks/signs of the sufferings endured by the beloved.

12. Exorcisms: prayers, sacramentals and sacraments force and persuade the poltergeist – or whatever – to depart.

It seems to me that  
God the Father Creates  
God the Son directs,  
God the Holy Spirit moves, energises humans who open their heart to that presence – and the while of the universe.

Though we can predict the behaviour of a bull when we shake a piece of red [or any other coloured] cloth in front of its eyes, it would be foolish to say we ‘understand the bull’.

### Faith goes beyond Darwin.

A new species appeared – who knows why? - and then it evolved to adapt itself to its changing environment. A species like a cockroach was pretty good, even if to our eyes pretty ugly, right from the start and does not seem to have changed much. (Humanity is evolving, and it needs to accelerate that evolution, if it is to survive let alone thrive in the predicted climate changes.)

The Creator – on the Cosmic-scale - is a bit like the inventor of the internal-combustion engine: Nicolaus August Otto. Born 1832 in Holzhausen, Germany. Every car, truck, bus, and tank, every vehicle from F1 racers to 4WD Chelsea Tractors have evolved from that one first design. Without Otto’s idea, we would not be motoring the way we do.

Both cosmic and individual organisms carry within their ability to evolve. Cars do not. Machines rather than organisms, they need external input to evolve.

That, I think is the problem of many atheists. They cannot admit that there are things greater than that which they can imagine. God is in the connectivity between every part of creation; in flora and fauna and human relationships.

It does not need a genius to connect the dots between our materialistic society’s malaise – as quantified by hours spent on video games and Reality TV – and a lack of interest in transcendental spirituality: the reality underpinning all the world’s faiths.

For many people I have come across in my ministry, the beauty of nature is their intuitive conviction that God is there. Without using the words, they realise that nature is sacramental. Within the material, there is the spiritual – as William Wordsworth articulated:

*A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things. [Tintern Abbey, July 1798]*



Or Dorothy Gurney's  
*One is nearer God's Heart in a garden  
Than anywhere else on Earth.* [God's Garden, 1913]

Though these might, by the gatekeepers of RC orthodoxy, be viewed with some suspicion, as pantheistic, we might legitimately speculate why?

Albert Einstein wrote, "*The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all true science.*

*To know that which is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their primitive forms – this knowledge, this feeling is at the centre of true religiousness.*" (Living Philosophies)

I do not know about you, but there are questions hanging over me that will not go away.

However, the elegance of creation is, for me, a powerfully persuasive argument for the reality of God.

So, moving on from the Physical there is

#### The Intellectual:

To avoid a gush of 'wonderfully awesome' personal experiences and to condense these into a unity, I feel a fictional story coming on.

*A couple living in West London decide to take a holiday: a night in Paris, then off to Rome and finishing off in Madrid.*

*Coming down for dinner that evening, whom do they see? What a surprise, it is their distant cousins. Great. What a co-incidence.*

*Next day, in Rome, wow, what a co-incidence. Their cousins are there in the same hotel. Isn't life strange!*

*On the third day, in Madrid, there their cousins are again. Coincidence? Causality. Behind the events there is a plan.*

God offers us clues to where we might find Him.

To my mind, there is more than enough evidence consistent with the presence of something – some One - finer than mere coincidence, defined as ' a remarkable concurrence of events without APPARENT causal connection.'

I have read that Albert Einstein stated, "*Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous.*" If he did, it is further evidence of his wisdom! Evolution may look like coincidence but in fact it must be directed – and by a genius with a remarkable imagination.

The one I call God is the power and mind behind evolution and ‘The Origin of the Species’.

It is clear that God loves variety. Think of the number of species and the varieties in each of these species: the butterflies and bugs and the Galaxies and stars. Creation is an immense series of Variations on The Theme of Beauty.

About 8.7 million - give or take 1.3 million - is the new, estimated total number of species of animals on Earth, with 6.5 million species on land and 2.2 million in oceans. [24 Aug 2011]. And that, in spite of humanity’s elimination of so many ever since the start of the agricultural revolution around 10,000 BCE.

Scientists estimate that there are approximately 12-15,000 species of butterflies and 150-250,000 species of moths. There are still thousands of moth and butterfly species that scientists have not yet found or described.

Every species seems to have morphed into surviving states as their environments changed. Alternatively, like dinosaurs and so many others due to nature and often human ‘nurture’ they died out.

As I am sure you will have realised, it is good to distinguish between evidence and proof.

According to Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle, to convert evidence into proof requires an intuitive leap.

Both justice and science get it wrong. Think of all those scientific – especially medical - convictions now binned. I was taught that there was no gas or oil – just coal in and around the UK North Sea oil fields were first found in 1955 Think of all those miscarriages of justice.

Remember how trepanations were sued – drilling holes in your head to cure headaches by letting out stagnant blood to be drained!

Just think of close personal relationships. Eventually, whatever the evidence, you have to take that intuitive leap and say, “Yes, darling, I love you.” “I believe you do love me.”

Trained as an engineer before studying theology and being ordained, I base my intuitive leap of faith on evidence.

Reflecting on reality, history and religions, the truth in these resonates with the reality of The One we call God.

Science, driven by the assumption that creation is intelligible, should speculate, “Where did the laws of nature originate? Who put them there?”

Sacred Scripture assuages yet whets my intellectual appetite.

#### Questions answered by God.

i. Who is behind it all? (*God has the means, motive, and opportunity to create. God is guilty of creation as charged.*[As an American lawyer would state])

ii “Why?” “Why is there anything rather than nothing?” Why does anything exist? “Why on earth are we?”

iii. Why is there within my Self a gap like the absence of a loved one who has passed away?  
I have found nothing on earth able to fill that gap.

iv. “Why am I on earth?” What is the purpose of Creation, of my life?

“To be or not to be” is the ultimate question.

“I” not being my own cause, cannot satisfy my “Self”. I have been created for far more than I currently am.

To find the answer, I have to die. Here on earth it is in ‘dying’ to myself, in living by giving myself that I experience the divine within. I sense - I know - that though the divine arm stretches way beyond my perception, the handshake is there. The divine and me are a ‘we’. All a bit poetic, I know. However, all we can say about God is poetry, analogy.

However, thanks to my belief in God’s presence I have avoided depressions. Depression is an outcome of grief – in so many of its guises. In our hearts there is a space that only God can fill. When that void is there, depression tends to seep in.

#### The Emotional; the aesthetical path towards God.

If the Intellectual way to God is active and discursive, Nature’s way to God is more passive-receptive. Intuitive. Moreover, at times, regenerating; powerfully calm. Motivating.

As endorphins in the bloodstream have to fade, the intellectual convictions are more enduring than transient emotional experiences. Nevertheless, the memories of these endure. Those who have never loved or cared for others will have no idea what the word ‘God’ represents.

Like it or not, within us there is a yearning for the absolute. God is the only one with the density and shape fully to fill that gap. Maybe that is why death does have its attraction.

We all need to worship. It is just a question of what we worship. We all need to serve. It is just a question of who? And how? Do I live to serve myself? Perhaps others? Maybe God?

Some seek a way forward through something like obsessive cycling. However, though short-term they assuage the pain, these activities cannot be the end. Many, outside worshipping communities, seek escape from despair through obsessive work, activities or extreme sports. However, as history has shown, they cannot do the long-term job.

Life has taught me - and, given my age, I am now convinced - that as we are made for the infinite, only a commitment to the infinite – the One I call God – will satisfy.

For those who are not God-blind, every experience of love is a reminder of God. Friendship brings his life, his grace, into our lives. For me, beauty, goodness and love signpost divinity. I know how hard it is to realise that presence in tight-packed, angry, hurrying, fixed-eyed

crowds, on a rush hour tube. (why is the slowest moving time of the day called Rush Hour? Any ideas ?)

Some people have what tends to be called a numinous, 'mountain-top experience'. It may have been by a river or a mountain stream; a cloudless, light unpolluted sky at night that convinced them 'something – indeed someone – greater than them' is there.

Aged 15, I went on holiday with my friend John, whose step-parents owned a small cottage on the island of Eriskay, in the Outer Hebrides, west side of Scotland.

One day, when John was playing with his friends, I decided to climb the small hill, the highest point on Eriskay, passing on my way the skull and horns of a deceased sheep. At the top, I sat down, looked West across the Atlantic Ocean. Suddenly something utterly unexpected happened. The only way I can put it is "I fell in love with infinity". It was my personal Pentecostal Experience.

I experienced the Divine Presence throughout my body.

I never asked for it, I never expected it. However, that moment — no idea how long it was before I climbed down that Benin Scathing peak of 185m — has stayed undiminished and fresh, glowing, solid still within my heart. Gradually, as the years went by, realised that that 'Infinity' was — and is - the One we tend to call 'God'.

Whenever asked to say what happened, some put it that "I fell in love with infinity".

Love is an experience. So is God. Some experiences are adamantine. They never go away.

Struggling to describe that numinous experience, the only words I can find are 'warm beauty', 'joy', 'peace' and 'unity with everything'. 'I felt at home. I belonged.'

It is precisely because God is beyond my grasp, yet I have a yearning for infinite love, that I am, I have to be, open to God.

Ever since that personal Pentecost, my faith has been rooted not only in the Scriptures and shaped by the teachings of the Church but also in my experience. In my heart faith and science have embraced.

Human love is beautiful and in its initial stages, when dopamine is coursing through the veins, intoxicating. However, it falls short of what I yearn for; what, deep down, I need. Beauty in its many forms and textures has the ability to assuage that yearning even if only for a while. Created beauty hints of infinite beauty awaiting us the other side of death.

Sport over many centuries had a religious dimension and for so many nowadays it is an ersatz-faith. (If you are interested in sport and religion, open "The Games People Play" by Robert Ellis.)

There are many ways of trying to touch the one we call God. However, even the most ardent sport fans admit their beloved activity stops short of answering life's deepest questions.

Art, community, laughter, the love of friends - and light-unpolluted night sky - raises my mind and heart to God. They communicate far more than words on their own could ever manage.

### The Spiritual. The mystical and apophatic path towards God.

The spiritual and spirituality are hard to define as they refer to the non-physical, relational dimensions of our lives.

Apophatic theology, also known as negative theology, is a type of theological thinking that attempts to approach the Divine by negation; to speak only in terms of what we think may not be said about God. It forms a pair with cataphatic theology, which approaches God by affirmations: statements about what we imagine/believe God really is.

The word 'spiritual' encapsulates being rather than doing. It is there in relationships, in beauty, virtues, energies and hopes. Spirituality is an open door to the divine.

Independent of whether you believe or not, religious ritual, at its best, can be spiritually nourishing.

Living by giving without expecting anything in return, works. It resonates with divine life within me.

Yoga and mindfulness practices assuage but cannot satisfy life's deepest-rooted questions.

Goodness - and its beauty - is sacramental (A sacrament is a physical expression of a spirituality. Hence, all humans are sacramental! I remember as a boy, learning its strictest definition from the 'Penny Catechism': "A sacrament is an outward sign of inward grace, ordained by Jesus Christ, by which grace is given to our souls." (249) ) expression of God.

Spirituality knows the difference between right and wrong. It feels moral outrage at injustice and cruelty. Whence – if not from God - did this moral sentiment come from?

Evolutionary theory is rooted in death and violence in which only the fittest survive. Might is right in Nature. So why this outrage? Maybe it is because within us there is that divine DNA. Who, as yet, knows?

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Given this presence, some people resonate with God in a cathedral, a church, and tabernacle. Others in woods and forests, mountains and rivers. You might already have discovered just how many different ways there are to live with and without God.

Spiritual love, love that has its spiritual content, generates sensitivity to others; morphing our primeval instincts of aggression and fear into appreciation and respect. Love makes humanity human.

Human beings with our five senses remain, in part, predictable. We love soft things against our skin, exciting tastes and pretty things, pleasurable smells and intoxicating relationships-

even drinks. Unless we sense their sacramentality, they may be fine but cannot satisfy your heart.

For Karl Marx religion was an opiate. People who know me well would tell you, that for me, religion – my relationship with God - is Benzedrine, adrenalin, dopamine and oxytocin. Certainly an ‘upper’.

Consciously living in that divine love below the surface of life – as a fish beneath a hurricane-swept sea – sustains peace. Though emotions may be in turmoil, the spirit in the heart may be calm. Inner solitude gives courage, strength.

As G K Chesterton put it, *'if you don't believe in God, you'll believe in anything at all'* because we need to find some sense beneath and within our material world. Instinctively we know we matter more than mere matter.

Divine love, identified, post-Pentecost, as the Holy Spirit, is like magnetism. Some hearts are ferrous and feel that presence. Others are non-ferrous and remain untouched. I thank God my heart is ferrous. That is a gift. It is not my doing.

For me, a theologian and engineer, the evidence of God's reality is compelling, conclusive.

Next Week, we shall look at The Land of The Heart: why we are mysterious as we really are.