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Patricia Catherine Worthingham

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ST. STEPHEN'S COLLEGE

GOD DON'T MAKE NO JUNK, A LOOK AT MAKING ART AND  
THE THEOLOGY OF DESIRE

by

Patricia Catherine Worthingham

An Integrative Study presented to the  
Faculty of  
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## DEDICATION

For Bolek Mesjasz,  
My Uncle,

If only I had been more than a child then,  
I would have walked with you, back to the asylum.

At the very least, I would have given you the money for a bus,  
But that was so long ago,  
and still my heart aches,  
for what might have been.

Supper wasn't over yet when you left,  
Maybe all you wanted was to move,  
So later you could paint,  
How would I have known!

You left,  
To walk alone,  
Hours from home.

## ABSTRACT

This integrative study provides an historical review of humankind's relationship with desire as regarded by philosophers and theologians of western civilization. It examines desire as reflected in the characteristics of our culture and the societies we have built since early history; then highlights which desires, according to Dr. Steven Reiss' research into what motivates and makes life meaningful, we chose.

This study's main focus is mystical consciousness and speaks to this in a heuristic account of altered consciousness and the 'feeling of oneness' while making art, resulting in a deeper relationship with God and the development of my own theology of desire. Selected pieces of art created during this process are included. The concept of 'body, mind, spirit connection' appears as a theme throughout this study, as my source of wisdom and knowledge for making art.

In the section devoted to Theological Reflection, an integrated methodology based in Kinast and Underhill's approach to reflection and mysticism is used and frames my discussion on the desire for a career change. Questions are posed, a thorough discussion ensues, examining the notion of betrayal, the debilitating effects of judgment and inertia on my relationship with desire, how my senses, perception, and consciousness influence my experience and understanding of desire. References from psychology, quantum physics and cosmology help to further develop my theology. This study has been a journey into my heart's desire.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor and advisor, Dr. Mona-Lee Feehan, for the support offered me in the making of this integrated study. Even now I hear your melodic voice and see your smiling face over the phone. More importantly, it is your deep faith and courage in face of personal challenges that rests in my memory. This study will always remind me of your joy and strength.

To my husband, Randy, you are the light of my life, my love, my heart's desire. You carried me and our household while I wrote and wrote and wrote for months. I am so very grateful I went to that BBQ fifteen years ago. Looking to the future, we have so much to look forward to and enjoy.

You are always there to listen to my ideas, and share in their development, and thank you for recognizing just how much this degree means to me.

To the professors of St. Stephen's College, who have dedicated themselves to educating another generation of scholars, theologians and art therapists. There is no better place to learn and grow. You have gifted me with the greatest learning process of my life.

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## INTRODUCTION

It would be wonderful to live out our lives nurtured by a theology that acknowledges the power of our desire. In western civilization, we live with psychological, social and religious inferences that generally view desire with a moral perspective. Desire is innate to us all, yet we live in a culture that rarely asks what it means to our lives and the decisions we make; and as a consequence, affects our understanding and quality of aliveness, our relationship with God. The unspoken truth and expectation is that we learn to deal with desire on our own. 'Living with' desire could become part of a common consciousness were an attitude of inclusiveness also part of our experience and philosophy of living. Depth psychology and spiritual reflection, each in their respective splendor, could converge to offer a steady diet of wisdom and knowledge. The concept of sin could be replaced with one that cheerleads 'trial and error' and advocates acceptance. Desire could displace inertia and put the dichotomy of self and God to rest. These are some of the thoughts that have led my choice of subject matter for this study, influencing the title: *God Don't Make No Junk: A Look at Making Art and the Theology of Desire*.

The main focus of this study is mystical consciousness and I discuss my experience of desire in a heuristic account of altered consciousness and the 'feeling of oneness' that comes from making art. Making art has led me to a greater understanding of desire but not before I learned more about sensory messages, perception and consciousness from Evelyn Underhill and her practice of mysticism and reflection. Linked to this was a desire to substantiate my experience of making art with references

from cosmology and quantum physics so as to better understand the process I was undergoing. It was clear to me that I desired a holistic approach to this research project. Curiously enough, it was the historical review of the theology of desire that served me best, and gave me a new perspective on time and personal growth. It inspired me to commit to new actions, but not before I changed some old beliefs.

I have included three appendices to this integrative study. One of these presents a collection of quotes by artists about their experiences of desire, which I found inspiring. I would like to open this study with a blessing to all who read it, a blessing for insights that are in your heart's desire.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

GOD: My Maker is Creator of the All that Is. He is just, strong, loving, kind, giving, patient and watchful. Although I know God to be without gender, I embrace Him in the masculine with qualities of profound wisdom, authority, benevolence and love. He is everywhere, throughout time. He knows all and is present in everything. He is not limited by our imagination. His love is unconditional; He does not punish. He challenges us and teaches us. He waits. He watches us evolve and grow. We are but fragments from His Existence, looking for our way back home, to His Body.

ART: uses color, light, texture in two and three-dimensional forms to express a story, thought, emotion or desire. Visually, with sound, or the written word, it entertains the element of beauty and as form may strike a chord within the viewer.

BODY, MIND, SPIRIT CONNECTION: refers to a flow of energy where all senses in one's body work with the capacity of mind and a spiritual knowingness to create as complete and as full an experience of 'beingness' as possible.

CONSCIOUSNESS: see Ego

COSMOLOGY: a branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of the universe; a theory or doctrine describing the natural order of the universe; a branch of astronomy that deals with the origin, structure, and space-time relationships of the universe.<sup>1</sup>

COVET: to desire what others have. Our attention is turned outwards now. In our society we have confused desire and covet to mean the same thing. Coveting has the quality of the emotion of "lusting over", strongly wanting what others have. It is highly charged and may imply sexual attraction.<sup>2</sup>

CREATE: to make, to do. Not only is desire a part of creation; it may also be what motivates it. Without a formulated plan, however, without sequential action steps

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<sup>1</sup> Merriam Webster online, s.v. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>, (accessed March 5, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>, (accessed March 5, 2012).

leading to an end result, nothing can be created. Creation takes place in 3D, on this physical plane using cognition, and human effort.

DRIVE: is the power that makes something work. It provides momentum toward the successful operation or functioning of something. It can force somebody or something into a particular state or condition, sometimes an extremely negative one, harmful to oneself or others. It may or may not be conducive to one's nature.<sup>3</sup>

EGO: in psychoanalytic theory, is that portion of the human personality, which is experienced as the "self" or "I" and is in contact with the external world through perception. It is said to be the part that remembers, evaluates, plans, and in other ways is responsive to, and acts in, the surrounding physical and social world.<sup>4</sup> According to Jung it is the center of our conscious identity and selfhood. For the purpose of this study, ego, consciousness, self, and mind all refer to this phenomenon in the human being.

FELT-SENSE: is not a mental experience but a physical one. It is a bodily awareness; an internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time and communicates to you all at once rather than detail by detail.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>, (accessed March 5, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica online, s.v. *Psychoanalytic Theories*, <http://www.britannica.com/search?query=psychoanalytic+theory&page=1>, (accessed March 3, 2012).

A felt-sense does not come to you in the form of thoughts or words or other separate units, but as a single (often puzzling and very complex) bodily feeling.<sup>5</sup>

INTENTION: is a directed thought-energy. Goal oriented and purposeful, it has design, and seeks some return. Intention comes after desire. When intertwined with desire, it becomes a powerful force.

JUNK: without value, unpleasant, judged to be worthless, trashy, dirty, smelly, wasted.

MANIFESTATION: is the completion on a desire and intention. It is energy that aligns itself with the universe, attracting people, places, circumstances and events to come together to realize a goal. It has qualities of effortlessness and magic.

NONORDINARY CONSCIOUSNESS: also known as ‘altered states of consciousness,’ and considered almost always temporary, is a state of awareness that is different from our normal waking beta wave state, and is experienced as a visual aesthetic trance, meditation, loss of time awareness, and for the purpose of this study, involves ego-dissolution in awareness.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Eugene T. Gendlin, *Focusing*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. ed. New York: Bantam New Age Book, 1981, 32-33.

<sup>6</sup> Dieciuc, Michael. “*The Mystical Mind: The Philosophical and Psychological Significance of Mystical Experiences*,” *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society*, Vol. 1, Number 2, 2011, <http://religionsociety.com/journal/> 154, (accessed Feb. 23, 2012).

**PASSION:** is an intensity of feeling or desire. Along the continuum of desire, it scores an 8 -10 out of 10. It signals a strong emotion or visceral reaction. It may also mean a very keen interest in a particular subject or activity.

**PROMPTERS:** are integral to the making of art; they are the most ethereal, light and airy version of desire to be delivered.

**SPIRIT:** see Unconscious

**THEOLOGY:** For the purposes of this research, the study of religion will be defined as faith, especially the Christian faith and God's relation to the world, a religious theory, school of thought, or system of belief, a course of specialized religious training, especially one intended to lead students to a vocation in the Christian Church.<sup>7</sup>

**UNCONSCIOUS:** Although Freud defined the unconscious as the deepest level of consciousness, as a pool of unwanted or unacceptable ideas, wishes or desires, memories, and emotions pushed down into the unconscious so that we do not have to deal with them and so they do not interfere or cause problems in our daily lives, this study uses the word unconscious to infer the collective unconscious as a spiritual place of time and space where God is present in stillness. It is also considered the dwelling place of our purest desires. The words unconscious, spirit and stillness may be used interchangeably.

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<sup>7</sup> Merriam Webster online, s.v. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/>, (accessed March 5, 2012).

## A WORKING DEFINITION OF DESIRE FOR THIS PAPER

What questions might I ask myself about desire? Is desire of the mind or is it emotion? Is it a feeling or a state of consciousness? Why is it ethereal, so delicate and refined, light and airy? Do we have to move to bring it into conscious awareness? Does acknowledgment and interaction prepare the way for its future? Is it our link to the heavens here on earth? These are some of the questions that come to mind when addressing desire and they will be discussed at different points throughout this study.

The etymological meaning of desire is ‘of sire’ or ‘of father,’ it also has roots in the phrase *desidere* ‘from the stars,’ from *sidus* (gen. *sideris*) ‘heavenly body, star, constellation’.<sup>8</sup> Desire is a driving force at the core of what it means to be fully alive as a human being.

Its presence runs the gamut from illusive and barely detectable to ‘in your face’ and strongly passionate. Even in a state of quiescence, its strength to drive much of our activity can easily be summoned. This is its power, to initiate and complete its activity. Desire requires motion, and being engaged in this movement means the body can feel it, the spirit can have an ethereal felt-sense of it, and the mind can think of it. Occupied within a bodily sensation, it can tingle, pleasuring the body, arouse the mind so as to engage it in intrigue, planning and design, and drive the spirit to reveal itself in inspiration, awe and the feeling of universality.

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<sup>8</sup> Etymology Dictionary online, s.v. <http://www.etymonline.com/?term=etymology>, accessed on December 15, 2011.

What is desire? It is an energy that wishes and wants, creating a strong longing or craving for the heart's desire. It can be a sensual feeling, or an object wished for<sup>9</sup>, lusted over, and coveted.<sup>10</sup> If one were to describe it using a continuum from one to ten, desire could register anywhere along that continuum in intensity and quality. It can be colored by intention, creativity, and manifestation, the powers of the mind, our choices, personality, our environment, culture, and society. Rarely has it been described as a 'need', yet it most certainly can pass as one.

The internal experience of desire can be fleeting, vague or ethereal (hard to grasp, even articulate) and certainly very subjective (personal) so that others cannot enter into it with us except through some persuasive means. Desire is more of an 'alone' experience than an 'along' experience, and for that reason an individual can find it confusing and dark. It may be the place where we have our first opportunity to be with God or at least look for God. There are desires of a divine nature as well as those of a worldly nature.

Desire can also be described as a drive or force bringing into form, bringing into being-ness. It is an energy that motivates one to be, do, have, and achieve. All the achievements of the world, be they the pyramids, the Eiffel Tower, the Panama Canal, space exploration, cell phones, nanotechnology or open heart surgery, are all driven products of desire.

Desire as energy comes from God, lays itself down, and in its greatest reality connects with our body, mind, and spirit. It is present to us in the moment, it is either

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<sup>9</sup> Albert and Loy Morehead, eds., *The New American Webster Dictionary*, (New American Library, Times Mirror, 1972), 130.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

noticed or ignored, allowed to thrive or diminish, but never lost or silent. It retains itself as excitement and worthiness, to come around and rise again. Desire is persistent. As a force, and by virtue of our attention to it, it commits to pursuing the fancy that it tickles.

Desire is active energy and moves us beyond our existing state of being-ness. It is the energy of more, doing more, being more, and wanting more. Although it could be construed as greed, envy or lust, as a pure state, it is not about the willful accumulation of materials or energy, sought after or taken. Rather, in its purest state, desire is goodness that values its human experience. Desire loves the body, the mind, and the spirit. It pushes forward, ultimately to bring out into existence more of what is present within each individual, so that more can be known and applied in this physical dimension.

Some people would identify this life-giving force as sexual in nature, energy that drives and registers the sensual pleasures of the body. Peter Black says, “Desire is born of the erotic Spirit whose breathing forth and birthing forth is the basis of all arousal.”<sup>11</sup> This study understands desire from Black’s perspective, defining it in communion with God as arousal and birth of creation through body, mind and spirit. Physiologically, desire is found in arousal, and in its largest intensity, overwhelmingly wants. One can have any number of desires at a given time, each defined by quality, strength, and intensity, generated from within or by influences from without, and limited in time and space by our ability to fulfill them. Many desires are never acted

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Diarmuid O’Murchu, *The Transformation of Desire, How Desire Became Corrupted – and How We Can Reclaim It*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 162.

upon. We decide and we choose which to favor and liken ourselves to the ones that give pleasure, for which we receive deep satisfaction.

Desire is an originator. It is a beginning energy that is *us* or *Oneness* and at the very least, is channeled through *us* from *Oneness*. Are we destined then for a relationship with God through desire? Yes, if I believe in the Ultimate Originator and call him God, then God originates and that arousal found in us is continuance from the Originator; in this dimension it is known as desire and is the beginning of something new.

Desire motivates. It is energy it drives and excites, inspires and grows, and gives us feelings of ecstasy and power; that tickles our fancy. More importantly, desire links into time and space so it can operate and stay with us in this dimension. Desire has the potential to be both grounding and exhilarating.

Desire is about movement towards God, and carries with it the ethereal quality of light and air. Desire moves to strengthen and nurture this ethereal connection with Universal Life. To be in relationship with God in this way is analogous to a mystical experience, yet different because of its lightness and ethereal quality.

What would desire look like if it were remarkably willful, out of sorts and off scale? The shadow side of desire, defined in this paper as lust, greed and covetness, is more ego-based and ego-driven. It lives in our three-dimensional world as opposed to the felt connection with the ethereal world. It lacks knowledge and experience of the body, mind and spirit connection as a tri-umph, working instead to pick off 'body and mind' from its union with spirit, limiting it in some finite way. To desire in a covetous way is to want what others have or own. This lacks originality, yet continues to gain

momentum as something our culture teaches us to be and do. Humankind has a felt sense of desire even when it is not always clear or immediately obvious to our consciousness what it is that is being desired. In some cases, desire paradoxically has guided us to better choices, even correcting unbalanced behavior.

Persistent, desire does not give up on us, no matter what the state of our conscious awareness, it comes back again and again to complete its purpose. It arouses pleasurable interest as to fashion a commitment from us and like a blessing, it gently lands to catch our attention. Outsourced by God, desire as emissary, invites us to take the next step in the process of creation.

Just as there is a dichotomy of self and God, there is also a dichotomy that exists between self and desire. Since antiquity, desire has been marked as a reckoning force of nature and consequently has endured measures of constraint culturally, psychologically, and theologically. Traditionally, desire has been described as passion, linked mostly with the pleasure of sexual gratification, but also linked with survival and self-preservation particularly in times of war. Desire is perceived as a primordial instinct. As literature of quality on the subject is selective, I have taken liberties in characterizing humankind's relationship with desire and have placed particular emphasis on behaviours, drawing inferences about desire from what has been recorded in history. This section of the study will examine the unique perspectives held by philosophy, theology and psychology to examine theories presented by the great thinkers who have influenced our relationship with desire as a world collective.

The discussion is framed within an historical timeline rather than an exclusive chronological review of theories presented to the world. This format allows for comments and questions of how desire has been observed, interpreted, and explained, but more importantly, managed in the world over three millennia. Discussions around similar themes can then help the reader see an evolutionary process of discovery and change in progress.

The truth of who we are is with our roots. As early as 1000 BC, the thinkers of our founding religions and civilizations were driven by two main themes: 1) suffering and

the complexities of life, along with 2) excellence in humankind, 'being the most that one can be'. Both are rooted in desire.

## Buddha

Any relationship with desire manifests in humankind both as an internal and external phenomenon and clearly, Buddhist theology relates to desire as an inward journey. Buddha observed how one craving [desire] after another took possession of his mind and heart. He was convinced that desire was responsible for suffering and developed his worldview out of his personal experience.

All around him, he was painfully aware that, "Being forced into proximity with what we hate is suffering; being separated from what we love is suffering; not getting what we want is suffering".<sup>12</sup> It was Buddha's experience and opinion that the clinging nature of desire was the constant in all of the reflected images of suffering. His was an insight that highlighted the immanence of desire and its pervasive energy.

Guided by a depth of reflection exemplified by discipline and patience, Buddha proved that meditative practices could give birth to a different kind of human being. Systematically he trained his mind, breaking it of laziness and inertia; his existence no longer controlled by cravings [desires], conflicting fears, greed or selfishness.<sup>13</sup>

Desires could pass, much like a cloud traveling through the sky. They were not held or crystalized, they were not grasped, and they did not torture with repetitive

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<sup>12</sup> Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation, The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House, 2006), 278.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 288.

cycling. Here was a state of mind where consciousness held positive feelings of compassion; there was room for serenity and prayer; one could delight in the joys of others without envy or personal impairment.

Buddha had long ago discovered that any search for pleasure did not lead to lasting relief from suffering, or for that matter, any increase in pleasure. Once people cut the roots of their egotism, they lived at the peak of their capacity and could activate parts of their beings that were normally dormant.<sup>14</sup> This, Buddha said, was a practice for the masses. It was possible to live in this world at peace, in control, and in harmony with one's fellow creatures. His theological practice embraced being *in* the world, and not just *of* the world.

Buddha traveled, teaching the masses for 45 yrs. He was not drained, not weakened, not destroyed by his encounters.

Even in the face of this persuasive evidence, he insisted that his disciples test everything he taught them. For a religious idea could all too easily become a mental idol, one more thing to cling to, and hold one back from serenity. To accept a dogma on somebody else's authority was unskillful, he professed; it could not lead to enlightenment because it amounted to an abdication of personal responsibility.<sup>15</sup>

By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Hobbes contrasted Buddha's teachings by elevating desire to a fundamental role, and encouraged following one's simple taste for or against something as a fitting guide to our decisions and choices. Desire, he argued was good, defining aversion as what one disliked.<sup>16</sup> Could he be encouraging a return

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>16</sup> Stanley Rosen, ed., *The Philosopher's Handbook: Essential Readings from Plato to Kant*, (New York: Random House, 2000), 82-83.

to self-trust and listening to the inner promptings of one's desires? Hobbes' acceptance of desire created a perspective with dimensions so different from those of Buddha. Hobbes was of the opinion that 'life is what it is'.<sup>17</sup> It would seem he was not as willing to paint desire with the brush of negativity that had prevailed theology for two and one half millennia (since Buddha, but more realistically since the book of Genesis). Whether or not Hobbes was an early thinker to this cause, his willingness to take a public stand could easily have been part of a movement of thought and sentiment (of his day) to offset the consequences laid down by stringent religious practices of the Middle Ages. Judgment had grown roots as righteousness and became almost unrecognizable as a modest opinion. Judgment, be it divinely inspired or humanly driven, had cast an ugly shadow on the workings of such a simple human phenomenon as desire. Could it be that society had learned to use judgment as a protective mechanism for mind (consciousness), albeit a negative one, for easy encapsulation of suffering, as detachment from those who suffered? Hobbes, however was not enmeshed with this aspect, but was pure and true in his acceptance of likes and dislikes; in his eyes, desire was good and not open for judgment.

According to Buddha, suffering could never be resolved with a desire for or an escape to pleasure, nor was it meant to be resolved by a significant capacity of mind in reflection and discernment to make the best possible decision given the knowledge at hand. Framed in psychological terms of the twenty-first century, Buddha's definition of desire as linked to suffering, could easily be understood as excessiveness even a compulsion of thought and emotion that quite possibly drove Buddha to discipline his consciousness and discover nirvana. This theology set in motion the dichotomy of

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 83.

desire and all its delight, pleasures and awe from the human experience of the ‘body, mind, and spirit’ and this proved to be agreeable to humankind.

It would seem that order, tranquility and idealism (see Appendix 1), relentlessly, patiently and purposefully urged Buddha towards the development of a practice that brought the relief and serenity he sought. Little value was placed in desire, yet by the very hand of desire, he was able to bring the best in what a human being could be into realization. Buddha’s contribution to humanity was monumental. He taught us to: 1) trust in self over any external authority 2) live with compassion in one’s heart, 3) embrace personal responsibility, 4) practice mindfulness and, 5) seek enlightenment. These, his wonderful gifts to humankind, became measures of a new desire and in some respects a more evolved desire. However, it would be two thousand years before Buddha was introduced to western civilization.

## Greek Civilization

‘Slain in battle, honored like a god,’<sup>18</sup> this verse can be used to exemplify the first seven hundred years of Greek civilization. Greek society was a warrior society; the shadow side of life was sustained by beliefs in gods and goddesses who supported the dark and dangerous aspects of life as much as the best humanity offered in the way of success and achievement.

Whether it was an athletic event, in the theatre with Greek epics or festivals honoring the gods, force was always on display with the message, ‘the mightiest won’. The Greek hero was an egotist. When a warrior was carried away by the ecstasy of battle, he knew that Ares (the god of war) was present. Greeks believed in the immanence of their gods. When a warrior’s world was

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<sup>18</sup> Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation*, 111.

transfigured by the overwhelming power of erotic love, he called this 'Aphrodite'. The divine craftsman Hephaestus was revealed in the inspiration of an artist, and the goddess, Athena was in each and every cultural achievement.<sup>19</sup>

As prevalent as the noonday's sun, desire was demonstrable, intense and extreme, its origins bequeathed by capricious gods. These gods were considered the cause and pervading presence in any passion, outstanding success or exceptional achievement.

Greek religion was pessimistic and mysterious, its gods dangerous, cruel and arbitrary. Each and every Greek god had a shadow side. None was wholly good; none was concerned about virtuous behaviour. Greek gods fought and quarreled, but each represented an authentic aspect of reality and collectively they were what made the cosmos whole. The rich diversity and complexity of life was depicted as paradox in Greek religion as portrayed by this entire array of gods, who embraced any and all parts of the world and its characteristics. The gods never entirely lost their tight grasp on Greek imagination, which was haunted by images of violence and disaster, gods and goddesses murdering their parents and abusing their children. There was no benevolent creator god and no divine order at the beginning of time, only relentless hatred and conflict.<sup>20</sup>

For the Greeks, war was the only thing that could give meaning to life. Every warrior was expected to excel in battle. In the heightened state of desire for war, the hero experienced life in a way that gloriously shone in contempt of death.<sup>21</sup> This was the altered state of consciousness the Greeks had come to revere; desires ignited by the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 108.

gods. No matter how powerful a nation, the Greeks never truly felt they were in charge of their fate.<sup>22</sup>

Regarding management and self-governing, the Greeks did experiment with different forms of government. Polis (city states) dotted the countryside; peasants and city dwellers alike had the same rights and responsibilities. The use of community resources was common to all. Each polis, true to its religious beliefs, had its own patronal deity, developed their own distinctive sacrifices and festivals around that deity; all this helped bind their citizenry together.<sup>23</sup> The polis remained an aggressive male state. Women were marginalized, segregated to the secluded courtyards of the family home.

Polis would compete with other polis for power and wealth. Greek values and desires were re-enforced. Celebrating athletic competitions at Olympia was a political act; it put your polis on the map, and an Olympic victor achieved legendary fame upon returning home. The earliest athletic competitions were held during the funeral of a great warrior. It was an event celebrating life with a twisted sense of victory, sadness, grief, fear, and resolve. These rites taught Greeks it was impossible to achieve life and ecstasy unless you had experienced the depths of loss.<sup>24</sup> The Greeks insisted that the essential goal of any festival, drama or athletic event was to create an arena where fear could be dealt with more fully. As part of a ritual confronting fear, they showed it was

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 58.

possible to come through safely to the other side.<sup>25</sup> It was a way of developing resolve and fortitude, of ensuring the ego as an essential Greek prerequisite for enlightenment. Excellence came in the form of physical prowess, power and might. The Greeks dealt with their unconscious rage through movement (athletics) and emotional catharsis (through drama and festivals). The arts rang in fear, while desire was dispensed on merit by gods and goddesses through governing sanctions unbeknownst to humankind. Western civilization would only acknowledge unconscious pain again twenty-five hundred years into the future. Trauma would have its effects on the soul, the conscious, and the unconscious throughout the middle ages and beyond. In evolutionary terms, this trauma would be carried down generation by generation and finally gain acknowledgement, studied and be brought to prominence by scholars like Freud, Jung and their colleagues. In Greek history, we see once more the dichotomy of desire from body, mind, spirit connection.

Greek philosophers differed from the general populace. Through their own capacity of mind, they developed theories of life, God, mathematics, and geometry; all the while honoring desire through their writings on virtue. Nevertheless, they were inspired by desire. Even though the individual might hold unique desires, these were overshadowed by society's sweeping desire to make their civilization mighty.

Greeks used their extraordinary talent for analysis to enhance [the longevity of] the old vision, to give it a system and rationale.<sup>26</sup> This was a civilization with its attention focused outward, in vigilance against enemies and in desire of political expansion. The

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 112.

Greek definition of enlightenment included achievement, success, and recognition, wholly entrenched in their desire for status, vengeance, power, order, and mastery. Competition was their *raison d'être* and fashioned each new generation for seven hundred years.

The polis was also famous for its public speaking and considered it as important as military prowess. In the public forum, it was important to develop strong debating skills, as people argued about practical problems.<sup>27</sup> The person who argued best was the victor. The entire polis was becoming an aristocratic warrior society; farmers were beginning to acquire this spirit too. Debating became a way of life. Everyone was expected to be remarkable, which meant everyone was a rival in the battle for uniqueness.

At a time when other peoples were beginning to find old gods unsatisfactory or were changing their notion of divinity, the Greeks were becoming even more committed to their paganism. Their beliefs served them well.

Yet from within the populous, there were men of reason; thinkers who questioned and challenged current perceptions of reality and the religious framework the Greeks adopted. Explaining his theory of mind and how thinking is something that happens to the mind, Plato believed, "The objects of thought were living realities in the psyche [unconscious] of the person who learned to see them. Every earthly object or experience had its counterpart in the divine sphere".<sup>28</sup>

"Plato introduced the concept of Truth, explaining it had to be 're-collected' from a prenatal existence when each man or woman had enjoyed direct

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 318.

knowledge of the 'form', it was not introduced into the mind from outside. Each soul had been born many times, as Plato explained, "and has seen all things here and in the underworld. There is nothing which it has not learned, so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things...because searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection".<sup>29</sup>

It is possible that Plato's philosophy with all of his insights preceded science by three thousand years and represents how the right side of the brain performs as a contributor to the many functions of mind. He also gives the earliest representation of what we now call 'intuition' or what Jung would call the 'unconscious'. Plato may have equalized status among all humankind with his proclamation that all people have powers of recollection hence the capacity for knowing, giving us all a respectful footing in life.

"Plato also pointed [inescapably] toward the Good, the essence he believed, of everything that human beings desired. All the other 'forms' were subsumed within the Good, and were nourished by it. In the Good, all things are one".<sup>30</sup> This was diametrically opposed to Greek society and religion of the time.

Our earthly world was not the true reality, he claimed. What was here and now was 'unreal', compared to the eternal world of the 'forms' and this perfect world was accessible to human beings. People, he said, did not have to put up with suffering and death. If they were prepared to devote themselves to a long, exacting philosophical initiation, their souls could ascend to the divine world without any help from the [Greek] gods and achieve an immortality that had once been the prerogative of the Olympians.<sup>31</sup>

Plato promoted a desire for tranquility, order and communion, but it involved an initiative that may not have survived the conflicted anguish that could result from the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 317-8.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 319.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 322.

insight (recollection), and conscious reorganization of thought and operating values the masses would have to resolve. According to Plato, the old guard could not bring true enlightenment; this new theology to which he ascribed, these forms could only be comprehended through the reasoning powers of the mind, not in the insights of myth or the sacred drama of ritual.<sup>32</sup> All humans had a daimon, a divine spark, within them, whose purpose was to “raise us up away from the earth and toward what is akin to us in heaven.”<sup>33</sup> This could be obtained through a disciplined practice of thought.

The heart’s desire was now set on immortality and the heavens. With the decline of Greek civilization, desires for vengeance, power, and status were replaced with the desire for Good, a way out of suffering and a willingness for a practice that would inspire communion, independence, acceptance, idealism and tranquility (see Appendix 1). It is unclear when Plato’s philosophy gained widespread favor. History showed, when it merged with a vision of ‘one God’, Plato’s philosophy remained the basic cosmological vision of Western Europe until the twelfth century.<sup>34</sup> His were the doctrines that would guarantee the good behavior of the uneducated.<sup>35</sup> Strategies embracing cohesiveness, enforcement and governance that made Greek civilization so successful, were not lost to time. This carried on as part of our evolutionary process. Lost however, were the traumatized masses left behind to deal with their fear, grief, rage and need to excel. One can easily see how Plato’s desire for Goodness and his

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 325.

vision for humanity took a secondary role among a populace concerned with survival in a society that was coming apart around them.

## The Story of Genesis

The first five books of the Old Testament were written approximately five hundred years after the birth of Buddha and five hundred years before the birth of Christ, some time during the Greek civilization. These scriptures were dutifully recorded and assumed authoritative status by the 5th century BC.<sup>36</sup>

Genesis is the story of desire that everyone with a Judeo-Christian theological upbringing has come to know. This is the first story in the sacred scriptures that mentions desire, linking it to temptation, punishment, and the origins of sin. It is the story of Adam and Eve. We quickly learn that desire was temptation and falling prey to it brought punishment. Obedience before authority and God was everything. Generations that have followed are reminded of their inheritance; as descendants, we have original sin, the burden and price for having life. We are taught a simple yet powerful metaphor emphasizing the consequences of temptation, a clear and simple message, rooted powerfully in Judeo-Christian theology that dominates Western Civilization.

As adults, I offer this story a different interpretation, rationalizing that Adam and Eve were naïve, unaware, perhaps even ignorant, exercising poor judgment when they

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<sup>36</sup> R. E. Clements, *The World of Ancient Israel*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 21.

bit into that forbidden fruit. They acted without the power of reason, unaware of the impact their actions would have, a lack of foresight and insight revealing their inexperience. They were fooled by a serpent and betrayed by their desire. Historically, we can understand why fear has attached itself to this story. Betrayal by our desires may have become our biggest concern. We were taught that desire is much too big an energy to handle, requiring direction, dependence and deliverance. We were not part of a culture that supports our ability to reason our choices and discern which desires to honor. In dealing with the aftermath of consequences, scripture has taught us that it is easier to blame others for any misfortune and misdeed than assume personal responsibility for decisions (actions) taken. As adults, we must ask more questions of this allegory.

Adam and Eve is also a tale of two worlds, the world before exile and the one after. Until their departure, Adam and Eve lived in a garden that was full of any number of trees that could provide their sustenance. There was no consciousness or need for thinking, decisions or discernment.

Until such time as God told them they could not eat of the tree that grew in the middle of Eden, they were carefree with their choices, for life was blissful, abundant and even impulsive, with little responsibility. The Garden of Eden was as safe as a womb, as joyous as one might imagine a heaven to be. Theirs was a protected existence.

At a pivotal place, obvious from all sides of the garden, distinct, delightful and different, this fruit was the one thing they could not touch. As readers, we can see that desire has taken center stage. Although Adam and Eve had a responsibility to God,

their covenant apparently had a diminishing hold on their attention. They experienced a desire that would overwhelm even their most blessed commitment. Were Adam and Eve accomplished enough to appreciate the meaning behind God's request for compliance? A simple act of obedience would have changed the course of history. For centuries Judeo-Christian institutions did their very best to keep humankind on the track to obedience, showing little evolutionary success for their most stringent efforts.

However the serpent said to the woman. "You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened."<sup>37</sup> It was not until the serpent informed Eve of the powers gifted by this fruit, that she fell deeper into the dilemma. For her, choosing the fruit *AND* the gift of awareness over obedience (despite its consequences), was worthy of consideration. Was obedience to God enough in face of the daily discipline and commitment He was asking of them? In the weeks, months and years to come, the tree continued to be there, in the middle of the garden, a constant in the play on desire. The serpent assured Eve they would not lose their lives. The dilemma deepened.

"...and you will be like God, knowing good and evil".<sup>38</sup> True to his knowledge of God and privy to His compassion, the serpent foretold a measure of reality that came to pass. Despite their transgression and banishment from a life of bliss, God offered Adam and Eve a life of suffering in exchange for life itself. The condition of their reality was based now in their awareness of nakedness, they were vulnerable, fearful, unworthy, exposed, at risk and shameful. Yet Adam and Eve continued to demonstrate their love and trust in God by choosing to answer Him from their hiding place. In His

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<sup>37</sup> Genesis 3:5, (New American Bible).

<sup>38</sup> Genesis 3:5, (New American Bible).

Divine Mercy, God gifted Adam and Eve with two more things. He clothed them with articles of skin to protect their bodies. He allowed them their awareness and consciousness, not just knowledge but judgment; and as they were sent out of Eden, they went, like God, with insight and foresight. They differentiated, and in that ability there was power to see what was lower, lesser, more and mightier. Adam and Eve were set free to live life fashioned by their desires along with a taste of the struggles ahead. They were like God, but were forced to live now under different circumstances.

The story of Adam and Eve has yet another lesson. We learn that desire was not to be denied. It is pivotal to our existence. It stands center stage in the world, surrounded by contemplation, decisions and action. The story could have read differently. God took Adam and Eve aside, and under His guidance, taught them about the polarity of their desires, how these desires might play havoc with their serenity and solitude. He would caution them to remain steadfast and truthful to the process of communing with God and fulfilling His desires as they go through life, as difficult as it may seem. He would tell them not to be afraid, as betrayal was not the name of the game. Rather, the goal was to harness the killer within who strikes out of fear of the dark and fear of the unknown to learn how to direct this destructive force in constructive ways to consciously destroy whatever it is within one's being that destroys one's awareness of union and harmony with God for greater purposes.<sup>39</sup> If only the story had described the role of ego in these matters, not just as serpent tempter, but as catalyst to new experiences that lead to growth, ultimately a doorway

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<sup>39</sup> Beth Hedva, *Journey from Betrayal to Trust, A Universal Rite of Passage*, (Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts Publishing, 1992), 128.

to deeper levels of awareness and a way for consciousness to discover its union and desire for God. Surely, this is something the masses could comprehend.

“Desire leads us to profound discernment”.<sup>40</sup> The story of Adam and Eve is also the story of ‘not reaching out’ for discernment, consciously choosing not to commune with the rhythm of Universal Life. This then could be a story with missing pieces that can only be found in the unconscious. Is the serpent, likewise Adam and Eve, some arrested and misunderstood “re-collection” of archetypal images from deep within the unconscious, captured in narration for perpetuity? As O’Murchu states in his book *The Transformation of Desire*, we have alienated ourselves from the creative lifeline force that we are dependent on for survival and in its place we have accepted some questionable psychic realm where the forces of good and evil battle it out for supremacy.<sup>41</sup> This notion does not offer us life-giving energy; rather it stands diametrically opposed to the properties of Nature and its redeeming, constructive characteristics. It insults the intuitive understanding of our very nature. This frozen construct alienates us from our ‘body, mind, and spirit’ connection. Imagine how differently civilization could have evolved if it had been based in a theology that had a confident story of desire.

Even though each decade seems to pioneer a new wave of research in science and writings on the subject of God or sin, the experience of our psyche is not afforded the luxury of ‘catching up’ and integrating current theories and philosophies with the past. Science is most impressive. We now know that,

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<sup>40</sup> Diarmuid O’Murchu, *The Transformation of Desire*, 159.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 118.

The origin and evolution of life is connected in the most intimate way with the origin and evolution of the stars...The very matter of which we are composed, the atoms that make life possible, were generated long ago and far away in giant red stars. The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of starstuff.<sup>42</sup>

Four billion years ago, the Earth was a molecular Garden of Eden.<sup>43</sup> Our

understanding of the story of Genesis may require some adaptation of beliefs.

For life to be possible, more than forty different elements must be able to bond together to form molecules. Life molecules cannot be built unless sufficient quantities of all the elements for life are available<sup>44</sup> ....

...One must monkey with the physics of the universe to get enough of the right elements for life, and further to get those elements to join together to form life molecules. One must also fine-tune the universe to get enough nucleons (protons and neutrons) to form the elements<sup>45</sup> ....

...Not only must the universe be fine tuned to get enough nucleons, but also a precise number of electrons must exist<sup>46</sup> ....For many decades astronomers and others have wondered why, given God exists, He would wait so many billions of years to make life. Why did He not do it right away? The answer is that, given the laws and constants of physics God chose to create, it takes about twelve billion years just to fuse enough heavy elements in the nuclear furnaces of several generations of giant stars to make life chemistry possible<sup>47</sup> ....

...The universe also possesses an extreme amount of entropy, or energy degradation. This high level of entropy is essential for life. Without it, systems as small as stars and planets would never form. But as extremely high as the entropy of the universe is, it could not be much higher. If it were higher, systems as large as galaxies would never form. Stars and planets cannot form without galaxies.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*, (New York: Random House, 1980), 233.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

Such is the balance and the wonder of science and the law of entropy is as wonderful. It is one of the most fundamental laws of physics. I introduce it here as it interfaces so well with the story of Adam and Eve. Entropy is the measure of unusable energy and its tendency is to either increase or remain constant.<sup>49</sup> By definition, any system is moving to a *lower* state of usefulness; an overall increase in entropy represents a ‘loss’ of useful energy, which can never be replaced.<sup>50</sup> This energy can be recovered in another form, but it no longer remains as it was in its original state. Entropy is energy degradation and/or a state of inertness (constancy). Because of entropy, the state of order of the initial system is reduced, thereby making entropy an expression of disorder or randomness.<sup>51</sup> What is, is broken down. This law of physics remains faithful in the universe and as quoted earlier, is present in an extreme amount and is essential for life. *Conversely, in order to create or increase the energy in a system, it is necessary to degrade energy from another part of the same system, as to be put to creative use.*<sup>52</sup> In the final analysis, entropy is the cause of death.

Transferring the laws of entropy to the story of Adam and Eve may help us understand that the story of Adam and Eve could be the story of evolution that holds chaos, destruction and creation as normal and natural. Here, the Garden of Eden is the system, and as a system it is complete unto itself, faithful to the laws of God (and physics). Life in the Garden of Eden was inert (or constant) throughout time.

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<sup>49</sup> John Matson, What Keeps Time Moving Forward? *Scientific American, Special Collector's Edition, A Matter of Time*, (Vol. 21, Number 1: 90-93), 92.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

Suddenly, entropy moved in a different direction, from degradation to one of creation. Adam and Eve decide to become more than they are. They eat the apple from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, changing the natural entropy of the system; there is disbursement of energy. Taking action makes them more 'like God'; there is a 'forcing into' organized energy; their desire for something new arrests the process of degradation. The Universe responds to order; it responds in like, to this desire. According to nature, organized energy comes at the expense of another part of the system, and degradation must still occur. Consequently, Adam and Eve are forced from the Garden of Eden. There is a new order.

Connection and communication with God remains intact. Adam and Eve are given life, sustenance and skills. Adam and Eve create and gain useful form, but life is forever changed. According to the laws of physics, energy can never be reclaimed to its original form. "...in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust [stardust], and to dust you shall return".<sup>53</sup> Energy pulled out of inertness (or constancy) into usefulness comes at an expense. To increase in order (useful forms of energy), evolution comes at the expense of disorder elsewhere. By the very nature and character of our desires, we are led to where 'order' (creation) needs to take place next. We are then co-creators in God's self-expression. Out of the fabric that makes this Universe, life within this 'body, mind, spirit' connection cannot be any different. It is what it is. Our universe is a world of disbursement, formation, and degradation; in human terms, a world of desire (passion), creation, and destruction.

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<sup>53</sup> Genesis 3: 17-19, (New American Bible).

This story of Adam and Eve in the Old Testament came to be through altered states of consciousness, some gift of prophecy, a vision, some primordial thought on creation as an intuitive understanding of physics, or in a dream. It is possible it was the answer to a question immersed in desire.

## The Mystics

I do not wish to make the presence of violence and its consequences a tedious reading component of this study. In each segment of this historical review it would be safe to assume that violence involving human life has been present.

The middle ages were chaotic and turbulent times, where church dominated state with religious doctrines that influenced economic matters that built the society of the day, and fashioned minds of that era.

During this time, kings and lords battled with the church over who had the right to control people's lives.<sup>54</sup> Monasteries were numerous, dotting the countryside right across the continent. They played a dominant role in the community's life. As centers of influence, not only were they the heart of church service, but of learning and healing, housing, libraries, and hospitals, assisting the poor with their health, offering spiritual counsel and advice, as well as providing work. Monasteries also acted as museums, curating for great works of art and literature.

In England [for instance] monasteries were also great landowners with immense power and wealth, owning a third of the land and a quarter of the country's wealth.

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<sup>54</sup> John Farndon and Victoria Parker, *Visual Factfinder - History*, (Essex: Bardfield Press, 2004), 314.

The poor were oppressed, their land taken away for back payment on heavy tolls in tithes (church taxes). Payment was made in seeds, wheat, or livestock and kept in tithe barns owned by the church.<sup>55</sup>

Failure to comply with tithing would banish souls to Hell at death.

The middle ages were also a time of schism and discord within the church itself.

Indulgences in fine foods and high living (mocking the oppressed and impoverished) became commonplace among priests and monks whose behaviour greatly fractured the church. To add to the confusion and feelings of scandal, the faithful dealt with a papacy that was split with three popes all claiming authority at the same time.<sup>56</sup> It was dangerous for anyone not to be deemed orthodox.<sup>57</sup> The Inquisition continued to gather momentum, as it was bent on suppressing heretics and anyone who might lead an organized challenge to church authority. Forerunners to the Reformation started confronting the church both in matters of doctrine and practice.

Medieval philosophy and theology was in a state of turmoil, their relationship in question. There was bitter controversy over Aristotelian philosophy, with some considering it to be irreconcilable with Christian faith.<sup>58</sup> As discussions among theologians in the universities became increasingly specialized, a new intellectualism of the clergy emerged, leaving them more removed from the simple messages preached to the people.<sup>59</sup> ‘Mind’ became the primary qualifier and as a result, changes

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 320-321.

<sup>56</sup> Anne Hunt, *The Trinity, Insights from the Mystics*, (Collegeville: a Michael Glazieu Book, Liturgical Press, 2010), 100.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 82

in church structure began to mimic the class divisions in society, increasing the concerns that certain parts of church hierarchy saw themselves as entitled.<sup>60</sup>

Further to that, with the birth of many new schools of theology and a more precise, analytical approach to prayer, religious practices developed a tendency to classify, analyze, and compartmentalize prayer life.<sup>61</sup> This lessening of contemplative prayer came with the expressed idea that contemplation was reserved for an elite few [with concern] that it might be full of dangers and not something to which the ordinary Christian should aspire.<sup>62</sup>

These chaotic times gave birth to the divergent theological and philosophical ideas of the times. In this section, I will examine beliefs of the mystics that may have appeared contrary to church doctrines, which nevertheless were esteemed and allowed to prosper for a time, thus adding to the confusion on theology of desire of that age. Though both male and female mystics made a significant contribution to theology, this study will focus on the female mystic as she best circumvented the dichotomy between the Church and its teachings on contemplation and desire for God.

The predominant culture of the day held a misogynistic view of women. Required to be invisible to be virtuous, women in general were considered disorderly and sexually voracious.<sup>63</sup> In contrast, if a woman achieved any type of prominence she was

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>61</sup> Marsha Sinetar, *Ordinary People as Monks & Mystics, Lifestyles for Spiritual Wholeness*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 109.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 109-110.

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Body and Soul, Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 164.

open to accusation of transgression against God's will in gender arrangements, and of sinning against conventional female behavior.<sup>64</sup> Her natural state was that of subjection and included the widespread notion of her inferiority. Even holy women could be labeled heretics, witches or whores, unless their transgressions met with God's approval in some demonstrable way.<sup>65</sup> Yet there were female mystics who managed to rise above these cultural mores to garner the recognition and esteem of the church.

One can only guess that the convergence of a multiplicity of factors played a role in this phenomenon. First, there was the emerging theology and reverence for Mary, which male counterparts accepted, opening the door to worship and devotion of a female entity as Mother of God. The Church acknowledged the feminine as creative energy. Second, there was the psychological need for nurturance in times of trouble, anguish and strife, that brought both popes and statesmen to these women who had achieved an idealized state of virtue and wisdom coupled with a solid reputation for their teachings, mysticism, and theology based in their reverent desire for and relationship with God.<sup>66</sup> The fervency of the women outperformed that of their male counterparts, which brought men of leadership to seek God's guidance as it manifested through these women. This was a time when feminist theology shone, expressing itself in teachings, writing, art, music, and medicine.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 165.

The early church had been founded on religious traditions that encouraged an intimate and direct relationship with God; the church of the middle ages scrutinized it behind the guise of the Inquisition, considering personal practice both venerable and dubious.<sup>67</sup> Even though the writings of Saint Paul frequently urged his own disciples to grow in their own intimate knowledge of God<sup>68</sup>, by the end of the middle ages, the church described this practice as best heuristic, lacking a solid base in reason and church doctrine. Ironically enough, this tradition for personal experience of God lived on through the mystics, retaining meaning for a good part of the Middle Ages.<sup>69</sup> Female mystics were not totally exempt of discrimination, however. Any correspondence with church authority was heavily prefixed with pious words acknowledging her rightful place in society and the Church as a member of the female gender.

The times were complicated with admonitions from the church and fears of heresy and now society differed based on geographical location, culture and time. Earlier I explored how Greek civilization instilled excellence and character, planting in their populace a desire for vengeance, power, status and honor. Approximately one thousand years later, fear was rampant once more only one's worthiness was diminished by a sense of obligation to the masters of church or state, threats of purgatory and hell for lack of payment of tithes and religious indulgences. There was little comfort offered; even solace and a personal relationship with God were rebuked.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 109.

The faithful were subjected to many kinds of abuse. There is no doubt that religiosity was highly politically charged on a range of levels.<sup>70</sup>

The papacy was concerned with extolling any virtues or truths the ‘uneducated’ could not understand or appreciate. Critical thinking was relegated to those of stature and education. The faithful were immersed in a worldview that embraced ‘suffering along with Christ’; visual arts upheld this passion, depicting Christ in art as the Man of Sorrows, the Suffering Christ, His body scourged, His head crowned with thorns.<sup>71</sup> His sorrowful face had a pervasive immanence that people venerated, as they coped with suffering of their own. In terms of popular piety, this devotion to the suffering and passion of Christ was particularly strong and wielded much power over the faithful.<sup>72</sup>

“This [phenomenon]...was [also] connected to [doctrine that re-enforced] a dualism between body and soul; salvation was understood as the purification of the latter by its escape from the former”.<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately the paradox associated with this theology lead to a denigration of the human body that played itself out as conflict in the unconscious of Christians for centuries to come.

The mystics were favored with a different worldview, as highlighted by their ecstatic experience of God,

...to a distinctive type of divine rapture...[likened to] intense sexual passion.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Anne Hunt, *The Trinity, Insights from the Mystics*, 78-79.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>73</sup> F. LeRon Shults, “*Introduction: Saving Desire?*”, <http://eerdword.wordpress.com/2011/07/14/saving-desire-by-f-1...>(accessed January 24, 2012), 3.

<sup>74</sup> Diarmuid O’Murchu, *The Transformation of Desire*, 156.

Given the nature of their times, the medieval female mystic “[did] not rebel against or torture their flesh out of guilt over its capabilities so much as [to use]...the possibilities of its full sensual and affective range to soar ever closer to God”.<sup>75</sup>

[Their experience] has been misinterpreted and dismissed [by some] as temptation from Satan, whereas, in fact, it may be precisely the moment when the Holy One...engag[ed] the psyche most deeply.<sup>76</sup>

The writings of the female mystic embraced a dual phenomenon; alongside these documented ecstatic experiences full of passion were their writings on the Incarnation [the embodiment of Christ] that saved them from persecution by the church. The female mystic revealed her deep veneration of ‘body, spirit’ in her visions, her writings, her prophecies. Here was the church expressing tolerance (at the very least) and acceptance (at the very best) for ‘body, mind, spirit connection’ in light of culturally oppressive views on the body (particularly the female body). The female mystic was prolific in her contribution as healer offering messages of comfort, as counselor for the good of others, as political advisor to clergy and statesmen, as fulfillment of her desire for being part of co-creation, guided by God.<sup>77</sup> Eloquent, creative and logical these women had a place in a society that had already timed itself out as corrupt and wasted.

Standing out in stark contrast to the general attitude towards sin characteristic of her church, and contrary to the philosophy of her age, perhaps to her own experience

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<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Body and Soul*, 164.

<sup>76</sup> Diarmuid O’Murchu, 156.

<sup>77</sup> Elizabeth Alvilda Petroff, *Body and Soul*, 164.

of sin, guilt, and fear, Julian, the mystic from Norwich, informed through a parable, taught the following:<sup>78</sup>

Holy Church taught me that sinners are sometimes worthy of blame and wrath, but I could not see these in God in my showing. I saw that our Lord was never wrathful, nor ever shall be...Our soul is oned to God...and therefore between God and our soul there is neither wrath nor forgiveness because there is no between<sup>79</sup>....

Julian [says]: "God showed me that we should not feel guilty because of sin for sin is valuable"<sup>80</sup>....

...She cautioned against too readily seeing good and evil in things: "We perceive some doings as good and some as evil, but our Lord does not perceive them so...There is no doer but God...It is necessary that sin should exist. But all will be well, and all will be well and every manner of thing will be well."<sup>81</sup>

Julian was also cautionary against too much self-accusation, writing:

As long as we are in this life and find ourselves foolishly dwelling on sinfulness, our God tenderly touches us and joyfully calls us, saying: 'Let all your love be, my child. Turn to me, I am everything you need. Enjoy me and your liberation...She says it is our failure to see God in all things that leads to our despair and self-berating: "We often fail to see God and then we fall into ourselves and feel there is something wrong with us...The solution to such despair is a rekindling of power, wisdom, and goodness on our part. Because we were "loved from before the beginning" and "made for love."<sup>82</sup>

One can see the constancy in the message of the mystics and from the church's view, their contrariness. How is it they avoided recrimination? Matthew Fox believes mystics were hungry for goodness, hungry for blessings, which helps explain why they spent little time talking about sin. They preferred to talk of God and ways to God than

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<sup>78</sup> Joan M. Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter, the Theology of Julian of Norwich*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 119.

<sup>79</sup> Matthew Fox, *Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, Crown Publishing Group, 1999), 127-128.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Andrea Janelle Dickens, *The Female Mystic, Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages*, (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2009), 127.

to talk of sin and human folly.<sup>83</sup> They encouraged others beyond the popular notions of good and evil to refrain from judgment so as to experience God more fully.<sup>84</sup> Slow to judge good and evil, mystics were considered to be artists, artists of the soul's deep experience.<sup>85</sup> They fulfilled a great need from within the Holy Mother Church.

Navigating their way through a landscape that was 'overwhelmed with grace and devotion, overwhelmed with adversity, overwhelmed with feelings of guilt and penitence' ... the mystic's yearning for God [drew] them deeper into contemplation, seemingly even to arenas where the demonic and divine grace do battle with one another.<sup>86</sup> As a result of their experiences, we came to understand that, 'the holy life appears as a strenuous and uncertain groping towards a goal that is not fully perceived, let alone conceptualized'.<sup>87</sup>

Not only was the desire for God fervent and paramount in their hearts and minds, the intensity of that desire birthed visions and mystical inspirations. Transported physically and mentally, mystics were totally absorbed in a movement, a journey in which the psyche or essential self came to life with, and in, God.<sup>88</sup> The basic desires for tranquility, idealism, order, acceptance and social contact were met in this relationship (see Appendix 1). Even though this longing was compartmentalized by

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<sup>83</sup> Matthew Fox, *Sins of the Spirit*, 121.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>86</sup> Andrea J. Dickens, *The Female Mystic, Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages*, 154.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>88</sup> Marsha Sinetar, *Ordinary People as Monks & Mystics*, 81.

medieval society in a way that disavowed bodily senses with any real experience of God, the mystics, congruent with their hearts' desire, managed to integrate both, so as to remind us of our cosmic relatedness and connection.<sup>89</sup> As Julian of Norwich explains: 'God wishes to be seen, and he wishes to be sought, and he wishes to be expected, and he wishes to be trusted. He longs for humans, and the human, in response...should long for the love of God in return.'<sup>90</sup>

From within her mysticism, Hildegard von Bingen delivered a framework that expressed both the cosmos and the individual. Hildegard viewed the world as an organism, in which each creature was both a symbol of God's overflowing plenitude and at the same time could be an instrument through which God worked. Her vision started with the being of God, primordial, which is what creatures return to in their being.<sup>91</sup> She asks, 'How could God be known to be life, except through the living things which glorify him, since the things that praise his glory have proceeded from him?'"<sup>92</sup> Hildegard believed that all creation lived in God.

She saw the human body and the human psyche as creation-in-miniature. According to Hildegard, we are in the cosmos and the cosmos is in us. "Now God has built the human form into the world structure, indeed even into the cosmos," she

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<sup>89</sup> Michael Dieciuc, "*The Mystical Mind: The Philosophical and Psychological Significance of Mystical Experiences*," 154.

<sup>90</sup> Joan M. Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter*, 138.

<sup>91</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, (Santa Fe, N.M: Bear & Company, Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality, 1985), [http://www.sol.com.au/kor/5\\_02b.htm](http://www.sol.com.au/kor/5_02b.htm), (accessed Feb 21, 2012).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, (accessed Feb 21, 2012).

declared, “just as an artist would use a particular pattern in her work.”<sup>93</sup> If this be so, then we are interdependent with all of creation and it is from this law of interdependence that truly wise living will be learned and practiced.<sup>94</sup>

Hildegard and her contemporaries flourished in the middle ages when science and theology, for a brief time, came together in creative ways. It was scholasticism in the end that won the game of domination and swayed the church’s focus away from mysticism and cosmology towards the ordered and systematized theologies.<sup>95</sup>

The medieval church found middle ground in the compartmentalization of body, mind, spirit, with veneration of the human Mary as the Mother of the human Jesus in conjunction with a growing Christological devotion that emphasized Christ’s human nature more fully.<sup>96</sup> The Church embraced Mother Mary, as Universal Mother, Nurturer, Caregiver, Benefactor. By the 14th century, she had grown in popularity as compassionate intercessor and protector of humanity. The female mystic was now marginalized. Mysticism went underground, and the faithful seeking help for their salvation found it in the theological devotion to both Mary and the suffering passion of Christ.

The female mystic’s veneration of ‘body, mind and spirit’ was expressed in her visions, her writings, her prophecies, and healings. This belief and conviction in experiential mysticism would not claim its position in human history in any great way

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., (accessed Feb 21, 2012).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., (accessed Feb 21, 2012).

<sup>95</sup> Andrea Janelle Dickens , *The Female Mystic, Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages*, 35.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 17.

again until the twentieth century. For centuries though we remembered these mystics as unique individuals with exceptional consciousness and the deepest desire for God.

## Modernity

The era of modernity, characterized by Industrialization, was more dynamic than any preceding time in history. This was a time of transformation where social change and economic development were closely related with technological innovation. This cultural and intellectual change starting in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, extended as far as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was marked by the extensive organization of an economy around mining, transportation, manufacturing and the reorganization of agriculture. Portrayed in more detail, it was associated with the establishment of economic institutions, the handling of a new market economy and the building of political organizations, promoting the ideas of nation-state and mass democracy to the world.

Modernity was enveloped with the notion that science would lead to all knowledge, throwing back the shroud on religion, cosmology and mysticism as superstitions. The world was being transformed by human intervention. There was a move away from Plato to an Aristotelian approach to thinking. It was about observation, methodology and the power of the intellect. This period saw innovation in physics, astronomy, biology, and in institutions supporting scientific investigation largely because of this attitudinal change in thinking and perceiving nature and the universe. It all started with a systematized process for skepticism that went on to challenge the truth behind

all beliefs. This new era was characterized by the Cartesian philosophy of ‘loss of certainty,’ transforming the concept of truth, with God and the Church as its longtime guarantors, to the realization that certainty could never be established.<sup>97</sup> This inspired humanity to question all manner of things and it was this thinking that secured secularization. Our intellect was now held in higher regard than any felt-sense in body and spirit, but more importantly this newfound faith and hope in the omnipotence of the intellect entrenched the dichotomy between humanity and God.

While social change succeeded in emancipation from religious leadership and influence, the Church as an organization with authority kept pace nevertheless with society, in its growth and development. Besides organizing itself around the Aristotelian process of logic, it offered Christian doctrine influenced by desires implicit in society guided by family values, the need for socialization and acceptance, honour for religious traditions within an orderly framework of worship and study, embraced social justice, and created a space to experience tranquility (see Appendix 1). Consequently, the secularization of society clearly encouraged human thinking and its varied forms of expression, keeping its promise to liberate humankind from ignorance and irrationality.

In the 15th century and earlier, the concept of *individualism* was foreign to the culture of the time and typically, whenever the word *individual* was used, it was used numerically and meant “indivisible”; rarely did it refer to “a person.”<sup>98</sup> By the 17th

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<sup>97</sup> Derek Briton, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: A Postmodern Critique*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 75-76.

<sup>98</sup> Peter Abbs, *The Development of Autobiography in Western Culture*, (PhD. diss., University of Sussex, 1986), <http://www.findingaugustine.rog/Record/227>, (accessed May 13, 2012).

century, *individualism* as a concept gathered momentum and although many persons expressed disapproval in the idea of separateness, now it defined a person as possessing his or her own needs, goals, and desires. As in everything during this era, organized movements were started, among them an influential form of *individualist* anarchism, called “ego anarchism”.<sup>99</sup> Perhaps for the first time in history, we had documented discourse on desire.

As imagined, counter-movements called altruism and utilitarianism, rose up to proclaim that individuals should not treat themselves with higher regard than they had for others; agreeing however, that one should *not sacrifice* one’s own interests or well-being for others, as long as these were substantially-equivalent to the interests and well-being of others, of what is right in conduct for all concerned.<sup>100</sup>

This was just the beginning of the development of ideas on desire, individualism and society. Philosophers and psychologists of the day developed many theories.

In 1844, Stirner published *The Ego and Its Own*,<sup>101</sup> advocating self-assertion, believing that the only limitation on the rights of the individual was their power to obtain what they desired.

I am the owner of humanity, am humanity, and do nothing for the good of another humanity. Fool, you are a unique humanity, that you make a merit of wanting to live for another than you are.

...everyone is ego; and, if only this ego has rights, then it is ‘the ego’, it is not I. But I am not an ego along with other egos, but the sole ego: I am unique. Hence my wants too are unique, and my deeds; in short, everything about me is unique. And it is only as this unique I that I take everything for my own, as I set myself to

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<sup>99</sup> David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), <http://books.google.ca/books?id=Fgya85u7S-4C&q=ego+anarchism#v=snippet&q=ego%20anarchism&f=false>, (accessed May 14, 2012), 99.

<sup>100</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, (1863 republished in 2008 by Forgotten Books), [http://books.google.ca/books?id=e2P6XYi5K3QC&printsec=frontcover&dq=utilitarianism&hl=en&sa=X&ei=KZqxT8e\\_KqzciQLjnoSeBA&ved=0CD4Q6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=utilitarianism&f=false](http://books.google.ca/books?id=e2P6XYi5K3QC&printsec=frontcover&dq=utilitarianism&hl=en&sa=X&ei=KZqxT8e_KqzciQLjnoSeBA&ved=0CD4Q6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=utilitarianism&f=false), (accessed May 14, 2012), 20-21.

<sup>101</sup> David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow*, 99

work, and develop myself, only as this. I do not develop men, nor as man, but, as I, I develop – myself.<sup>102</sup>

In his *Essay on Self-Reliance*, Ralph Waldo Emerson declared, “Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.”<sup>103</sup> Emerson opposed reliance on social structures, both civil and religious, because through them the individual approached the divine second hand, and to achieve this original relationship one must “Insist on one’s self; never imitate,” for if the relationship is secondary the connection is lost.<sup>104</sup>

Descartes ascertained that nothing was certain except one’s own thoughts. In *Passions of the Soul*, he writes “of the passion of desire as an agitation of the soul that projects desire into the future. He believed an emotion was usually explained as an event internal to, or taking place within, a subject that produced associated ideas, all of which formed a characteristic desire which in turn registered itself in the body to generate motion.”<sup>105</sup>

According to Kant, desire could represent things that were absent, not only those things at hand. He attached moral and temporal values to desire in that objects, which enhanced one’s future, were considered more desirable than those that did not; he introduced the possibility, or even necessity, of postponing desire in anticipation of the future.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>103</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson – Texts, Essays: First Series, <http://www.emersoncentral.com/selfreliance.htm>, (accessed May 13, 2012).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., (accessed May 13, 2012).

<sup>105</sup> John Cottingham, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 380.

<sup>106</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.C. Meredith, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 34-38.

Kant established a relationship between beauty and pleasure which he described in *Critique of Judgment* writing, “I can say of every representation [desire]<sup>107</sup> that it is at least possible (as a cognition) it should be bound up with a pleasure. Of representation [desire] that I call pleasant I say that it actually excites pleasure in me. But the beautiful we think as having a necessary reference to satisfaction.”<sup>108</sup>

In *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Hume suggested that reason was subject to passion. Motion (actions) was put into effect by desire, passions, and inclinations.<sup>109</sup> It was desire, along with belief, that motivated action. He believed in the autonomy of desire.

For Hegel, desire was conceived in substantially negative terms as a ‘desire-for’ something that once fulfilled, the desiring subject no longer desired what it had; the object lost its very value and desirability. We are autonomous, unified beings driven by a desire for self-knowledge as a means to Absolute Knowledge.<sup>110</sup> This pursuit is some teleological series of improvements or self-overcoming; it pushes back its boundary of self-knowledge to go beyond.<sup>111</sup>

Sartre proclaimed we desired to be what we were not and to achieve this required the negation of our own self-consciousness. We continually desired to be everything

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<sup>107</sup> Desire, as defined by Kant, is ‘found in the representation of the object.’

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>109</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4705/4705-h/4705-h.htm#2H\\_4\\_0081](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4705/4705-h/4705-h.htm#2H_4_0081), (accessed May 12, 2012).

<sup>110</sup> Anthony O’Shea, “*Desiring Desire: How Desire Makes Us Human, All Too Human*,” *Sociology*; Nov 2002, Vol.36 Issue 4, [http://goliah.ecnext.com/coms2/gi\\_0199-2295245/Desiring-desire-how-desire-makes.html](http://goliah.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-2295245/Desiring-desire-how-desire-makes.html), (accessed March 8, 2012), 926.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 925.

in order to gain complete self-understanding. “To me man means to reach toward being God. Or if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to become God....man is the desire to be.”<sup>112</sup>

Freud was renowned for his redefinition of sexual desire as the primary motivational energy of human life, and the theory that dreams were the source of insight into unconscious desires. According to Freud, our unconscious self was the dominating influence in our lives and it contained all of our primal instincts, sexuality, aggressiveness, and our bent toward self-destruction and death.<sup>113</sup> Freud’s purpose in psychoanalysis was to lead the client to uncover the truth about his or her desires, but this was possible only if that desire was articulated. In naming it, the client created and brought forth a new presence into the world. Psychoanalysis taught the client “to bring desire into existence.”<sup>114</sup>

Jung had interesting comments on desire: “He whose desire turns away from outer things, reaches the place of the soul...He becomes a fool through endless desire...If he possessed his desire, and his desire did not possess him, he would lay a hand on his soul, since his desire is the image and expression of his soul.”<sup>115</sup> Jung believed the soul was found in desire itself, and not in the play of the objects of desire.<sup>116</sup> God was not

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<sup>112</sup> Sartre, 1943: 566. quoted in Anthony O’Shea, “*Desiring Desire: How Desire Makes Us Human, All Too Human*”, 927.

<sup>113</sup> Stephen Wilson, ed., *The Book of The Mind, Key Writings on the Mind from Plato and the Buddha through Shakespeare, Descartes, and Freud to the Latest Discoveries of Neuroscience*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003), 309-315.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>115</sup> C.G. Jung, *The Red Book, Liber Novus*, (London: Philemon Series, The Philemon Foundation & W.W. Norton & Co. 2009), 232.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

dead but had a new name and a new location. Salvation was now founded in individuation, and the spiritual art of becoming a whole person.

These philosophical ideas influenced a movement, which within the artistic community, moved to reject a utilitarian and moral approach to art and developed instead a cult of beauty and refined sensuous pleasure. Art was now characterized by a style that exuded sensuality, was full of symbols, and could relate to music, colors, and words. As a movement, it embraced individualism and culturally came to mean self-creation and experimentation. Here were philosophers, mystics, artists and writers who rejected social convention, did not follow popular opinion, nor adhered to dogma of the day. True to their ideals they lived according to their means and desires. Modernity ushered in desire as something to believe in, with new concepts. Desire returned with a grand entrance via the secular world; yet again, it remained shrouded as an abandoned theology by the institutional church.

## Postmodernity

For the purpose of this study, I will assume modernity ended in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was followed by the era of postmodernity<sup>117</sup> until the present day. This period is distinguished from the rest of human history with economic development that

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<sup>117</sup> In order to find as much information as possible on all that is happening in contemporary history, I thought it appropriate to turn to the Internet for this section of the study alone to access current, up-to-date information on all the innovations changing the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Postmodernity website was last modified March 11, 2012. In the interest of excellence in workmanship, the site asks for feedback on the information provided under the headings of trustworthiness, objectivity, completeness of information and writing style. At the time of writing this site rated comparably well with sites like contemporary history and religion that covered material relevant to this study.

produced the most significant changes in everyday life, unprecedented in the history of humankind.

Advances in technology and medicine have impacted life expectancy and increased communication has contributed to democratization. In the history of science and technology, we have enjoyed airplanes, the development of spaceflight and exploration, nuclear technology, laser and semiconductor technology, the development of molecular biology and genetic engineering, along with the development of particle physics and the Standard Model of quantum field theory, not to mention the dawning of the Computer Age.<sup>118</sup>

The Information Age, commonly known as the Age of the Computer, is characterized by the ability of individuals to transfer information freely, and to have instant access to knowledge that would have been difficult or impossible to find previously.

This era is not only marked by a shift in handling of information but it is also characterized by an economy based on Internet directories, search engines like Google (founded in 1998), and new approaches to relevancy ranking and information retrieval. Innovations like Web 2.0 have inspired information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design and collaboration on the World Wide Web which has led to the development and evolution of web-based communities, hosted services, and web applications, which in turn have birthed social-networking sites, video-sharing sites, wikis, blogs, and folksonomies.

The future is anyone's guess. Longer-term trends are currently being researched by future studies, an approach that uses various models and several methods (such as "forecasting" and "back-casting") to search out through a collection of quantitative and qualitative data the possibility, probability, and desirability of change in the on-going effort to analyze alternative futures.

Postmodernity represents the culmination of a process where constant change has become the *status quo* and the notion of progress has become

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<sup>118</sup> David S. Alberts, Daniel S. Papp. eds., *The Information Age: An Anthology on Its Impact and Consequences*, CCRP Publication Series, <http://www.dodccrp.org>, Alberts\_Anthology\_1.pdf, 1997, (accessed May 14, 2012), 36-50.

obsolete. Aspects to our contemporary culture include the fragmentation of authority as well as the commoditization of knowledge.<sup>119</sup>

Jameson, a political theorist and literary critic, views a number of phenomena specific to postmodernity. He speaks of “a new kind of superficiality” or “depthlessness” in which models (such as hermeneutics, the dialectic, Freudian repression, existentialist distinction between authenticity and inauthenticity, and the semiotic distinction of signifier and signified) that once explained people and things in terms of an “inside” and an “outside”, have been rejected.<sup>120</sup>

Where there was culture during the Modern era that sought redemption and kept sacredness, giving back to the world the enchantment that science and religion had taken away, postmodernity has undergone a fundamental mutation and views the notion of utopia and idealism as futile.<sup>121</sup>

Viewing postmodernity with skepticism, it is important to appreciate how this ubiquitous dissemination of knowledge could fundamentally alter humanity, the relationship between reader and that which is read, between observer and the observed, and between those who consume and those who produce.<sup>122</sup> The information age has created a decentralized, media-dominated society in which ideas are only simulacra,

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<sup>119</sup> Martin Irvine, “*The Postmodern*”, “*Postmodernism*”, “*Postmodernity*”, *Approaches to Po-Mo*, <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/pomo.html>, (accessed May 13, 2012).

<sup>120</sup> Fredric Jameson, “*Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*” found in Thomas Docherty, ed., *Postmodernism: A Reader*, (New York: Harvester Wheatsheat, 1993).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

inter-referential representations and copies of each other with no real, original, stable or objective source of communication and meaning.<sup>123</sup>

Postmodernity has created a world *once removed* from our body, mind, spirit connection, and risks losing a depth of 'beingness' that comes from experience first hand and living a life reflected back at itself. The discourse on desire continues and while making resurgence, philosophers, sociologists and theologians are starting to address the corruption it has endured, the rehabilitation it needs and the transformation for humanity it could suggest.<sup>124</sup> For the future, a more evolved understanding of itself may take shape. In the meantime, even though postmodernity is so far limited to an eighty year window of time, you can note the variance still present among thinkers with the following excerpts.

Maurice Blanchot (1907-2003) writes, "for passion [desire] to become energy, it is necessary that it be constricted, that it be mediated by passing through a necessary moment of insensibility, then it will be the greatest passion possible."<sup>125</sup> Here stoicism is a form of discipline, through which the passions [desire] pass. Blanchot says, "Apathy is the spirit of negation, applied to the man who has chosen to be sovereign. Dispersed and uncontrolled passion does not augment one's creative force but diminishes it. Apathy is opposition not to desire but to its spontaneity."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>124</sup> F. LeRon Shults, "Introduction: Saving Desire?," (accessed January 24, 2012).

<sup>125</sup> Eleanor Kaufman, *The Delirium of Praise: Bataille, Blanchot, Deleuze, Foucault, Klossowski*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 179.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 179.

Lacan's (1901-1981) concept of desire is central to his theories and follows Freud's concept of *wish*. In *The Signification of the Phallus*, Lacan distinguishes desire from need and demand.<sup>127</sup> For Lacan, “desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second.”<sup>128</sup> Lacan proclaims desire can never be satisfied. Desire is not a relation to an object but a relation to a lack.

As quoted in O’Shea, Levinas (1906-1995) maintained desire was not about satiation but about seeking more, as an opening to and acceptance of the infinite. “I subjectively experience affirmative desire that is more than I am, one that I can never fulfill and never, ever sate, but it is not a ‘desire-for’, it is not lack. Rather than making me more than I am, I drown in the experience, I am lost to and dissolved in it. Beyond limits and identity I am opened up to the infinite by desire.”<sup>129</sup>

Gilles Deleuze’s (1925-1995) philosophical mind “also challenged desire as lack and postulated that desire ceaselessly drove toward and sought its own limits, a continual affirmation of life that was beyond, and was a continuous openness with the ability to respond to and be affected by, difference, and was related to our capacity to respond.”<sup>130</sup> In being open to difference, Deleuze believed we became more than we are, different from what we are. Desire was productive and life affirming. For

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<sup>127</sup> Anthony O’Shea, “*Desiring Desire: How Desire Makes Us Human, All Too Human*,” 927.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 927.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 928.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 927.

Deluze, we are able to be more than what society would represent and constrain us to be.<sup>131</sup>

In his book, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel*, Girard (1923-present) speaks about desire, as mimetic, in the following terms.<sup>132</sup> Our desires are borrowed from others. Far from being autonomous, our desire for a certain object is always provoked by the desire of another person — the model — for this same object. “The object has some value only because it is desired by another.”<sup>133</sup> This means that the relationship between the subject and the object is not direct: there is always a triangular relationship of subject, model, and object.<sup>134</sup>

O’Murchu, sociologist and Catholic priest writes, “The longings of the human heart, the desires for meaning, purpose and fulfillment are all born of a yearning that defies rational explanation. Many scientists have a limited view of desire, and many religious leaders have expended a vast amount of energy in moral campaigns against the immorality of desire.”<sup>135</sup> O’Murchu suggests a spiritual practice of yearning and challenges us to see that desire is inescapable, full of ambiguity, and as being part of

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 927-8.

<sup>132</sup> Rene Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. by Yvonne Freccero, (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1965).

<sup>133</sup> The Mimetic Desire, s.v. <http://www.cottet.org/girard/desir1.en.htm>, (accessed May 13, 2012).

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., (accessed May 13, 2012).

<sup>135</sup> Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, review of *The Transformation of Desire*, by Diarmuid O’Murchu, <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/books.php?id=16712>, (accessed March 8, 2012).

an unconscious process, remains “a gift to be embraced rather than a malady to be gotten rid of.”<sup>136</sup>

Some see desire as one more brain process to be investigated by neuro-science (cf. Schroeder 2004). I wish to highlight the *teleology*, the goal (s) which inform our desiring at every stage of its being and becoming. These goals are primarily cosmic, planetary and transpersonal<sup>137</sup> ....

...*We burn with an eternal longing for the infinite.* This is the purpose of our life; this is a goal of all our strivings.<sup>138</sup>

Wendy Farley, as theologian and educator, acknowledges,

...desire does not wait until we are free from illusion or anger. Desire itself will guide us, past, and through all our mistakes, pain, losses, and moments of despair. If we can connect with even the smallest hint of this desire, which emanates from the divine image deep within us, then nothing, not even ourselves, can break this thread that leads us home.”<sup>139</sup>

F. LeRon Shults, theologian and philosopher, as collaborator in his book, *Saving Desire, The Seduction of Christian Theology*, writes that theology should learn to emphasize the positivity of desire, that our lives can be ordered in a more wholesome way with the appropriate intensification of desire.<sup>140</sup> Secondly, he emphasizes the sociality of desire and suggests we learn more about the way we order our lives together in communal relations and practices to shape desire. Thirdly, he emphasizes the physicality of saving desire, and writes, “We are not saved *from* bodily experience,

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., (accessed March 8, 2012).

<sup>137</sup> Diarmuid O’Murchu, *The Transformation of Desire*, 10.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>140</sup> F. LeRon Shults, “*Introduction: Saving Desire?*,” (accessed January 24, 2012).

but in and through them.”<sup>141</sup> In studying and writing about desire it is his intention to intensify the insatiable desire for the infinite goodness of God.

With postmodernism, religious and spiritual communities bring desire back to life, recognizing its full potential within a triumvirate of body, mind, and spirit.

Consideration is being given to the re-socialization and reintegration of desire as a theology, offering desire as a way to balanced living and expression of aliveness in God. Desire is being revisited under new confidences.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., (accessed January 24, 2012).

## MY EXPERIENCE OF MAKING ART

I was dutiful, always busy, a 'doing' machine. It was what I knew about myself and about living; I rarely stopped to reflect on the richness of my life. As an artist, I was unaffected by my paintings or my connection to them; I was unaware of what or how these paintings contributed to my life. I lived in my head most days and forgot the pleasures of moving, hearing, smelling and tasting life. Then I attended university and enrolled in expressive art classes, which introduced a new realm of 'being-ness' that reacquainted myself with 'body, mind, spirit' awareness. My process of awakening came gently and slowly over a period of five years.

I remember participating in an installation with members of my expressive art class, where we were asked to create a moving sculpture with our bodies. This meant following our inner promptings, and allowed art to happen organically as a living, moving energy from within the group. Very quickly my repertoire of 'doing' behavior ran out and for whatever reason, probably embarrassment; repeating any of my prior movements felt unacceptable. I was still participating, still moving when I realized I had to come up with something original. I remember feeling uncomfortable, unaware of what I really wanted of myself. There was a part of me that was so shy and introverted it did not want to display any prompted movements. This shyness could easily have shut me down. I was only willing to do what I knew, what was constant and comfortable for me. Even swinging my arms, tapping my feet or rolling under the table required a decision to participate and every action took courage. This awareness put me face to face with my inertia.

I tried moving my body in the way that 'I' felt, then I tried showing how 'I felt,' as well as doing 'what' I felt. Movement stopped being automatic; now it was conscious and purposeful. Soon I came to understand that I was supposed to be moving for the sake of my 'self.' This was my opportunity to do what I wanted to do, and only what I wanted to do. I was learning to respond to my inner promptings. If it did not feel right, I refrained from moving in that way or I would wait for a prompter, sometimes waiting for long periods, as inside my head, there was a lot of noisy chatter. I was aware of my conscious mind in a way I had never been aware of it before. There I was in a room, moving with other human beings, in silence, more aware of my conscious mind than ever before.

At some point I became conscious of my expression; but more importantly, about allowing myself true expression. I was reflecting in movement what I was really feeling. This event and these movements were different from dancing, which I could do publicly and enjoyed immensely. I became intent on listening to the softer, gentler voices in my head and holding them gently in time and space, without being pulled in the direction of the noisy chatter I was also having. Eventually this exercise taught me to acknowledge the guidance that comes from my body and mind interaction and what also appeared to be my spirit.

This experience had a huge impact on my perception and delighted my senses; it was very freeing. I remember closing my eyes, so I could not see the other members of the group; this allowed me to go inside myself and get those sensory readings. It helped to hang my head down, so I would not meet anyone's eyes. It was a gift I gave myself, a gift I needed, and was not aware just how much until I finally did close my

eyes. My senses grew clearer. The more I did what it was I felt like doing, the better it felt, the freer I felt. This event was an important introduction to this other world. Today, I feel this freedom whenever I paint.

My early art was rather primitive as might be expected. My judgment of it played havoc with me. "Havoc" was there all the time but I was not conscious of him until he showed up one day, rather unexpectedly, in several paintings. As a form with distinctive features, he was always pleasant looking. He actually presented with the same features from one art piece to another, for this is how I knew him. Intuitively I knew his name and his role. The way he made his entrance was mysterious, totally unconscious and speaks to the power behind art and touch drawing. Otherwise known as judgment, "Havoc" created a lot of angst in my life and it wanted to be known. His was an energy that not only introduced me to a part of myself and taught me about the damage it could do, but it was also an energy that came out of the shadow and transformed itself, the more I painted.

Whenever I painted, I would make thirty or more 'touch drawings' at a given session. The process was always the same. I would ink the acrylic board with block printer's ink in a variety of colours, then spread it around with a brayer roller, place paper on the board and then would move my hands and fingers across the paper. As I moved I would try not to think. The more I moved, the more I was able to get to the stillness within and could sense the promptings to follow. When I felt I was done, I would take the paper off the acrylic board and lay it on the ground to dry. After an hour, surrounded by drawings, I would survey what I had created. From my perspective, the bulk of these paintings looked awful. At first glance, it was really

nothing to get excited about. Then I would start over again, filling the acrylic board with color and movement.

Once the paintings dried, those areas where colors had overlapped developed wonderful new hues. I would spend hours pouring over my paintings, gazing and looking, without much as a thought in my mind, feeling serene; like a mother with her newborn. One day, my intuition suggested I get a picture frame through which to view my paintings. This opened doors to images that had always been there, only shadowed by my perceptions. I found beautiful images there. It was Jungian, archetypal, and introspective, it was deeply fulfilling (Figures 1-6).

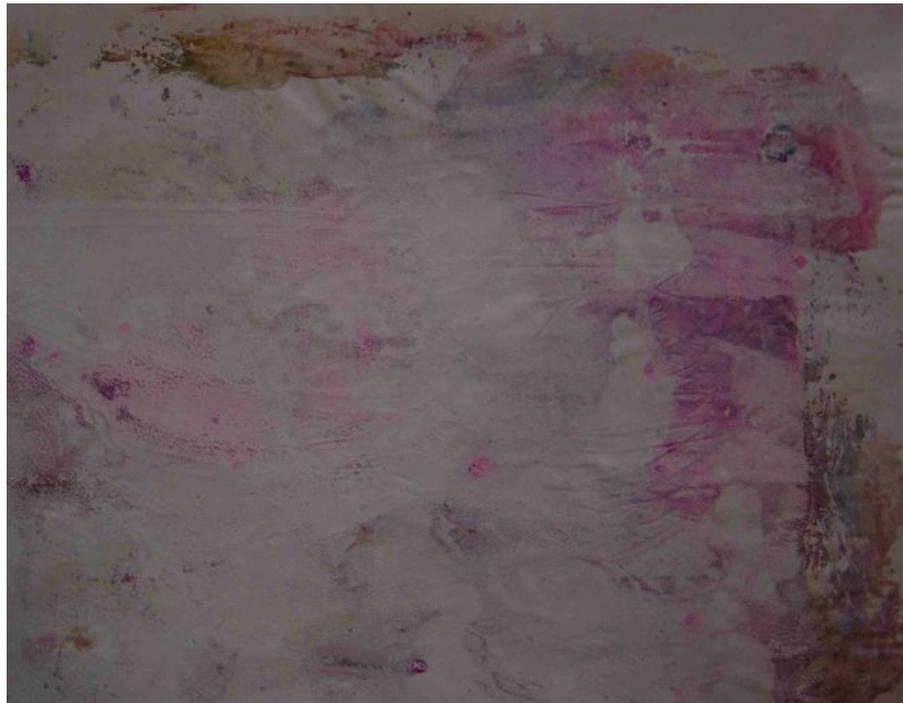


Figure 1



Figure 2

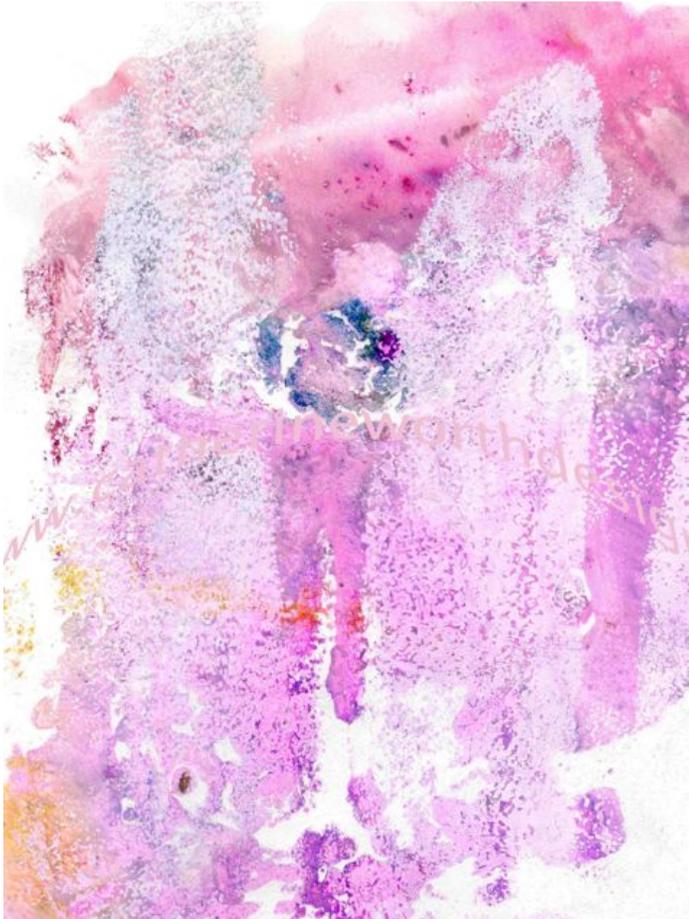


Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6 *How many ducks do you see?*

There amidst the copious amount of paper dotted in ink, was the right mix of paint, color and movement to create a painting that stirred my soul. It always felt like a gift from God and it always took me by surprise, even today. The “ugly” ones were too numerous to count. Such waste I thought, but I have never thrown any of my paintings away. I never knew what I might find.

There were times I would not paint. I blamed it on being too busy, but it was really my judgment of and lack of commitment in my work. Because it felt like I was going

nowhere; this spilled over into my art, colored my self-esteem and my desire to paint. Consequently, inertia set in.<sup>142</sup>

Months later, after some trauma at work, I turned to painting for relief but was not getting the satisfaction I was looking for. I had always been very patient with my art and treated it with great wonder and respect. In the very same way, the promptings began again. From amidst the grief and confusion that came from encounters in my secular world, there came this energy, direction, this *knowing* from my inner world. I got promptings to take pictures of the acrylic board I was using. After hundreds of touch drawings, the layers of paint had built up on the board. The light that was captured on digital film and the intersecting layers of color showed these photos in the best possible light to be abstract art. Like looking under a microscope or into a kaleidoscope, there it was, more detail and more beauty (Figures 7-10).

It was in front of me all the time, and it took another pair of eyes to show me what it was and where it was. I actually fell to my knees in awe. Deeply, deeply humbled, yet feeling majestic, I was held in awe of some greater connection, creativity, possibility, and held all these feelings at the same time. It made me gasp. I went to my bedroom, fell to my knees and prayed prayers of gratitude.

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<sup>142</sup> By definition, inertia means inability or unwillingness to move or act, the property of a body by which it remains at rest or continues moving in a straight line unless acted upon by a directional force, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/inertia>, (accessed May 13, 2012).

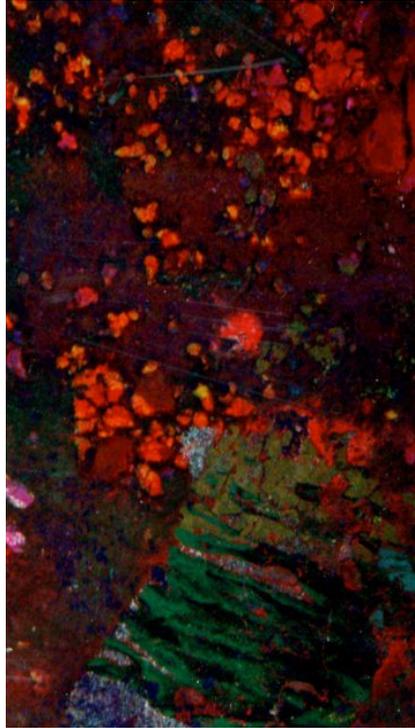


Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

I trusted my inner promptings. Unafraid, I painted. Good, or bad, I expressed myself. I stood with my judgments and gave them voice appropriately and in balance, but more importantly, I did what felt good. I had begun to follow my desires.

Nothing was crystallized, rigid, or boxed in; making art was very forgiving. I could always remake what I had just done, or expand on it. There was an intense freedom and bliss in that knowledge. Making art was flexible. There was space for me to be.

Still, there was angst, and there always would be angst, for this process was not in itself ecstatic. It was gut-wrenching at moments as I wrestled with parts of myself that wanted to dominate, telling me what and how to paint. It was different now, for I had won rights to the knowledge in my body by listening to it fittingly. It was a love affair with being, to see on paper, in colour, as creation, that which I had experienced as connection. I was grateful for what I had learned. I wrote the following poem to capture and celebrate these memories:

Hope replaced by delight,  
Fascination, rapture, tiredness, frustration, fear, doubt, length of time, knowing...  
when to Stop,  
Knowing the how...  
Following intuition,  
knowing when to allow yourself to just do, be, not judge...  
Allow instincts to take over,  
Just be,  
Trust in self.  
Choices,  
Choices the brain wants to interfere in, interfere with, over-ride,  
With other conscious choices,  
Thrill of allowing things to be and not judge,  
Pick one and stay with it,  
Own it,  
Feelings of Fullness,  
Thrill.  
Return to excitement.

Talking with intuition, strengthens intuition,  
Dialogue with other parts of yourself,  
Strengthening that relationship,  
Embody it,  
Check in,  
With body, mind, heart,  
What pleases you?

There's pleasure in color, movement, shape.  
Movement is essential to my work,  
Deals with the inertia,  
Inertia is so from the brain!

When moving, my brain shuts off,  
This is good,  
Tendency to overanalyze.

World of school is wonderful,  
Art is wonderful.  
The Desire to connect lives inside,  
Does not live alone.  
Lives with a spark.  
connected to God.  
Also has relationship with ego,  
Part of being human,  
Hence the angst, the tension,  
Now I have learned this is not a bad thing,  
When it appears in the session of art making,  
Allow it to be.

Not struggling with it anymore,  
It passes.  
Took a long time to learn about letting go,  
Let it do what it wants to do.  
Freedom  
Gone are the rules, laws, rigidity, linear thinking, concrete thinking,  
Trapping me,  
Soul screaming out to me,  
For freedom and release.

Art allowed me to be more human, more in touch with myself, sharper, and more conscious. It created a space in 'mind' that was different. I had come to use my body more, noticing its reactions so I could discern meaning from its feelings. If I noticed my body wanted to move in a certain way, I humored it by doing so and going there. In retrospect, making art cultivated a keen awareness of the promptings of body and mind and attraction for the senses produced and stored there. Art engaged me in the act of trusting. I had learned it was best not to ignore these gifts.

Making art elicited my enjoyment. By the use of my hands, it allowed me to touch my way around reality, familiarizing myself with the world in ways that were different from the usual, the predictable, or the ordinary. It scrambled old brain patterns,

accessing other parts of my brain that, in time, would create changes and activate the potential for a higher awareness. In this I was certain. I even had dreams about it, traveling on roads, on foot or by car, aware of changing tracks while moving quickly on superhighways. Sir Ken Robinson writes, “Positive emotions, especially joy, make thought patterns far more flexible, creative, integrative and efficient.”<sup>143</sup> Making art contributed to the elasticity of my brain by developing new pathways and strengthened old ones; it built more elaborate networks. It did both and did it effectively. Changes in my dream content authenticated this phenomenon. As a result, art opened up space and carved out another dimension of experience for me. Things continued to happen while painting; magic. I did not assume to understand it. I allowed myself to be amazed by it.

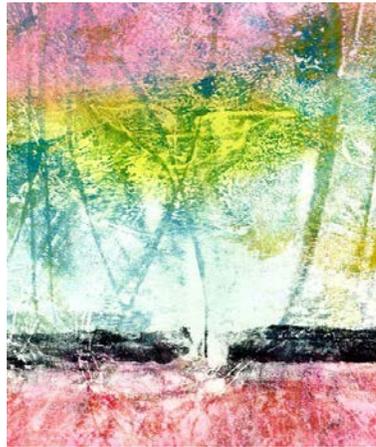


Figure 11

Movement was essential to the making of my art (Figure 11). It broadened what I knew and understood as myself to give me more pleasure as I painted. It was freedom. These were not just experiences of physicality, responses to what was around me

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<sup>143</sup> Sir Ken Robinson, *As Science Turns Its Attention to Feeling*, <http://www.huffingtonpost.ca>, (accessed January 13, 2012).

rather these were conscious choices to respond to energies within, caught as movement. Delivered as sensory impulses, then transcribed, there was a statement in the movement, liberating some thought or energy that might otherwise have been unavailable to me. Now it was caught on paper with printing ink. Emily Carr wrote, “Remember, the picture is to be one concerted movement in a definite direction for a definite purpose, viz. the expression of a definite thought”.<sup>144</sup> This is art.<sup>145</sup>

Making art was a venue, a safe place where my body and mind as a storehouse of energy, allowed spirit to connect or convert more energy into something new. It was a place where desire moved freely. If consciousness was a place where I experienced my body and mind, then desire was the guide that led me still deeper, into stillness and spirit. Everything desire led me to do, no matter how insignificant, contributed to this ultimate connection and it should never be judged nor should it be curtailed. In my experience, art became a safe place to discover desire. It was free of cross-purposes as Emily Carr<sup>146</sup> points out and Evelyn Underhill<sup>147</sup> emphasizes. Making art tuned me to ‘the waiflike energy’ that was my connection to God, this ‘precarious delicateness.’ If I moved from this ‘stillness’, the connection was gone.

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<sup>144</sup> Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journal of an Artist*, (Toronto: Irwin Publishing Co., 1966), 86.

<sup>145</sup> At this stage, I had been painting for five years and had developed my own technique and approach to touch-drawing. It felt right to paint in this new approach. Images from my unconscious bubbled through; truly, not the making of any imagery or thought of my own. Unlike Emily Carr who engaged cognition *and* movement in her paintings, my approach (with ink under the paper and fingers moving over the paper) has been to wait for emptiness, and stillness then engage *solely* with movement to paint. My results are always shrouded, then I search and edit. The reader needs to be aware that my paintings are part of the unconscious process.

<sup>146</sup> Emily Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands: The Journal of an Artist*, 86.

<sup>147</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, (Columbus, Ohio: Ariel Press, 1986), 59.

Art was a playground. I was aware something was anew. While it was important to accept and take action on as many promptings as was fitting, what faced me in the moment was valuable and could not be lost to my judgment, ignorance or inertia. Desire longed to be experienced. Desire was alive and sought union. It led me in a multiplicity of directions, and by its very nature, required that decisions be made on a constant basis. Therein lay my paradox; I so earnestly sought a freedom from mind, but I was still making decisions, only now I was enjoying myself. Making art was a practice in desire, discerning and deciding in the moment how to proceed.

In art, there were no mistakes, no repercussions; anything found viscerally undesirable could be remade, painted over, redone, corrected, and made anew. This was my place of solace and a wonderful place to acquaint myself with desire.

## THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

This section of the study addresses theological reflection, the art of recognizing God's hand in the events of our lives. As a process, reflection can be compared metaphorically to an archaeological dig; we look for signs of God's presence in our

lives and carefully dust off and examine found treasures to categorize and piece them into a story with purpose. In theological reflection, we also look for treasures as resonance and meaningful connection, which for the large part, engage our consciousness and involves discernment.

The object of this process was to ‘connect the dots’ marking God’s presence with the expressed hope of getting closer to Him and developing a deeper understanding of His will and purpose for my life. This was my opportunity to highlight, with significance, those times in my life when I have felt and where I have known, God’s presence in an effort to review, refresh, and renew this relationship. Theological reflection was my story, only worked backwards, retracing steps in an effort to find order and stimulate meaning about who I am, where I had been, and provide future direction as divined by God.

Theological reflection shone a light on my life, assuming I also used my body to sense, my heart to feel, and not just my mind to think. It seems utterly unconscionable and confusing not to use knowledge of my desires when reflecting on this journey. How can examination take place otherwise? To reflect on my life without considering my desires would be disrespectful to the One who created me. When my desires are left in the dark, silenced or hidden, life itself becomes arrested, and my attempt at discernment and reflection may become confusing and disqualifying.

I believe desire is the divining rod that provides direction, shining a light on God’s design for my life. Desire is part of the cosmic invitation to create, marking my initiation and propagation of God’s design for the world with pleasure and reward.

Robert Kinast's book, "*Making Faith-Sense, Theological Reflection in Everyday Life*," outlines the steps to a successful theological reflection as: selecting an experience, paying attention to feelings and thoughts surrounding this experience, and using narration or a story-telling approach.<sup>148</sup> Partnering with another person is helpful, as it provides the opportunity to speak aloud which, by its very nature, allows one to capture meaning in events that might otherwise have been hidden from one's understanding. Writing with as much accurate detail as possible is also recommended.

Kinast clearly and strongly reminds us that letting the experience reveal its own meaning on its own terms, in its own time, can make better faith-sense of our experience and help us avoid looking at these events as mere affirmations or illustrations of what we already believe.

Perhaps the 'niggly' feeling inside my chest was my cue to start reflecting. The right side of my brain has never let me down and perhaps it needed the opportunity to shed some light on the matter, to tell me through pictures just what more I knew about my quest, of which I was not conscious or able to verbalize. My intuition suggested creating a series of collages about my desire for a change in my career. The first collage (Figure 12) was created from a dozen pages pulled out of a large assortment of magazines. I rummaged, sensing my way around unfamiliar territory, and only when the moment felt right, stopped to tear *those* sheets from the magazines. Done with eyes closed, these pages, in a sense, chose me.

What seemed like a strange exercise in consciousness (or unconsciousness as the case may be) was really another way at getting information. "If our hope is to describe

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<sup>148</sup> Robert L. Kinast, *Making Faith-Sense, Theological Reflection in Everyday Life*, (Collegeville, MI: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 12-13.

a world fully, says Maslow, a place is necessary for preverbal, ineffable, metaphysical, primary process, concrete experience, intuitive and esthetic types of cognition, for there are certain aspects of reality which can be cognized in no other way.”<sup>149</sup> This collage was a valid and important way to start this reflection. My thoughts around this question already felt scrambled; why not create a little chaos by shaking it up further?



Figure 12

“...A slight alteration in the rhythm of the sense would place at your disposal a complete new range of material; opening your eyes and ears to sounds, colours, and movements now inaudible and invisible, removing from your universe those which you now regard as part of the established order of things”.<sup>150</sup> Taking this wisdom to

<sup>149</sup> Michael Dieciuc, “*The Mystical Mind: The Philosophical and Psychological Significance of Mystical Experiences*,” 156.

<sup>150</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 37.

heart, I was hoping this exercise would destabilize my contextual field, and get at my unconscious desires, so as to help me affirm what God had in store for me as His divine plan.

My established order of life was tightly wound around a career in nursing, and despite my attempts at replacing it with other interludes, the longest of which lasted ten years in financial planning, I had always practiced nursing. With a desire for crafts, sewing, painting, knitting, designing, and making jewelry, I had been moving between two worlds, art and nursing, all my life. The desire for helping, healing, counseling and contributing had been present all my life. By Dr. Steven Reiss' measure, I had desires for acceptance, order, idealism, social contact, honour and status (see Appendix 1). More recently, the desire for 'knowing God and creating' had deepened so much that I wanted to create full time but this desire begged the question, "Could I generate an income doing what I loved most?". It was a comfort knowing this desire had grown so robust. I wanted to be in God's presence creating all the time.<sup>151</sup> This was the nature of my theological reflection.

I have learned when embracing conscious awareness as a tool for reflection, everything has meaning, even the smallest events of the day. This morning, I caught a glimpse of something new just as I was waking up; it was an end state of my dream world. It was beckoning me, not yet part of my awareness; it had no ground, and slid away as it was calling out to me. Now, I cannot remember what it was about. It was just out of my reach, yet it was there. I am certain it had something to do with letting

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<sup>151</sup> Using Dr. Steven Reiss' research into desire, one might very simply assign only tranquility as the desire being expressed here. Others however might still consider romance, order, acceptance, family, or honour as well. His study did not qualify 'union with God' as a desire (see Appendix 1).

go of the old. I had the sense of it smiling and showing me the way down deeper as it slid away; it had something to do with my desire for mastery and my (to date) lack of commitment. How did I know that? This was a feeling, a general impression; it was the only thought that came to mind upon awakening.

In my search to substantiate my experience of this altered state of consciousness, I found an article written by Michael Dieciuc.

We usually think of consciousness as ordinary waking consciousness, which is 'normal' only in the strict sense of 'statistically most frequent'; [when we think of this type of consciousness] there is no connotation of 'good,' 'worthwhile,' or 'healthy'<sup>152</sup>....

We do however have thoughts that are 'statistically less frequent'...experiences...[such as]: weird coincidences, synchronicities, prescience, absorbed attention, intuitions, random epiphanies...we might more accurately refer to these milder forms [of altered states of consciousness] as *nonordinary* experiences<sup>153</sup>... Each altered state of consciousness digests, interprets, and models reality in its own unique way<sup>154</sup>...Thus, each state of consciousness functions...with different information and produces different results...which we can use upon the world to expand our knowledge of it.<sup>155</sup>

What I found particularly interesting in this article were the many more states of consciousness that could, in turn, assist me with *different* information in my quest. There was wealth in the variety of our processing capability. I already trusted my intuition. What I wasn't sure about was whether it was enough to answer my question on my career decision.

It was time to make the next collage. With the first collage, I relied totally on my intuition, making it easy to produce. The second collage was more pictorial and the

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<sup>152</sup> Michel Dieciuc, "The Mystical Mind: the Philosophical and Psychological Significance of Mystical Experiences," 155.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 155.

process of choosing felt a little more chaotic. As there were more images to choose from, I required a constant reminder and self-check to choose only those pictures that felt good or leapt out at me with significance, not just those that were visually pleasing (Figure 13).



Figure 13

I was aware now of pictures as distractions as opposed to those with a felt-sense that beckoned me. It was not always easy to tell the difference between the two phenomena. I had to listen carefully to my bodily reactions. This second exercise was much more taxing.

Pictures from the first collage still lay on the table where I left them. When the second set of pictures was chosen, I went about the business of making two collages. Then I waited for further direction.

The next morning as I sat at my computer, my intuition suggested I prepare a list of descriptive words that captured the essence of each picture in the second collage and lay this list beside those words from the first collage.<sup>156</sup> Words picked totally at random, untouched and unaltered, combined line by line with those from the first collage, separated only by a semi-colon, I watched a poem come to life. Here is the unconscious energy that came from just such an exercise:

Living in the heart of your home; grounded  
Talking back, Renaissance woman; solid  
High grade; comfort, warmth, belonging  
Your design personality - Premier, Modern; beauty, aesthetic  
Enjoy; round, curves  
Unique, your creations' synergy; textured green trees with moss  
September; blue ethereal flowers  
Get in on the secret; Born  
Future; Look  
No matter what you put in your specialty, it's full of possibilities; Focus  
  
Making his living as an artist is now a reality; Stars  
Confidence; Going into the depth, or up into the heights, depending on your perspective  
  
Grateful for the unflagging love and support; mastering  
  
Love; Calm, happiness, serenity  
Dreams through persistence; Order, peace  
Gifts within a lifetime; Smooth lines  
Must help or money refunded; Smiling faces, grinning behind a playful mask  
  
Triumph; all faces are light, bright, content

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<sup>156</sup> The word for each picture was chosen quickly, intuitively, so as not to involve an internal discussion or thinking process.

Alegria (mood or state of mind, jubilant); The baby seal is vulnerable, delicate, new,  
soft, loving, with a peaceful look on its face

Ready; The sweetest thing  
Where possibilities never end, tried and new; Full moon  
Trend watch; at home  
Watch out; Feature  
Affordable; Group of Seven painting in variety of greens

Healthy mouth, healthy body; Greens of all varieties, light oranges, and the color tan

Limited edition; Drift  
On track; the art of comfort  
Renovation and design directory; Island writers  
We are grateful for the opportunity to improve the quality of life for hundreds of  
thousands of men and women; International design

Custom design; Art underfoot  
The building of... ; Library  
Professional; Easy does it on the islands,  
Emerald green; Water lapping up as foam on the sandy beach

Crafted  
Perfecting  
Sunshine beyond a door  
Asian aristocrat, dressed in all her finest.

I laid this poem aside for several weeks. I became aware of two distinct feelings. One was abrupt or detached and cold in that a part of me was looking for a solution to my dilemma, eager for a quick and easy fix; the other feeling was softer, warmer, in love with the beauty captured in the imagery of this poem. There was a reluctance to invest in the possibility of its truth. I did not want to move on this insight too suddenly.



Figure 14

Recently, I decided to make a third collage, a combination of the previous two (Figure 14), with the intention of evoking some emotion to hold and experience my

feelings with greater intensity. This third collage, as a visual experience of the poem, felt contrived. It had little visceral impact; it let me down. As I was writing this, it became clear that the first collage and my poem were the two art forms that elicited the most feeling in my body, mind and spirit. These two were also the most unconscious. It took the wonder of serendipity to get me fired up and on board with this reflection.

There were no assurances about how altered states of consciousness would arrive to inform me of my decision. I had always allowed intuition to inform me and I was used to waiting, watching and sensing. I did not want to will my consciousness into an answer or contrive an experience which would rob me of my *true* experience, or shut the process down prematurely, possibly driving my feelings along with my desires underground. At this stage, things remained tepid.

This poem had also shown me my unconscious desires. The poem-making process found its own energy and asked for respect in its own subtle way, by *contrasting* itself with that which was most dominant in the second and third collages; my consciousness. The contrast was most effective by showing the poem to be more pure in thought, word, and deed.

I trusted the first collage because it was so serendipitous. I trusted the poem because the collages collaborated as a unit in support of my unconscious. Even though the second collage was the least serendipitous, it added value to my experience nevertheless, because of its rich imagery. Overall, the combination created enjoyment because of my felt-sense of it. It was important to me that these exercises as events found their own meaning as an answer to my question. The search continued.

As Kinast aptly shared from his book, “the first and most common way of making faith-sense is to affirm your faith by letting your experience illustrate what you believe”.<sup>157</sup> Faith in this context meant faith in my own intuition, in the makings and workings of my right brain, not in dogma. Some magical process of mind created this poem and these collages, externalized the desires I held deep within and gave them words as to be recognizable. Accordingly, this poem was my mirror, reflecting what I believed. I was having a difficult time accepting these desires into my feelings. Initially, there was a palpable disconnect. It held my attention, yet the resonance seemed low and even though I looked at those desires as mine, I felt there was no message, no answer for my question. I may have been asking the wrong question.

Following the earlier recommendations set out by Kinast, I had already participated in a reflective account of my life story.<sup>158</sup> What amounted to a three-hour session, a narrative exercise was not particularly entertaining, nevertheless it was helpful. It had the harsh reality of highlighting my shortcomings as underdeveloped thoughts and raw emotions. Kinast’s suggestion for this narrative exercise was indeed important. It was helpful to notice my past and what was carried into the future from previous generations, and it was also wise to sit with it long enough to respect the memory of what had transpired both in my personal life and in my relationship with my family.<sup>159</sup>

What had I learned in experiencing both exercises? I had learned how much easier it was to commit to something that pleased and satisfied and how easy it was to replace my desires with duty and obligation. I also learned that replacing any despair I

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<sup>157</sup> Robert L. Kinast, *Making Faith-Sense*, 47.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

had with hope really did not get me very far. Hope felt like a passive emotion now, waiting for someone or something to save me from myself. Yet I continued looking for some emotion upon which to latch<sup>160</sup>, to fire me up.

Indeed the future could look different, but deep inside my chest, there still remained a heavy feeling. Kinast stated, “Sometimes an experience does not confirm your faith so much as confront it with questions and challenges.”<sup>161</sup> In fact very little came in the way of comfort, affirmation or confirmation about how my future was going to unfold. I was looking for assurances as another part of myself was leading me to more questions. For the remainder of this study, I examine these questions and the theological reflection that came as a result.

### Are My Desires God’s Desires?

If this study were to characterize Art, it would be defined by the phrase, ‘allowing energy to exist,’ moving from an invisible state of pure energy to the third dimension where it takes form. As expressed in earlier parts of this study, making art is a sensory, whole-brain experience of a time and space that is pleasantly recognizable. In this space, something happens. Making art dissolves the initial separateness of soul *from* God, and offers a vestibule to return to, to commune, to make, to be, to develop, to create, to display and give witness to God in color and light. This is connection and communion of soul *with* God. Art grounds my consciousness in God by tapping into

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<sup>160</sup> Emotion has its roots in the Latin word ‘*emovere*’ meaning move out, remove, or agitate, [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=emotion&searchmode=none](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=emotion&searchmode=none), (accessed Feb 23.2012).

<sup>161</sup> Robert L. Kinast, *Making Faith-Sense*, 47.

the stillness where energy originates. Desire lives within my conscious and unconscious, within body, mind and soul; and it moves through all at any given time, through space. Very simply, desire is God's emissary.

Reflecting on the inner world of her artistry, Emily Carr's writes in her book, "Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of an Artist":

Remember...all its building is for that thought [desire], the bringing into expression and the clothing of it. Therefore if you have no thought [desire] that picture is going to be an empty void, or worse still, a confusion of cross purposes without a goal. So, old girl, be still and let your soul herself find the thought [desire] and work upon it. She alone understands and can communicate with her sister out in nature. Let her do the work and, restless workers, running hither and thither with your smelling, looking, feeling, tasting, hearing, sit still till your Queen directs but do not fall asleep while you wait – watch.<sup>162</sup>

Emily speaks about her process, letting her soul find its way to paint, stopping her activities of life to wait for directions from within. She introduces her concept of God as feminine and addresses her soul as 'Queen,' who clothed in 'stillness', garners a direct relationship (connection) with Emily, nature and the act of painting. I took liberties with her message to insert the word [desire] and it would seem that her message retains its integrity with either choice of word and preserves the meaning of its intent. Emily does however excite the reader with wonderment, not so much with what she will be guided to do, (as we know it is about painting) but more earnestly, about 'when' this guidance will take place, which then begs the question 'how' will she know that she is being guided.

I agree with Emily; making art promotes a balanced mind of thought and creates an inner space of 'empty receptiveness.' Much like meditating, praying or having a mystical experience, it quiets the brain so as to come into the 'stillness'.

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<sup>162</sup> Emily Carr, *Hundred and Thousands, The Journal of an Artist*, 86.

Where Emily Carr addresses the quieting of the bodily senses, Evelyn Underhill speaks to the same issue with an emphasis on quieting the mind.

At this very moment your thoughts are buzzing like a swarm of bees. All this is only happening upon the periphery of the mind, where it touches and reacts to the world of appearance. At the center there is a stillness which even you are not able to break. There, the rhythm of your duration is one with the rhythm of the Universal Life.<sup>163</sup>

This then would explain why I found my second and third collages distracting and disengaging; they were too busy and as pictures, captured my consciousness and surface-self (personality). The spirit in me was questing for something deeper and substantial. This was the part of me that needed my attention. Once more it was my desire (for an answer) that led me further and beyond. Paradoxically, it was the playful masquerading of body and mind that confused and frustrated me.

Mystics have always felt the need to describe their wayward path and connection to God, and Evelyn Underhill eloquently shares with readers her experience of the tension that exists when consciousness (mind), which has made choices that are valueless to the claims of the deeper self, struggles with spirit.<sup>164</sup> Desire, she claims, has been turned around and harnessed to the wrong driver. Our habits (of thought, word and deed) can have us in chains. The disharmony that is pulling us at once in two directions is really a tension between desires of the soul and those of our consciousness.<sup>165</sup> According to Underhill, it would seem no peace is possible until one gives one's attention to God and commits oneself to this relationship.

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<sup>163</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 59.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

Cursed by this phenomenon, one might say humanity has no choice but to participate in this raw and naked dance of evolution, featuring the *buried* spirit (also known as soul and the unconscious) and the *surface*-self (as ego, consciousness or mind).<sup>166</sup> Spirit and mind have access to both our conscious and unconscious worlds, yet spirit is the one who yearns for union with God. While ego, masquerading as the surface-self, pulls equal weight as to create discomfort and disagreeableness, for it thinks that life is meant to serve it.<sup>167</sup> This friction, which conjures up betrayal, paradoxes, inertia, confusion, sin and judgment, colors our world (hence our consciousness) and remains to this day the burden and substance of any and all theological reflections. Here is the stage and these are its players.

Going back to my reflection, I had already established this strong desire for God. I had found God while making art and this relationship was both delightful and definite. Clearly, I wanted to spend more time with God. In the act of choosing God, according to Underhill, I was also denouncing the desires of my consciousness.<sup>168</sup> I was not prepared for such a schism, in spite of the distress my dilemma was causing me. I did not believe my desire for God came at the expense of other desires; they were not mutually exclusive, rather one and the same, all part of the web of Universal Life. This was not about desires spiritually at odds with one another. My angst was about something much more human.

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 152.

O'Murchu maintains we are not in charge of our desires for they come hither, and from beyond, suggesting, prompting, and yearning.<sup>169</sup> If this were true, then God, having given me these desires, would take care of their fulfillment. In my heart that felt true, but it was also true, that in the past, I had felt betrayed. God did not appear to be there when things had failed before. At this stage in my life, I did not want to take on more financial risk. I wanted to feel supported by the web of life, and within the web of life. I could not help but think there were issues of worthiness lurking behind my demand for assurances. I did not find much solace with religion describing life as full of potential, creation, mystery, chaos, destruction and recreation. Rhetoric; all I wanted was relief from my plight. In my search for sources, I found current writings on science that provided me with unique thoughts for consideration.

In the twenty-first century, quantum physics has found subatomic particles to be flexible matter with the ability to become one thing and then another and sometimes all at the same time, only having meaning when in relationship with everything else.<sup>170</sup> Science understands the universe as a dynamic web of interconnection.<sup>171</sup> Things once in contact, remain always in contact through all space and all time.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> O'Murchu, *The Transformation of Desire*, 130. He writes, "Desire cannot be subjected to rational evaluation, psychological analysis, religious control, sociological framing or any form of structural manipulation exercised by the human will to power. Like the Holy Spirit who blows where she wills."

<sup>170</sup> Lynne McTaggart, *The Field, the Quest for the Secret Force of the Universe*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2002), xv.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

My matter mattered. All that made the Universe, made me. The observation by scientists of activity of subatomic particles explained activities inside me and my relationship with God. Somehow this all led me to conclude that my desires were God's desires.

Likening me to the energies beyond, this confirmed the decision I had made earlier; desire acted as a tether between worlds, God's and mine. Desire, activating potential matter (sub-atomic matter) became 'anything and all' at the same time, was energy that connected me, and was connected *to* me, without which, I was just ego (consciousness) stuck in the finiteness of my own mind. Without desire, ego (consciousness) would be looking for something to be, and do. I needed only to look at all the great and wonderful things created in the world to know our desires amount to great significance. As Hildegard von Bingen pronounced: 'God has arranged all things in the world in consideration of everything else. We are in the cosmos and the cosmos is in us.'<sup>173</sup> This power of body, mind and spirit we possess is magical.

So as not to confuse purpose and meaning, all desires came *from* God and all desires came around again as desire *for* God as the only cosmic revelation. I now understood that developing a relationship with desire was essential. It also meant I was creating a relationship with God for the purpose of creation. It was through each of our differentiated relationships with desire that creation manifested diversity, climaxing as its own experience of pleasure and joy. I had my role to play and a contribution to make.

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<sup>173</sup> Hildegard, [http://www.sol.com.au/kor/5\\_02b.htm](http://www.sol.com.au/kor/5_02b.htm), (accessed Feb 21, 2012).

## What Does Living in my Desires Teach Me About Life?

My responsibility, then, was to call forth, relate, repeat and renew; in essence to deepen this understanding of my experience with my own desires. O’Murchu writes: “It seems to me we need to allow desire to manage us. We need to adjust our whole way of living and being, so that it is congruent with the desires of the web of life within which everything is held and sustained.”<sup>174</sup> God’s desires govern ‘*all that is*’, as everything held and sustained as life. *Could I put desire in the driver’s seat?* It would seem it already was and had been, since the beginning of time. Yet how could I be assured of a livelihood and not be dragged through some masquerade based in imagination and misperception? I was praying these desires were not generated by the distractions of the outside world, that I had taken these desires one step too far, misinterpreting God’s plan for me.

What we think about and how we feel engages the brain in a variety of complex and interesting ways with equally varied and profound results. The experience of losing oneself while reading a book, walking in nature, painting, playing an instrument, or listening to classical music, occurs when our attention becomes so focused, so intense that anything outside our awareness vanishes; in its most profound form, the ego [mind] dissolves into unity with the rest of the cosmos [called ‘*unio mystica*’].<sup>175</sup> Regardless of the intensity of this altered state of consciousness, for the short time this ability is activated, we manage to displace ego [mind] and the

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<sup>174</sup> Diarmuid O’Murchu, *The Transformation of Desire*, 123.

<sup>175</sup> Michael Dieciuc, “*The Mystical Mind: The Philosophical and Psychological Significance of Mystical Experiences*,” 152.

distractions of life. When mind [consciousness] loses [dissolves] itself in *a* thought or activity (for example, as in meditation or visual aesthetic trance) through some unknown natural means, it reintegrates itself to a higher, more complex form, and consciousness grows.<sup>176</sup> The more complex an instrument our brain becomes, we could assume we have a greater potential for altered states of consciousness. Buddha proclaimed this over three thousand years ago. Buddha's intent was to move *away* from his desires because they resulted in suffering, and mine was to move *toward* my desires. What was now painfully obvious was that I assumed I would suffer with the decision to have desire as my driver and I deeply wanted to avoid that pain. I was assuming financial ruin. At some point in my past, I had learned to mistrust the secular world as well as myself.

Placing my attention on what I desired could prove to be fruitful. However, being fixated on what I was afraid could happen, would only stir the cauldron of imagination and consciousness into a disturbing upheaval. Underhill singled out 'imagination' as that mechanism with the power and ability to alter the incoming messages of her senses, as also being a dreadful energy that could power her out of her *moment* with the richer, more vital world of God.<sup>177</sup> According to Underhill, her perceptions of the world were crafted by imagination and it was this same imagination that could bully her out of her stillness with God.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>177</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 39.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 39.

One could argue that one could keep vigil against such occurrences. Consciousness is an interesting thing; in the very act of vigilance the mind creates a set point, then, on attention. Underhill wanted us to appreciate the impact imagination has on perception.<sup>179</sup> If repetition of this kind persisted, imagination could take the next step by triggering emotions and the vigilance would be further strengthened, creating a triggering loop.

The mystics taught that letting this or any such phenomenon be, by letting it pass much like a cloud wafting along in the sky, our job, very simply, is to observe it as it goes by. They taught us to focus our attention on stillness, and calm, away from distractions. Practice of mind then proved more important and more effective than imagination and vigilance; practice over protection. If I was not conscious of my attention or beholden to a practice, then I must be aware of what I was otherwise asking myself to be, do and think. In my own theological reflection, I was concerned that mind (consciousness) would take liberties with my desires. As Underhill warned, it was really my imagination that could power down my incoming senses, and deprive me of the direction of my desire.

I had choices. I could maintain my investment in illusion and fear and continue dodging and resisting the cute and clever ways my mind and imagination had devised to torment me over the years or I could acknowledge them and go about my task anyway, realizing my perceptions were a composite of fears and images I had chosen

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<sup>179</sup> Perception depends on complex functions of the nervous system, subjectively it seems to be mostly effortless because this processing happens outside conscious awareness. From the work of Piaget it is known that perceptions depend on the worldview of a person. The worldview is the result of arranging perceptions into existing imagery by imagination. Perceptions are integrated into the worldview to make sense, taken from J. Piaget. *The Child's Conception of the World*. trans. by J. and A. Tomlinson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967) 45.

from my past. The other illusion I held was that I could, in fact, get rid of them. All my life I had exhausted myself believing this was possible. As a consequence I wavered between pretending to be fearless, and truly feeling anxious. As a result of this theological reflection, I was able to come to terms with the fact that these illusions were going to be here anyway. Indeed I could learn to watch them come and go, rather than engage them.

My own experience of ‘incoming sensory messages’ (also called *prompters*) had always been delicate, almost waiflike in nature, and prone to vanishing easily. They were never destined to be experienced as epiphanies, which made them easily forgettable. Rather, they moved energetically in a way that I was unlikely to notice them. I had often wondered if my desire for making art was my way of strengthening this phenomenon.

My experience of desire was authenticated through making art. Art had the capacity for keeping me in active receipt of my senses (in closer connection with God), otherwise these senses would have, in many cases, gone underground or been desensitized.<sup>180</sup> As I learned to respond to my *prompters*, I got better at it, and they became more easily recognizable to my consciousness. I managed to pull myself out of my casual thinking, where I would otherwise wallow. I learned to acknowledge

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<sup>180</sup> David Abram. *The Spell of the Sensuous, Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*, (New York, Pantheon Books, Random House, 1996), 20. “I had rarely before paid much attention to the natural world. But my exposure...was shifting my senses; I became increasingly susceptible to the solicitations of non-human things...I began to *see* and *hear* in a manner I never had before...when the [shaman] spoke of a power or “presence” lingering in the corner of his house, I learned to notice the ray of sunlight that was then pouring through a chink in the roof, illuminating a column of drifting dust, and to realize that that column of light was indeed a power, influencing the air currents by its warmth, and indeed influencing the whole mood of the room; although I had not consciously seen it before, it had already been structuring my experience...I became a student of subtle differences: the way a breeze may flutter a single leaf on a whole tree, leaving the other leaves silent and unmoved,” 20.

*prompters*; sometimes even the gentlest waif was the attention-getter that initiated a new idea or a movement to pursue in making art, wherein lay the beauty and power of my desires. As Evelyn Underhill maintained, "...the more perfect your union with the world of growth and change, the quicker, the more subtle your response to its countless suggestions; so much the more acute will become your craving for Something More".<sup>181</sup>

I wanted to step away from the cliff, to fly without trepidation, and follow my desires for a new career; but I was not sure I could trust myself to continue returning to my God for those prompters that would guide me forward. Now I could see it would require my commitment to a diligent practice of mindfulness. I knew how to sabotage my 'self' and I was afraid.

### Does Betrayal Play a Role in My Relationship With Desire?

Although I did not know it at the time, I had used my imagination to misinterpret my desires. In my most sincere state, in the past, I had followed what I thought God wanted me to do. Coming away without results, I felt hurt, and betrayed. In the following excerpt, Mechtild the mystic, speaks of her own betrayal, and shares her feelings so we can further understand:

I was warned against writing this book.  
People said:  
If one did not watch out,  
It could be burned.  
So I did as I used to do as a child.

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<sup>181</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 133.

When I was sad, I always had to pray.  
I bowed to my Lover and said, ‘Alas, Lord,  
Now I am saddened all because of your honor.  
If I am going to receive no comfort from you now,  
Then you led me astray.  
Because you are the one who told me to write it.’<sup>182</sup>

It was comforting to know I was not alone with feelings such as these and as a phenomenon challenging humankind; betrayal was expected at some point during a lifetime. It was vital that I understand it better. Dr. Hedva’s book, *Journey from Betrayal To Trust, A Universal Rite of Passage*, made things clearer for me.<sup>183</sup>

The words, *betrayal*, *traitor*, and *tradition* all come from the same Latin root word *tradere*, meaning: “to hand over,” “to deliver,” or “to place in the hands of.” As Dr. Hedva writes: when we hand ourselves over to the anger, pain, and grief of betrayal, one is placed in the hands of a traditional response. Then we become traitors to the light within. We die a thousand deaths when we rationalize essential spiritual questions with the limited data provided by our social traditions, personal history, and cultural upbringing. Unenlightened actions or purely emotional reactions perpetuate the pain. To act from the state of feeling betrayed kills relationships, trust [in life, in God, in humankind], and faith, and destroys a deeper sense of meaning or purpose in life.<sup>184</sup>

Yet I had gone to this place easily. Unrequited desires had left me feeling disappointed. This kind of experience fueled my judgments, festered feelings of betrayal and depression, and darkened my ability to deal with life’s paradoxes.

The right brain may contribute to this injustice. It not only generates our feelings, and holds our passions, it is also the place where imagination rules, where symbols and images live. It allows us to believe, it generates fantasies, presents possibilities, and it is impetuous, taking risks (see Appendix 3). All these things can affect

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<sup>182</sup> Andrea J. Dickens, *The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages*, 73.

<sup>183</sup> Beth Hedva, *Journey from Betrayal to Trust*, 6.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

perception. No doubt even a small shift in any of these means would alter the experience and understanding of desire in my life. I had been too general in the past, accepting any desire as true. This may have been my downfall. Underhill alerted me to this understanding and theological reflection was there as a trustworthy practice to help with its discernment.

I was easily connected to my right brain and all that excited it. It was obvious now that I had not always noticed my real desires. It became evident that I had to learn to discern those desires generated by ‘distractions of the world’ from those that were unconscious and what the mystics called ‘desires of the buried spirit’, and discern those perceptions masquerading as desires that were also unconsciously paired with imagery. All this took effort, practice, time and reflection. In the past I have managed to identify and follow some desires but not others; totally ignoring those that might have lead me to greater good, greater pleasure, contribution or vocation. As outlined earlier my misinterpretation and misperceptions fed my disappointments and betrayals.

...to come to trust in the life process which prompts [us] to discover the inner Self [spirit] and that mystery which renews, heals, and transforms one’s experience...trust cannot be fully realized without betrayal. Only after betrayal, when one knows the risks and trusts anyway, is true trust established...to trust something deeper, something more essential... When we get past the pain of betrayal, we learn to risk [again] in spite of opposition, counterinfluences, or discouragement.<sup>185</sup>

In recovering, Hedva says, we recognize our illusions and allow them to exist alongside us, as we go on with our living. Through my art, I had discovered something altogether different that was equally important; if desire was not grounded in active pleasure, I learned I should not proceed. To move forward despite this lack

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<sup>185</sup> Beth Hedva, *Journey from Betrayal to Trust*, 12.

of pleasure, would only damage my relationship with, and trust in, myself. Not to honour this, in the end was a deeper kind of betrayal.

Had I ever betrayed myself by believing desire was entrenched in its own longingness? Now, I understand, I was playing desire like a broken record. According to Lacan, "Desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second...desire begins to take shape in the margin in which demand becomes separated from need. Hence desire can never be satisfied."<sup>186</sup> Desire is not a relation to an object but a relation to a lack. Further to that Slavoj Žižek stated, "desire's *raison d'être* is not to realize its goal, to find full satisfaction, but to reproduce itself as desire."<sup>187</sup> Somehow experience had taught me this fallacy. Now I believe both philosophers held a constricted view of desire based in the cultural myth of a disconnected body from mind and spirit. I maintain humankind has the choice of experiencing desire as any and all of the above, but making art taught me that placing desire in the driver's seat proved this belief to be a fallacy. Desire not only created beauty, it showed me that pleasure was more important than obligation as my measure for following God's will. There is a cosmic plan and following my desires is part of its fulfillment.

As I mentioned earlier, I had options. I could deny my desires, I could live in my illusions and feel betrayed, I could become fixated in the belief that something external to me would come in fulfillment of my desires or I could sit and wait. I

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<sup>186</sup> J. Lacan. *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink in collaboration with Heloise Fink and Russell Grigg, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 424.

<sup>187</sup> Slavoj Žižek. *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso 1997), 39.

sometimes wondered whether my experience of hope was one of these passive feelings. A desire that goes unrequited was by definition a desire that had not had any action taken towards its fulfillment, action that produced the same disappointing results, or as Underhill believed, was really a distracted desire of the surface-self (consciousness) and not rooted in the divine.<sup>188</sup> I could accept that my experience of angst, despair, and inactivity was linked to my misperceptions; but I also had tangible evidence of how my perceptions could change my reality. It seems I really did have choice.

### What Did I Come to Believe About Desire?

The use of dualism in the world is profound. We are always choosing between forms, this or that, good or bad, black or white, using judgment to help make decisions. Art, on some level, over time, has changed my cognitive approach to making choices. While making art, I enjoyed an inclusiveness, choosing ‘this *and* that’ approach, as ‘both and’, made for better art. On that level I found, that for me, judgment could not survive. It could not prevail. Everything in art had possibility and there were no qualifiers; things were what they were, and most times, it was best to include all choices to see where desire would lead. To make art, judgment had to lay itself down, to let a state of being-ness in.

Being an artist, judgment existed to guide movement across the canvas, contributing to a more pleasing and desirous aesthetic. Judgment was gentle then and

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<sup>188</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism*, 138.

acted as a discriminating filter, rather than a harsh, cold interloper with alienation (separation) as its intention. The judgment I learned about was quite different. This kind was part of the discerning process of creation and was quite wholesome. The other, more commonly used judgment alienated me from humanity and my God (Source). I needed a place away from the secular world where this ‘alienating judgment’ was suspended in time, a place where it could not exist.

Making art had taught me that judgment came with different temperaments and was not always negative. It became plain (neutral) under the power of discernment. It provided distinction, and the nuance that something better was possible because of it. Art was a neutral playground. Categorically, there was no good or evil in art. Art just was. It did not judge the subject matter that unfolded as image nor the quality that resulted. Art allowed for an altered state of awareness, both in the viewer and the artist.

Whenever I engaged the ‘alienating judgment,’ I engaged a loop of thinking that involved competitiveness, a measure of ‘like versus dislike’; and through some process of elimination, I learned to reject. I did not accept what was, inferring it should have been something other than what it was. To hold ‘either-or’ in my thinking, ensured the shadow side of my consciousness. Something unacceptable to me was hidden from my awareness and I continued to give it energy by virtue of holding it back. Even though the attention I gave it was negative, the vigilance it enjoyed ensured its strength.<sup>189</sup> Through choosing and embracing a ‘both and’ philosophy, I had adapted my mind (consciousness) to a world of possibility. Thus the ability to see

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<sup>189</sup> As mentioned earlier, this phenomenon surfaced in my art as “Havoc.” Once I familiarized myself with my own judgment in a way that released me of its angst, Havoc no longer appeared in my art.

and understand a problem from as many facets as possible became a little easier; desire became part of the solution and not just a part of experimentation or improvisation. Desire was not taken as being frivolous or discarded as less serious. The inclusiveness I had been writing about allowed a wiser more intuitive awareness and created a slightly altered state of consciousness, moving me a little deeper into my knowledge base.

The right brain is characterized by many attributes some of which are: playfulness, loose thinking that produces humorous ideas and thoughts, a sense of playfulness in solving problems, experimentation, improvisation, the frequent use of metaphors and analogies, an intuitive thinking process in solving problems, as well as the use of images in remembering.<sup>190</sup> Numerous artists and innovators can testify to the wealth and profundity of creative potential that lies deep within each of us if we could but learn to open ourselves up to it.<sup>191</sup> A biblical metaphor found in John 21: 4-12, John 21: 17-19 may very well capture this phenomenon,

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So

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<sup>190</sup> Marilyn Grey & Betty Bender, *It's All In Your Head, How to Use Your Right Brain to Help You Do Just About Anything*, (Lynwood, WA: Grey Matter, 1990), 14.

<sup>191</sup> Michael Dieciuc, "The Mystical Mind: The Philosophical and Psychological Significance of Mystical Experiences," 153.

Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net shore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord<sup>192</sup>....

“Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go. After this he said to him, “Follow me”.<sup>193</sup>

As in any theological reflection, I reviewed what was brought from the right brain of my consciousness in order to bring information to the left side of my brain for categorization and understanding of a different type, to chew, to eat, to digest, to assimilate, to integrate, and feed myself (John 21: 12). I learned that it was easier to commit to pleasure than it was to commit to an obligation (John 21: 18). Did I come away with answers about my quest for my career? I learned that desire came from God (John 21: 19), and no matter what I choose to pursue as my career, I could expect my illusions to make an appearance. To have a philosophy of inclusiveness encouraged me to pay more attention to my desires as prompters, and embodied me with a felt-sense of the world.

I am a cosmic creature, I belong to God and my desire for God is stronger than I have ever known it to be because of my experience with desire through making art. Most importantly, I have learned that to continue taking action on my desires, I need to learn to let my illusions drift out of my line of attention, lest that focus bring me down emotionally. I have learned that I live in the future in the hope of tomorrow with a dread of what might be asked of me in the present. I have learned that creation is

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<sup>192</sup> John 21: 4-12, (New American Bible).

<sup>193</sup> John 21: 17-19, (New American Bible).

possible with energy that is adventurous, eager, and self-giving towards the greater universe, and that I am part of an exchange. I have learned more about the mystical world of contemplation and reflection and I look forward to being more *grounded, and living in the heart of my home*. I am an artist and I love the closeness I have with God when I paint.

## CONCLUSION

The goal of this study, after an historical review and several experiences with making art, was to discern a theology of desire for myself that would be both authentic and

inspiring to my life and assist me with a career decision. As an artist it was not enough to paint so I could engage desire, it was ever more purposeful to retrieve and birth my unconscious desires to look at my truth. I was happy to be conscious of this process and in a traditional way, to have language and not just art describe what I had learned. This made the experience whole and alive, delivering desire from the depths and storing my relationship with it to memory.

Even though a large part of my theology of desire has already been discussed and shared, it would be most helpful at this stage, to record in as succinct a manner as possible, what I have taken away from this integrated study. Here is my credo:

1. I belong to God.
2. I matter because I desire.
3. I desire and that is what matters.
4. I am desire.
5. One day I will die desiring.
6. Everyday is a new day with desire.
7. Desire is pleasure; desire is angst.
8. Creation desires.
9. Desire alters consciousness.
10. Desire imagines.
11. Free desire as desire frees.
12. Stillness knows desire, and desire knows stillness.
13. God don't make no junk.

The research obtained for this study was impressive. I want to thank the countless individuals who remained true to their nature and contributed their understanding of desire, offering more clarity to the subject.

The Church (as an institution) had little that was new or nurturing as a theology of desire that could be presented to a large group to inform, educate or stimulate discussion on the subject. Theological reflection for countless centuries has been and

continues to be an option for the individual to discover his/her relationship with desire. As evidenced in this study, it was my experience that theological reflection was best utilized in conjunction with making art, one supporting the other by accessing both sides of the brain to create a full and more meaningful experience. This study examined how desire displaced inertia, it looked at judgment from an artist's point of view, and brought attention to body, mind, and spirit to better appreciate desire and understand how it moves through this triumvirate to become reality.

Going into the future, if one believes that our culture is trending towards simulacra, the creation of a 'new kind of superficiality' and the futility of idealism, then a theology of desire could stimulate reactionary behaviour, the likes of which could birth new and valuable experiences in relating, communicating and experiencing God. The longing to create and connect in new and different ways may prove overwhelming. The notion that desire, largely seen as an individualized experience, could stimulate a movement on a broader scale is an intriguing possibility for the evolution of humankind.

For future research into our deepest yearnings, it would be worthwhile to examine our capacity for developing altered states of consciousness as part of a theological reflective practice as well as examining our innate ability for ego reintegration after approaching the depths of our unconscious. In its desire for God, research could look into the experience of deep humility in the wake of an epiphany and research processes for discovering our purest desires. In the same light, religious leaders could learn more about what it is we seek from organized religion and how to assist humankind in their quest for belonging and as contributors to God's cosmic plan.

Since each person, according to Dr. Steven Reiss, has his or her own unique desire profile, it then follows that no two people would have the exact same spiritual experiences.<sup>194</sup> So our quest for knowledge deepens!

I would like to conclude this study with a quote by Pat Allen from her book, *Art is a Spiritual Path*,

If art is a spiritual path, it must lead outward from the individual listening with the body, mind, heart, and soul into the commons, that place where we are called to serve. To be authentic, this path must be well trod both inward and outward...Becoming spiritually fit for what comes your way. When you are suffering, suffer. When you are rejoicing, rejoice. Don't avoid the pain you see but also don't seek it avariciously. Activism can be as materialistic as anything else. Perhaps when you fully and freely make your art the world, or at least you, will be saved.<sup>195</sup>

To live out our lives with a theology of desire that nurtures our experience of life would be wonderful and well deserving. Consciousness is our most wonderful gift; motion close behind. We are who and what we are and there is great joy and pleasure in accepting this and all that is. God Don't Make No Junk. All that is, is we, is God. What is here, in this moment, *came of desire*.

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<sup>194</sup> Steven Reiss, *Who Am I? The 16 Basic Desires That Motivate Our Behaviour and Define Our Personality*, (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 2000), 239-240.

<sup>195</sup> Pat Allen, *Art is a Spiritual Path, Engaging the Sacred Through the Practice of Art and Writing*, (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2005), 206.

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## Appendix 1.

### Definitions Used in Dr. Steven Reiss' Research and Referenced in this Integrated Study

**Acceptance** is the desire for inclusion.

**Order** is the desire for organization.

**Saving** is the desire to collect things.

**Honor** is the desire to be loyal to one's parents and heritage.

**Idealism** is the desire for social justice.

**Social Contact** is the desire for companionship.

**Family** is the desire to raise one's own children.

**Status** is the desire for social standing.

**Vengeance** is the desire to get even.

**Romance** is the desire for sex and beauty.

**Eating** is the desire to consume food.

**Physical activity** is the desire for exercise of muscles.

**Power** is the desire to influence others.

**Independence** is the desire for self-reliance.

**Curiosity** is the desire for knowledge.

**Tranquility** is the desire for emotional calm.

Taken from, *The Basic Desires That Make Our Lives Meaningful*.

## Appendix 2.

### Quotes on Desire

"Lawren, what does it mean for you to be creative?" and he said, " When I paint, I try to get to the summit of my soul, and I paint from there, where the universe sings." - Lawren Harris

"I never think quite the same thing, because for me my books are experiences, in a sense that I would like to be as full as possible. An experience is something that

one comes out of transformed. If I had to write a book to communicate what I was already thinking, I would never have the courage to begin. I only write a book because I don't know exactly what to think about this thing that I so much want to think about, so that the book transforms me and transforms what I think. Each book transforms what I was thinking when I finished the previous book. I am an experimenter, not a theorist." - Michel Foucault

"Does there exist a pleasure in writing? I don't know. One thing is certain, that there is, I think, a very strong obligation to write. I don't really know where this obligation to write comes from ... You are made aware of it in a number of different ways. For example, by the fact that you feel extremely anxious and tense when you haven't done your daily page of writing. In writing this page you give yourself and your existence a kind of absolution. This absolution is indispensable for the happiness of the day... How is it that that this gesture which is so vain, so fictitious, so narcissistic, so turned in on itself and which consists of sitting down every morning at one's desk and scrawling over a certain number of blank pages can have this effect of benediction on the rest of the day?" - Michel Foucault

Decide what you want and don't think of intermediary conditions. When Nature works for us, we should want what we want and Nature will work it out for us.  
- Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

Desire is the very essence of man. - Benedict Spinoza

Take care to get what you like or you will be forced to like what you get. - George Bernard Shaw

Asking is the beginning of receiving. Make sure you don't go to the ocean with a teaspoon. At least take a bucket so the kids won't laugh at you. - Jim Rohn

Your life is shaped by the end you live for. You are made in the image of what you desire. - Thomas Merton

We cannot *will* to have insights. We cannot *will* creativity. But we can *will* to give ourselves to the encounter with intensity of dedication and commitment. - Rollo May

Decide to create the results that you desire. - John Di Lemme

Every artist would like to live in the central organ of creation... Not all are destined to get there... but our beating hearts drive us deep down, right into the pit of creation. - Paul Klee

By believing passionately in something that still does not exist, we create it. The nonexistent is whatever we have not sufficiently desired. - Franz Kafka

Men weary as much of not doing the things they want to do as of doing the things they do not want to do. - Eric Hoffer

You can have anything you want if you want it desperately enough. You must want it with an exuberance that erupts through the skin and joins the energy that created the world. - Sheila Graham

It's so hard when I have to, and so easy when I want to. - Annie Gottlier

Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; but remember that what you have was once among the things only hoped for. - Epicurus

One of the strongest motives that lead men to art and science is escape from everyday life with its painful crudity and hopeless dreariness, from the fetters of one's own ever-shifting desires. - Albert Einstein

All quotes were taken from this online site, [http://quote.robertgenn.com/auth\\_search.php?authid](http://quote.robertgenn.com/auth_search.php?authid), (accessed Feb 23, 2012).

### Appendix 3.

#### Functions of the Right and Left Sides of the Brain

LEFT BRAIN FUNCTIONS	RIGHT BRAIN FUNCTIONS
uses logic	uses feeling
detail oriented	big picture oriented
facts rule	imagination rules
words and language	symbols and images
present and past	present and future
math and science	philosophy & religion
can comprehend	can "get it" (i.e. meaning)
knowing	believes
acknowledges	appreciates
order/pattern perception	spatial perception
knows object name	knows object function
reality based	fantasy based
forms strategies	presents possibilities
practical	impetuous
safe	risk taking

<http://www.google.ca/search?q=right+brain&hl=en&client=firefox-a&hs=Fcp&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&prmd=imvns&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=7s5KT8boCOPYiQKu1rjBDQ&ved=0CFcQsAQ&biw=1454&bih=1306> (accessed Feb 26, 2012).