

conceive what has been prepared by God for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9). We proclaim, too, that the Cross and Pasch of Jesus is central to the mystery as this future unfolds in history.

Daring to say 'Yes'

Being willing and daring to risk surrendering ourselves to the Holy Mystery of God, of Christ in the Holy Spirit is a grace of graces. Scholars of religion have named the experience of human-divine encounter as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* - simultaneously we are **naturally** repelled by a dreadful awe and allured by its fascinating power. The Gethsemane narrative of Luke's Gospel gives us extraordinary insight into Jesus' experience of the nature of *tremendum* and *fascinans*; nevertheless *Not my will but yours* (Lk 22: 39-46). Contemporary Australian artist, Ted Snell, has also led me further into that inner 'undoing' and 'unknowing' process so necessary in yielding the human spirit over to a faithful God.

Snell's *Ritual* can move one imaginatively from the black hole of fear to the glorious height of transcendence. The iridescent blue oval strategically positioned between the one and the other, compels the viewer, I suggest, never to underestimate the power of Holy Mystery nor the invitation to dare to offer unequivocal 'Yes' in surrendering to the living God. How often, in frailty, do we hover between *Yes, yes and no, no at the same time?* (2 Cor 2:17). With Jesus there was never *Yes and No*, with him it was always *Yes*.

Conclusion

I conclude with a poem passed on to me by a friend following some exchanges of thoughts about this 'Yes/No' tug-of-war between desire and deed.

I suggest, that having read this **Inform**, the poem might be a good starting point for discussion with friends in a small group.

Appolonaire said:
Come to the edge
We might fall

Come to the edge
It's too high

Come to the edge
And they come
And he pushed them

And they flew.

(Christopher Logue in The Private Eye ca 1977)

The prophet Isaiah had the same insight centuries before:

those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint (Is 40:31).

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Discussion questions

1. **ARE THERE** events which have had the power to allow you to experience **mystery** (lower-case 'm')? Can you name occasions where there has been, for you, experience of holy **Mystery** (capital 'M')?

2. **How DO** you relate to the idea that 'Holy Mystery' evokes the paradox of awe-ful 'repulsion' and fascinating, alluring 'invitation' at the same time? (The Exodus narrative of Moses and the Burning Bush is one way of illustrating this.)

3. **How WOULD** you talk with someone who claims that 'mysteries of faith' are no more than intellectual propositions developed by the early Church?

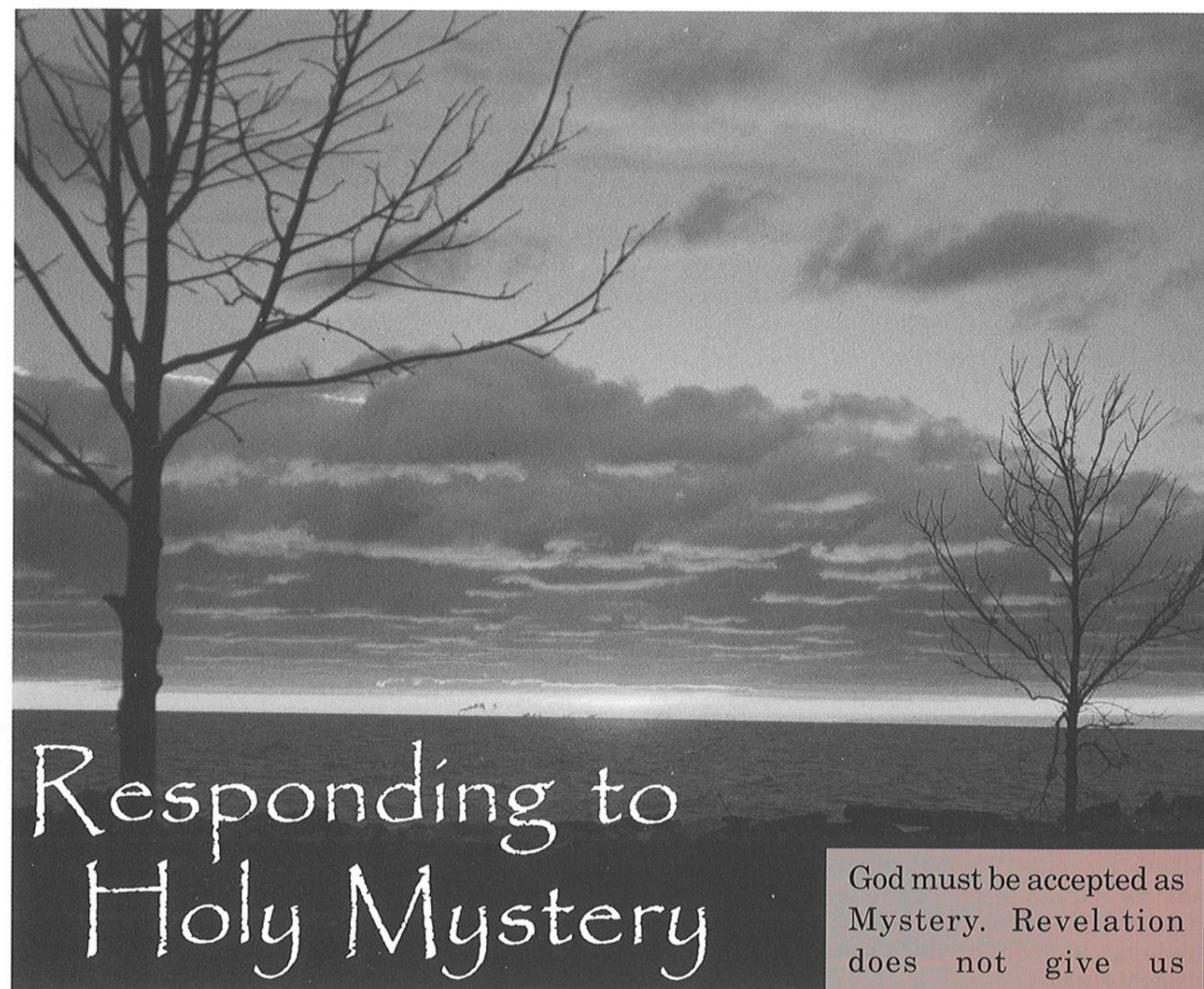
4. **WHAT POINTS** made in this reflection have struck you as most significant? Why?

INFORM

Current thinking on Catholic Issues

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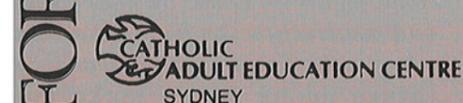


Responding to Holy Mystery

How rich are the depths of God;
how deep God's wisdom and
knowledge! Who could ever know
the mind of the Lord?
To God be glory forever!
(Rom 11: 33-36)

God must be accepted as Mystery. Revelation does not give us complete understanding of God. Our response to mystery is faith, not understanding. **Marie Farrell RSM** invites us into an experience of allowing the holiness of divine mystery to take possession of us.

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It is an overwhelming task to gather thoughts on 'mystery'! The word itself conjures up for me an early memory of family visits to Aunt Lizzie who was one of those wonderfully expansive, matronly ladies whose powerful contralto voice filled us children with awe as her bosom rose and fell in resonance with the passion of singing 'Ah! Sweet mystery of life at last I've found you! Ah! I know at last the secret of it all...'

The rest of the words escape me but I do remember that 'mystery' was evidently a most marvellous thing embodying 'burning hopes' and dreams, longings and waiting... There was always a moment of breathless silence when Aunt Lizzie allowed the final note to fade away... and then the generous applause. So even at a tender age my encounter with 'mystery' was associated with an 'Ah-experience' - which I was later to discover was a way that theologians named mystical experience of the gracious presence of God.

Entering into the 'Ah!' experience

Our lives as humans revolve about mystery; our lives as Christians revolve about 'Holy Mystery', that astounding 'state' (for lack of any adequate word) whereby we actually have the capacity for participation in the very life of God. What is this 'Holy Mystery'? What **truth** is held in those two words? What **meaning** that we cannot even begin to articulate? What **revelation** beyond anything our human minds can remotely conceive?

'Holy Mystery' is of a totally different order from the merely mysterious. We stand in awe before the mysterious secrets of the universe - secrets that are being continuously broken open by physicists and astronomers, by chemists and biologists who have the technological tools to demonstrate empirically that we can actually **know** in such a manner that 'mystery' no longer completely defeats the human intellect. 'Holy

Mystery' is the ultimate horizon against which all lesser mysteries are silhouetted; its **knowing** comes from the gift of the Spirit.

Nor is 'Holy Mystery' of the order of 'riddle'. Riddles, however mysterious initially, always have answers, at which point they cease to interest us or else have dire consequences, as in the case of poor Samson when Delilah turned quising - (Judges 14 tells the story well). Tolkien's 'riddles in the dark' from *The Hobbit* have to be some of the best of the genre, but even these have canny solutions:

Holy Mystery is
the ultimate horizon
against which all
lesser mysteries are
silhouetted; its
knowing comes from
the gift of the Spirit.

*It cannot be seen, cannot be felt,
Cannot be heard, cannot be smelt.
It lies behind stars and under hills
And empty holes it fills.
It comes first and follows after;
Ends life, kills laughter.*

What is it?

'Holy Mystery' draws us into relationship with God, into that abiding, yet incomprehensible divine wellspring. And there we recognize, however dimly, as human beings created in God's own 'image and likeness', that we have the capacity for 'seeing' the profound depth of things. We are grateful to the poets and mystics among us who give voice to such mystery:

*Earth's crammed with Heaven
And every common bush
afire with God;
But only he who sees
takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it
and pluck blackberries.
(E. B. Browning)*

Throughout the centuries theologians have grappled with 'Holy Mystery'. In our own time Karl Rahner has persisted in emphasising that at the heart of everyone's deepest experience - is a God whose love and light and mystery embrace us totally, in the midst of all the ordinariness of daily life. Christian faith affirms that God is present in our lives as Trinity of Persons to whom we freely 'say' our inmost 'yes' or 'no'. Deep down we know that we are loved by God unconditionally. This knowledge is what, for Rahner (and for most of us, I suspect) leads us into our own deepest mystery allowing ever new awakenings towards 'fullness of life' (Jn 10:10).

The 'colour' of Holy Mystery

Blue is the 'theologic' colour of Holy Mystery. The blue as experienced by Moses and his companions when they saw the God of Israel beneath whose feet there was, it seemed, a sapphire pavement blue as the heavens themselves... and gathered in communion to eat and drink in the divine presence at the summit of Mount Sinai (Ex 24: 9-11). The blue of the depth created by the sacred iconographers from algae in the fresh water streams of Russia. The blue used by Andrei Rublev in the clothing of the Sacred Three in his famous *Abraham's Trinity* (right). The blue of the mandorla surrounding the figure of Christ in icons of the Transfiguration and Resurrection, symbolising the mystery of the Word-made flesh.

Ever and always more...

Every partial insight into the mystery of God's own inner life of mutual indwelling in Love, every partial surprise at the graciousness of human-divine friendship reveals the always-more to be revealed, the always-more to be encountered. Grace, the divine indwelling in which humanity shares, is an inexhaustible fountain. A wonderful passage using

this analogy occurs in the writings of St. Ephraem, who ponders the sheer abundance of God's gift given to us in the mystery of Christ:

*The thirsty person rejoices
when they drink and
they are not downcast because
they cannot empty the fountain.
Rather, let the fountain quench
your thirst than have your thirst
quench the fountain.
Because if your thirst is quenched
and the fountain is not exhausted
you can drink from it again
whenever you are thirsty.*

We are drawn into the Holy Mystery in little sips, as it were, throughout life. But we must thirst for this water, as Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:13-15) and stressed so strongly when he promised the living water of the Holy Spirit on the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Jn 7:37-39).

The Holy Spirit, our access to Holy Mystery

As Christians, our very first encounter with Holy Mystery is through the Holy Spirit. The Letter to the Ephesians reminds us that we all have 'access in one Spirit' through Christ to the Father. We are first of all drawn into the Father's love for Christ through the Holy Spirit. We cannot say *Jesus is Lord* unless we are influenced by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).

It is the Spirit 'released' in a unique way by the Risen Christ who enables the Christian community to grow in faith, hope and love (1 Cor 13:13), in charisms of different kinds

(1 Cor 4:11) and who brings to mature ripeness the fruit of love, peace, joy, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23).

If it were not for the Holy Spirit's grace of being side-by-side with us and prompting us to declare our free 'yes' in faith to Christ, we would be unaware of the astounding relationship that we enjoy as sons



and daughters in Christ, with the 'ecstatic' love of the triune God.

The wonder of ecstatic love

One of the high points of theological reflection during the twentieth century has been to probe of the meaning of 'ecstatic love'. *Ex stasis* suggests a 'going out from' (*ex*) a static, passive state (*stasis*) into a vibrant, dynamic state of wonder and surprise. This, then, is the kind of selfless love which happens when, in loving someone, our whole will goes out to embrace the beloved. It has been described as an ecstasy whereby *the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved*. Such is God's own love moving out from the Holy Trinity into creation; the divine love 'personalised' in the Holy Spirit who

came upon Mary in the mystery of the incarnation of the Word in Jesus; the same ecstatic love revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus

Let us proclaim the 'mystery of faith'

Gathered together at each Eucharistic celebration, we acknowledge the 'mystery of faith'. We proclaim in one voice: *Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again or When we eat this bread and drink this blood, we proclaim your death Lord Jesus, until you come again or Lord, by your cross and resurrection you have set us free; you are the Saviour of the world*. A future opens as we make our proclamation; a future impossible for the physical eye to see, or ear to hear, defying us to even begin to