

DARKNESS, DIVERSITY, AND DEPTH: A JOURNEY OF SOUL

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Darkness, diversity, depth
The great companions
That meet us in the streets
And dance in our souls
And plead with us to hold them close
In a walk with Spirit that will
Horri-fy, clarify, sanctify, and glorify!¹

Journeys of soul are inevitably intertwined with darkness, diversity and depth, but the human fear of darkness and diversity often erects barricades that keep depth at a distance. The purpose of this chapter is to explore some of the realities and possibilities of darkness and diversity in human journeys toward depth. Spirituality, so often imaged as sweetness and light, is more often a journey through the harshest and most puzzling realities of life—a journey into the depths of soul. The bittersweet challenge of this chapter is to explore such realities and to re-envision spirituality. The challenge will take us through historical journeys of soul and through the cosmology of Alfred North Whitehead, but it begins with story—the place where all good spiritual journeys begin.

The story is found in Lane von Herzen's novel, *Copper Crown*. The year is 1913. A group of white men rape a black woman in their rural Texas town; this leads, in turn, to the rape and murder of a white woman by two black men. The cycle of violence, begun long before, is moving with fury. The white father who lost his daughter seeks revenge in an act that escalates the cycle yet again, this time to horrifying proportions. The grieving father and his cohorts hang seventeen black men, aged 15 to 35; they burn their homes. In the midst of this devastation, what can possibly be hoped?

The younger daughter of this white man is Cass. Cass's mother urges her to leave town and escape the horror. She offers her daughter these words of hope to take with her:

‘You’ve seen the killed and you’ve seen the killing and they have both left you trembling at your spirit. But girl—happenings like this, they don’t have to break you. A piece of your spirit stays on strong at the inside, whether you know it or whether you don’t. . . . You’re going to see that, when time passes over far enough to let you. Till then, you’ve just got to believe in it blind.’²

Cass takes her mother’s advice. She departs. Cass first rides to find her best friend, Allie, a young black woman who has just lost her brother to hanging and her house to burning. Cass finds Allie walking. Within a few moments, they decide to leave together.

As the two young women ride past the executed men, still hanging from the trees, they try not to look, but they cannot avoid the terrible sight. Cass is shocked to see two women among the bodies and ashes; she recognizes them as her dead sister and cousin “wringing their hands in their dresses and wondering what to do.”³ As Cass and Allie leave their homes on that fateful day, their eyes are filled with horror and their noses, with smoke; yet, they hold to that invisible hope that Cass’s mother announced—the hope that a piece of their spirits would “stay on strong at the inside.”

This story represents one great challenge of a soul’s journey—the challenge of walking through despair without abandoning hope. Yet another challenge unfolds with the story—the challenge of embracing diverse experiences. Diversity can take many forms, but always involves an experiential encounter with difference. In *Copper Crown*, the obvious diversity from beginning to end is race. The difference between black and white troubles *every* relationship in the book, but it also awakens and blesses those few who are open to receive blessings from difference. Diversity also arises when Cass sees the figures of her dead sister and cousin; only later would she discover the significance.

As the story continues, Cass and Allie travel many miles. One day, after a big dust storm, the air is heavy like the smoky air they left behind. Cass then confesses to Allie that she saw her dead sister and cousin among the dead boys. When Allie replies “Mm-hmm,” Cass tries again to explain her unbelievable experience. Allie simply says, ““You seen them because they was there . . . I know it, because I seen them too.”” Allie then explains to Cass what her mother taught her about spirits.

‘Child, you can’t no ways see a spirit with your eyes. You got to see it with your soul. Some peoples, their soul never gets the proper sight and they walk the world blind for always. Other peoples, their soul gets the vision by unlikely ways—by loving too much or losing too much or both of them put together. But one thing be sure. The visioning peoples, they got their spirits with them their whole life long.’⁴

This explanation opens a world to Cass—a world in which a new kind of perception can be experienced and honored.

This story illumines realities of soul journeys. One is the existential reality of hard living. Living can press hard on people who inherit racism, oppression, and vengeance. In such a climate, most are tempted to abandon hope. Cass was lucky that her mother, even in despair, could see hope: ““A piece of your spirit stays on strong at the inside, whether you know it or whether you don’t.””

People do not always have such a mother standing beside them; in fact, dominant worldviews often communicate just the opposite. Worldviews in which the physical world is taken to be a projection of the human mind do not take harsh realities seriously. In other worldviews, the harsh realities are taken to be the sum total of life; thus, the physical world is seen as a stage of great evil upon which a distant God plays the drama

of salvation. In still other worldviews, the positive possibilities of life are taken to be the sum total, and the realities that do not fit are ignored. These views deny the words of Cass's mother. They deny the presence and strength of Spirit within every creature.

The danger of missing the wisdom of Cass's mother is that we participate in our own destruction, resigning to the world's horrors and doing nothing to respond. Consider the natural tendency of people in traumatic circumstances to yield to their plight (poverty, illness, depression, and so forth), and to ignore possibilities for relief, protest, acceptance, or re-formation. Cass's mother insisted that a piece of the human spirit continues strong, even in the most horrible situation. Such is the strength that enabled some to survive horrors of the Holocaust (*Shoah*), and others to die with their inner strength still alive. Such is the strength that enabled Civil Rights activists in the U.S. to persist in following a dream toward equality and dignity. It is also the strength that enables some to live well with depression, not to deny or rush it, but to fill it with meaning.⁵ With these images in mind, we turn to history and then to cosmology for signs of hope.

SOUL JOURNEYS IN HISTORY

The realities of darkness and diversity are present and powerful in many religious traditions. The Hebrew Bible is rich with imagery in which both play significant roles in human life. Other religious traditions have similar accents, though practices and intentions vary. To explore spirituality in a grounded way, we will focus largely on soul journeys in relation to Christianity; thus, we begin with a brief look at Christian history.

In the first three centuries of the Common Era, the heroes of newly forming Christian communities were martyrs. In an age of persecution, martyrdom was so valued that the Church named its earliest bishops in retrospect, based on those who died for their

faith. Sculpture and painting focused on martyrdom, and the crucifixion of Jesus played a prominent part in the art and narrative of those young faith communities. The Gospel of Mark is one obvious example; the second half of Mark's story of Jesus is a passion narrative, and much of the first half anticipates the second.

In light of this early history, it is no surprise that spiritual journeys within Christianity came to be understood as journeys through hardship and discouragement. Communities expected hardship as a reality, and people valued suffering as part of the soul's journey toward meaning and depth, later identifying it as the dark night of the soul. These despairing seasons of life have been difficult to integrate into Christian visions of full living, but the tendency has been to elevate suffering as a positive value and to encourage self-abasement, even self-destruction, in the process. Consider traditions of flagellation, still practiced in rare Christian communities; consider more common practices of self-negating confession, self-denying spiritual disciplines, and self-debasing attitudes toward God. Such practices have been common in Christianity, and have inspired other popular spiritual movements, such as twelve-step programs.⁶

Such traditions are not surprising, given the trials and traumas of human life. William James argued that religions share one thing in common: they recognize that something is amiss with human life and that people can be saved from this wrongness by connecting with some kind of higher power.⁷ The present chapter focuses on this existential dynamic of spiritual journeys toward deeper relations with the Ultimate and the world. And because such journeys are not abstract, I will explore them in relation to one tradition, Christianity, leaving comparative religious work for the future.

DARKNESS—LIVING WITH MYSTERIES

Darkness can be an encounter with mystery that evokes awe. Consider a poem that I wrote in such a moment:

The fog rolls in
 and embraces the coastline
 We know the trees and sea are there
 beyond our sight and grasp.
 We cannot imagine
 the contours of their bodies;
 But we feel their presence,
 even as they stand shrouded in mystery!⁸

Darkness can also be an encounter with pain, as I pondered in a different moment:

God gave me peace
 when I called out
 And peace rose within me
 As sure as the rising of the tide.
 But today I do not
 pray for peace
 I only want to cry.
 The tide surges and crashes
 And my tears flow back into the sea
 To surge and crash again.
 That is my prayer today—
 a prayer of tears.⁹

Images of darkness are prominent in Christian tradition, often associated with hardship; however, the association with harshness does not adequately describe dark experience. Further, it feeds the damaging assumption that darkness is always negative. In this chapter, darkness is understood as *mystery, as that encountered in the dark of night or the depths of a well*. This may or may not involve hardship, although we find that hardship and mystery are often linked in Christian themes of spiritual journey.

The first theme—*longing for hardship as a path to God*—is found in Julian of Norwich, a 14th century anchoress in Norwich, England. Julian longed for an experience of illness in order to find a closer and more faithful relationship with God.¹⁰ She did, in

fact, experience a life-threatening illness when she was about thirty years old. As she lived near death, she was visited with sixteen revelations of divine love, upon which she reflected for the rest of her life. In spite of problems in longing for hardship (especially when viewed from modern worldviews), the darkness of Julian's illness became the pathway for her deepest encounters with God and her discernment of religious vocation as an anchoress. Having hungered for hardship (according to God's will), Julian received it as a gift of God's grace, an opportunity to know and love God more fully.¹¹

A second theme is *accepting hardships that emerge in the natural course of living by one's convictions*. The Beguines of Northern Europe (beginning in the twelfth century) provide an example. These women pioneered in new forms of religious life, neither cloistered nor consistently celibate, but focused on prayer, work, study, teaching and service. Beguines often stirred resistance, being counter-cultural in the church and larger social structures.¹² The poet Hadewijch was even counter-cultural within the Beguine community, and she eventually left the community under pressured circumstances.¹³ Both the community as a whole, and Hadewijch in particular, paid the price of living by convictions—being ridiculed and loosened from social and ecclesial supports. Hadewijch thus drew upon wilderness imagery to commune with God, emphasizing “abandonment, detachment, emptiness, and liberty.”¹⁴

A third theme is *protesting the hardship that emerges from social, economic, and religious injustice*. Spiritual journeys often awaken people to life's hard realities, to the harshness of evil, and to mysteries that transcend evil. Gustavo Gutierrez, listening to the poor, discerned the social and economic horrors of poverty, and discovered among the poor, a deep trust in the “God of life.”¹⁵ The poet Langston Hughes was distressed by

economic imbalance and the self-important attitudes of rich people, who were nothing “but foam on the sea.”¹⁶ Consider also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was imprisoned and executed in Auschwitz due to his commitment to resist the reigning powers and defend others from persecution and death.¹⁷ These three men faced honestly into pain and hardship, but they looked simultaneously for the larger mysteries that move in the world.

DIVERSITY—HUNGER FOR LIVING

This discussion of darkness and mystery leads naturally to diversity, *searching for life and receiving its richness wherever it abounds*. All forms of diversity—biological, ethnic, regional, religious, and so forth—stir nervousness in people. A glance at global anti-immigrant legislation reveals this phenomenon; add the horror of ethnic cleansings in the past 200 years and the annihilation of Jewish, Armenian, Native American, and other peoples in the modern era. What is often less acknowledged, but just as strong, is the *delight* of diversity—the joys, knowledge, and relationships that can emerge from it.

The beauty of brilliance fills the sky;
 Shadows of darkness creep down canyon walls,
 Holding moisture and shade
 against the scorching noonday sun
 And protecting shade-loving creatures in quietness
 While their sun-loving friends dance in bright light.

The soft colors of a dawning sky
 Touch the earth lightly
 While tall, craggy peaks reach high in the sky
 To kiss the heights of heaven;
 Grasslands roll,
 And deserts blow.

In every landscape, Spirit is revealed—
 Rolling, roaring,
 Shining, shading,
 Touching, reaching
 Spirit!¹⁸

Here, diversity is seen as a source of revelation and nourishment on journeys of soul.

Again, consider Christian traditions in which diversity has played diverse roles. The mystic Julian of Norwich was also a theologian of integration, integrating ideas that others took to be contrary—body and spirit, experience and thought, sin and goodness.¹⁹ Other theologians have been guardians of indigenous and popular traditions. Gustavo Gutierrez encouraged his people to “drink from our own wells”—to draw upon the spiritual resources of Latin America.²⁰ Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Yolanda Tarango invited Hispanic/Latina women, *mujeristas*, to draw upon the spiritual wisdom that arises in their daily lives.²¹ Asian theologians opened windows to spiritual traditions of Asian Christianity.²² Native American and Native Canadian authors, less interested in opening windows, sought to protect their spiritual traditions, too often denigrated and destroyed by European missionaries.²³ Others sought to recover Native traditions of *berdache*, in which gay people were revered as special spiritual leaders.²⁴ When theologians such as these tap the riches of diverse traditions, they inevitably discover new insights and raise fresh questions. Attending to diversity is not a matter of being nice or politically correct; it is a matter of searching for and receiving the fullness of life.

DEPTH

At the heart of these historical threads of darkness and diversity is the awareness that both lead to depth, *the experience of Life (God) within the daily footsteps of living*. Depth is not found in spite of darkness and diversity, but through them. Darkness is an encounter with mystery, and diversity is an encounter with otherness, evoking a hunger for living. Both shake us from superficiality, face us with incomprehensible realities, critique our ways, and invite new visions in journeys of soul.

Two people of the modern era exemplify the interweaving of darkness and diversity with particular boldness—Langston Hughes and Thomas Merton. Langston

Hughes challenges people constantly to be awake to creation. He especially urges that people avoid glibness and superficiality. Consider his “Call to Creation”:

Listen!
 All you beauty-makers,
 Give up beauty for a moment.
 Look at harshness, look at pain,
 Look at life again . . .
 Work for awhile with the pattern-breakers!
 Come for a march with the new-world-makers:
 Let beauty be!²⁵

For Hughes, to encounter pattern-breakers and new-world-makers, is to awaken to life—its mysteries, its harshness, and its wide range of experience.

Thomas Merton’s life reveals a similar interweaving of darkness, diversity and depth. Merton yearned as a youth for diverse experiences and a centered life; he walked into experiences as varied as wild parties, siring a child, a mysterious crucifixion experience, working with a spiritual master of Hinduism, and working with the poor in Harlem.²⁶ He searched to understand social movements (especially civil rights) and the deeper meanings within them; he explored movements within his soul and diverse religious traditions. The popularity of Merton’s biographical accounts suggests that his explorations of darkness and diversity struck a chord with others. Through his existential encounters, Merton’s life deepened; through his writing, others’ lives deepened as well.

ALFRED NORTH WHITEHEAD’S COSMOLOGY

With the riches of spiritual traditions, one wonders why cosmology is relevant at all. It does not directly guide spiritual life, but it does help make sense of the world. Consider the intellectual struggles of mystics and spiritual sojourners of the past. Julian, for example, wrestled with evil in relation to the sureness of God’s love, posing

cosmological questions regarding God and the world, but demanding that explanations be deeply grounded in the realities and pains of the world.

Alfred North Whitehead is a rich resource for such cosmological reflection, although his context, intentions, and concerns differed from those we have considered thus far. His wrestling with darkness and diversity, like theirs, was shaped and limited by his social location. Thus, we begin by looking at Whitehead, the socially-located man. Victor Lowe introduces Whitehead's biography by questioning how such a good man can be interesting: "A life of Whitehead is bound to be lacking in spice ... His adventures were adventures of the mind."²⁷ Yet, Whitehead was a questing spirit, who journeyed through some twenty-five agnostic years and many years of philosophical theism. He actively quested to understand the universe, not always at a safe distance. In his Cambridge years, he joined philosophical colleagues in the Cambridge Conversazione Society (Apostles) to explore questions at the edges of conventional thought.²⁸ Later, he resisted common dualisms by integrating ideas that others considered incompatible (See "Imagine Peace"). Such integrative impulses marked many aspects of his work.

Whitehead was not a social activist, but he was sometimes embroiled in issues of justice, as in Cambridge when he defended the tenure of his colleague Andrew Forsyth.²⁹ He was also something of an activist in education, speaking with polytechnic and university faculty in London and advocating for business education at Harvard.³⁰ He cared about the quality of education in which ideas and actions were considered in interrelated wholes, and duty and reverence were enhanced.³¹

As a philosopher, Whitehead sought a coherent theory of the universe, though convinced that no theory (his or anyone else's) would ever be fully adequate. Uniquely

for someone of his compass, he was interested in large, unified systems as well as “bite-sized philosophical problems.” In his philosophical construction, he emphasized the pluralistic nature of the universe in which “nothing exists without essential dependence on other things,” and the nature of God “as eternally *with* the temporal world.”³²

As a human being, Whitehead developed an early consciousness of social systems, a close relationship with the natural world, a sense of history, and a penchant for time alone. Though his own family was solidly middle class, he learned something of class structures through close relationships with others and avid reading. Whitehead was also curious about the natural world and its influences, noting the obstinacy and the “tendency to lonely thought” among his people, the coastal people of East Kent.³³ His deep connections with history were evident both in reminiscence and in philosophical analysis. He told one of his Harvard classes “that his grandfather was alive when the oak tree under which Augustine was said to have first preached to King Ethelbert was cut down.”³⁴ At the age of 80, he wrote of Canterbury, a few miles from his native Ramsgate: “As I now write I can visualize the very spot where Becket fell A.D. 1170, and can recall my reconstruction of the incident in my youthful imagination.”³⁵

As a thinker, Whitehead was keenly aware of his interior self. Lowe cites the 70-year-old Whitehead as saying “that he was no good unless he had a couple of hours each day in which to get off by himself and think.”³⁶ This is the same Whitehead who had earlier written, “Religion is solitariness; and if you are never solitary, you are never religious.”³⁷ Although this statement seemingly contradicts the relational philosophy of his later years, the image of individuals living in the rhythms of solitariness and community endures in Whitehead’s life practice and in his cosmology. He never rejected

the preciousness of each particular bit of reality in relation to larger interconnected wholes. We find here a human being who, like the other spiritual sojourners we have considered, lived a richly textured life; we also find a man whose cosmology promises deeper understanding of those textures, to which we now turn.

DARKNESS

Alfred North Whitehead, known for his relaxed disposition, left no diaries for others to access his internal struggles. On the other hand, his wrestling with mystery *is* accessible; his entire vocation can be summarized as a *search for mystery and for a cosmological framework to hold it*. He described his work on the Gifford Lectures, later *Process and Reality*, as “derived from years of meditation.”³⁸

Not only did he develop these lectures from a lifetime of meditation, but he also located the work of philosophy in a large and critical frame. He described his task in a four-fold way: to be constructive, to frame and examine critically a scheme of ideas, to make explicit and critique existent schemes, and to acknowledge the inadequacy of any such scheme. The second and fourth points are particularly intriguing in relation to Whitehead’s vocation of wrestling with mystery. On the second, he said, “[T]he true method of philosophical construction is to frame a scheme of ideas, the best that one can, and unflinchingly to explore the interpretation of experience in terms of that scheme.” This grand attempt is tempered with humility. In his fourth point, Whitehead described “how shallow, puny, and imperfect are efforts to sound the depths in the nature of things”; he further recognized that “the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly.”³⁹ In such words, we glimpse Whitehead’s method, standards by which we can now critique his work. Whitehead sincerely wrestled with

mystery, but did not finish the work. He left to others the task of wrestling with the harsh mysteries within human oppression, ecological destruction, and troubled human souls.

DIVERSITY

Whitehead had far more to say on diversity, but not in the popular sense of that word. He was concerned with *the diversity of ideas that enter into philosophy, the diversity of data and feelings that enter into each moment of becoming, and the diversity of movements in the universe that enter into the life of God.*

On the first point, Whitehead was frustrated by narrowness in philosophy, especially in narrow choices of evidence: “This narrowness arises from the idiosyncrasies and timidities of particular authors, of particular social groups, and of particular schools of thought, of particular epochs in the history of civilization.”⁴⁰ Whitehead was consistently *concerned with large systems in relation to a broad range of particularities.* I have argued elsewhere that Whitehead could have increased the range of his work by considering more evidence regarding ecological and human destruction.⁴¹ He did, however, seek to include as much evidence as possible inside his scope. His own social location and moment in history precluded more; the same will be true for us all.

If Whitehead was limited in analyzing destruction, he kept his philosophical doors open for new discoveries. He admired the “rough and tumble” of philosophical probing:

There is a greatness in the lives of those who build up religious systems, a greatness in action, in idea and in self-subordination, embodied in instance after instance through centuries of growth. There is a greatness in the rebels who destroy such systems: they are the Titans who storm heaven, armed with passionate

sincerity. . . . Philosophy may not neglect the multifariousness of the world—the fairies dance, and Christ is nailed to the cross.⁴²

To this end, Whitehead sought to maximize the order that weaves the multifarious details of reality into vital wholes, but to minimize the order that stifles freshness.⁴³

Whitehead was generally aware of the dangers of dominance in philosophical and social intercourse. He recognized that the blessing of a great organization becomes a curse when that organization becomes dominant. He, thus, hinted at social criticism in his analysis of systems, while advocating in his characteristic way that all movements be held in tension. He clearly did not move in the direction of Karl Marx with an either-or analysis of philosophical systems or social classes. Instead, he moved into a subtle, but powerful, approach to diversity, seeking not to destroy the dominant systems of the past, but to see them as a heritage to critique, resist, and reform in building the future. This may seem naïve in postmodern sensibilities, but it is also realistic. Whitehead saw the inevitable influence of the past and the necessity to wrestle with its blessings and curses, rather than oversimplify the past's influence or the future's possibility. This reflects openness to diversity that is rarely actualized in contemporary philosophy or theology.

Whitehead's second way of honoring diversity shifts attention from method to content: *recognizing the diverse data and feelings that enter into each moment of becoming*. The process of concrescence—the basic building block of the universe—is a process of the many becoming one. The concrescence of an emerging entity includes everything that is positively prehended, or felt; thus, diversity is embraced in the creation of every actual occasion.⁴⁴ Diversity is built into the basic nature of reality.

On a third point, Whitehead saw *diversity in the life of God*. As the world comprises infinite instances of the many becoming one (concrecence), so God receives the manyness into God's own being. While this view is distinct from that of Julian or Langston Hughes, Whitehead's view of God, holding together the fullness of creation, has a mystical ring. The consequent nature of God "is composed of a multiplicity of elements with individual self-realization," still imaged as a whole with discrete and vivid parts. God's consequent nature "is just as much a multiplicity as it is a unity"; further, this multiplicity is still "in process of creation."⁴⁵ Creation, thus, is never complete, even in God. This is the point at which the mystic's appreciation of diversity, entering into God and pointing to God's future, sings in harmony with Whitehead's symphony.

DEPTH

As for the spiritual sojourners discussed earlier, Whitehead's darkness and diversity lead into depth. This is not the depth of empty erudition or vain complexity; it is *the depth of intense experience and complex order that contributes to the wellbeing of the world*. For Whitehead, the depth of satisfaction arises through adequate order. A high degree of chaos contributes to triviality, but a high degree of order is also trivial, destructive to the inquiring spirit. Neither chaos nor order is an end in itself, but depth *is*. "Thus," according to Whitehead, "if there is to be progress beyond limited ideals, the course of history by way of escape must venture along the borders of chaos in its substitution of higher for lower types of order."⁴⁶

With such challenge, we turn now to re-envision spirituality and spiritual practice. Consistent with the method of this chapter, we will draw upon the life wisdom of spiritual sojourners and the cosmology of Alfred North Whitehead to identify new possibilities.

RE-ENVISIONING SPIRITUALITY

The heart of this chapter is the spiritual vision that arises from darkness and diversity, promising to deepen journeys of soul and the Soul of the Universe. From the chorus of these pages, we can now compose a word-picture of spiritual life and practice.

REACHING TOWARD MYSTERY

Reaching toward mystery is a primary descriptor of spiritual life, involving disciplines of being still, seeking, and resting. Consider first the *discipline of being still*.

Be still and know-----
 The peaceful quiet beckons me
 to be still,
 But I know not how.
 I think of things to do;
 They must be done,
 And yet, the quiet beckons still.
 I stop and sit and listen:
 I know-----

Walking softly on a path,
 I know-----
 The forest opens into space,
 A vast meadow stretches down the gorge,
 Tumbling into the river far below.
 We cannot walk on
 We can only stop and listen
 And know-----⁴⁷

Just as Whitehead's *Process and Reality* came from a lifetime of meditation, so the practice of stillness is fundamental to liberation theologians, like Gustavo Gutierrez, whose theology begins in contemplation, and to mystics, like Julian, who listened to the voices of Mystery beyond words.

A second discipline of reaching toward mystery is *seeking—seeking and finding, and seeking and not finding*.

Spirit--
 I know the touch of wind
 blowing over the mountains;
 Spirit--
 I know the chill of crisp
 breezes in Autumn;
 Spirit--
 I know the refreshing calm of air
 moving on a hot day;
 Spirit--
 I know the wonder of love
 that is larger than those who love;
 Spirit--
 I know the power of grace
 moving in anger and in sadness;
 Spirit, spirit--
 I know your movements,
 but I will never KNOW you;
 You are SPIRIT!⁴⁸

This poem echoes the spirit of Whitehead, who constructed a cosmology, yet did not expect any cosmology, his included, to be complete or adequate. It echoes Langston Hughes, who critiqued the racist, imperialistic, economically oppressive world in which he lived, while claiming dignity and hope for his African American sisters and brothers. It echoes Julian of Norwich, who saw God in something no bigger than a hazelnut. These people were all seekers, sometimes finding answers, sometimes finding more questions.

Finally, a third discipline of reaching toward mystery is the practice of *keeping Sabbath*. Darkness is well imaged by the night, which promises rest for the earth from the heat of sun, and rest for people who work by day. The discipline of keeping Sabbath can take many forms, but one might understand Sabbath as the embrace of darkness—of rest. Howard Thurman nourished a love of darkness by loving the night, and allowing its mystery to enfold him. I have learned this more slowly, but with thanksgiving:

Darkness folds around me
 And quiets the rush of the day--

I sleep.⁴⁹

DANCING WITH DIVERSITY

If reaching toward mystery is important in journeys of soul, so is *dancing with diversity*. Spiritual journeys are limp if torn from the richness of life. Journeys of diverse times and places reveal colors and textures of spiritual experience and interpretation.⁵⁰ These complexities can then be woven into a life of blessed simplicity—holding the complexity of life in a unified whole.⁵¹ Such simplicity is a depth that emerges in the very encounter with diversity, a depth than can be nourished by spiritual disciplines.

First is the discipline of *attuning to the present other*. Whitehead describes his philosophy of organism as devoted to “making clear the notion of ‘being present in another entity.’” Indwelling is an ontological reality; “everything is positively somewhere in actuality, and in potency everywhere.”⁵² Realizing this can awaken people to the “everythings” that exist somewhere and everywhere. For Cass and Allie in the opening story, this involved attuning to the spirits of the dead around them.

A second discipline is *attuning to history*. We have already made the case that Whitehead was consciously attuned to history through the land and waters of his early years, as through churches, fortresses, and remnants of earlier civilizations. History was part of his imagination and part of his philosophical work; it lived at the core of his being. At the same time, Whitehead never understood history as a pure determiner of the present. His understanding of philosophy and the dynamics of concrescence assured that. Neither did Whitehead understand history as a manifestation of universals; it was simply a great pile of past facts—an emergence of particulars into historic realities. He gave the example of Castle Rock in Edinburgh, a rock of great mass and prominence, which could

easily be mistaken for a permanent and necessary substance. He argued that Castle Rock simply “exists from moment to moment, and from century to century, by reason of the decision effected by its own historic route of antecedent occasions.”⁵³ Whitehead’s attunement to history was grounded in reality—as gritty as Langston Hughes’ poetry: “I’ve been a slave ... I’ve been a worker ...”.⁵⁴ It resonates also with Gustavo Gutierrez’s empathy for Job’s ancient story of suffering, reiterated still in his people.⁵⁵ Such attunement is rich in awe, sorrow, and hope.

A third discipline is *making decisions*. In a Whiteheadian cosmology, every being is made by decisions: entities are actual because they represent decisions from a vast array of potential. Past influences are weighty, but the final movement of an emergent occasion is “the self-creative unity of the universe”; thus, all beings have some degree of self-determination or self-realization.⁵⁶ This explains why decisions are important, but it also points toward an inadequacy in Whitehead’s cosmology. Whitehead explained how decisions function in relation to diversity, but gave little ethical guidance regarding the power and direction of decisions. This is left to other spiritual sojourners. It is left to Sojourner Truth, pointing the way of freedom for her people. It is left to Mahatma Gandhi, pointing the way of nonviolence for India and the world. It is left to Gustavo Gutierrez, sharing realities and visions of the poor and oppressed. It is left to Charles Birch, John Cobb, and Jay McDaniel, analyzing ecological destruction and the plight of animals, and pleading for human compassion and the liberation of life.⁵⁷ It is left to Sue Nelson, analyzing dynamics of self-destruction and pointing beyond.⁵⁸ It is left to Peter Paris, creating a shared moral discourse from the spirituality of African peoples, and recharging the values of beneficence, forbearance, practical wisdom, improvisation,

forgiveness, justice.⁵⁹ It is left to ordinary beings to make conscious decisions, aware that their marks will shape the future of the universe, as others' marks will shape ours.

This leads to the fourth discipline—*imagining new possibilities*. Dancing with diversity is itself a source of imagination, found in feelings, intellectual thought, and educational practice. Whitehead acknowledges that diverse *feelings* in an emerging subject reveal “some trace of free imagination.” As to diverse *propositions*, “it is more important that a proposition be interesting than that it be true.”⁶⁰ Imagination is also critical to *education*, which needs teachers “whose learning is lighted up with imagination.”⁶¹ Imagination is a discipline to be cultivated, not simply as flights of fancy, but as ways of engaging the real world and contributing to its flourishing. For models of such imaginative living, we can look to Nelson Mandela, living for decades in prison, and emerging as a man of vision who could lead his country into a new age, or to Martin Luther King, Jr., who had a dream and evoked a dream of freedom in the United States. Imagination also marks the work of Elsa Tamez, who brings together women theologians in Latin America to concentrate their influence and shape the theologies, ideologies, and actions of their respective countries.⁶² These are all people who imagine possibilities and lead others in the discipline of imagination.

We turn now to the fifth and final discipline for dancing with diversity, namely the discipline of *embracing pain and dwelling on the tender elements of the world*. The language here is partly borrowed from Whitehead. In a rare moment of explicit reference to Christianity, he describes “the Galilean origin of Christianity,” which “dwells upon the tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love.” Building upon this central idea, he describes God as being *with* the world in creation, and as *saving*

the world as it passes into God's own life. God embraces the world, including the pain, with compassion. God judges with "a tenderness that loses nothing that can be saved"; God uses "what in the temporal world is mere wreckage." We are left, then, with a vision of God as "the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by [God's] vision of truth, beauty, and goodness."⁶³

Whitehead's Galilean vision resonates with his relational cosmology, which, whether attached to process-relational theology or no theology at all, gives value to embracing pain and dwelling on tenderness. This discipline is embodied in the story with which we began. Cass's mother could not bear the destruction that had come to everyone she knew, and she could never again receive her murdering husband into their marriage bed. Even so, she sent her daughter Cass away with the assurance that a piece of her spirit would stay strong inside her. The discipline is also embodied in Langston Hughes, who could not bear the horrors of racism, but who dwelled on the beauty and dignity of his people. The discipline is also embodied in Julian of Norwich, who saw sin as inevitable, but also knew, with confidence, the goodness of God: ". . . but all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well."⁶⁴ A close look at Julian's seemingly naïve testimony reveals a thoughtful analysis—a blessed simplicity—that embraces pain and dwells on the tender elements of the world.

The final word on tender dwelling can be given to Cass's mother. In the story, Cass visits her mother at the end of her life. In those days of communing, this mother, who has suffered much, describes what a good life has been for her:

It's been giving away so much love there have been times I thought I'd die from the outpouring. . . . It's been raising up my children the best ways I knew how, and

it's been watching Oloe die without hate taking hold of my soul. . . . I don't know as I could call it the life I would've chosen, but maybe God—when I stand before Him, with all my days and nights laid out plain for Him to see—maybe God will call it good.⁶⁵

Cass's mother denies no sadness, wrongdoing or destruction; she has faced them honestly throughout her days. Yet she chooses to dwell on the tender elements of the world.

LIVING IN THE DEPTHS

This paper is a journey through darkness and diversity into depth, and that is where it will end—with *an invitation to live in the depths*. Guided by spiritual sojourners of the past and the cosmology of Alfred North Whitehead, the journey is itself a bold invitation to human sojourners to reach toward mystery and dance with diversity.

Journeys of soul have markers and disciplines along the way but, finally, the goal is depth—not an ending, but a new beginning for more reaching and dancing!

¹ An earlier version of this paper, including the poem, were developed for the International Conference on Process Thought and the Common Good, Center for Process Studies, Claremont, CA, August 1998.

² Lane von Herzen, *Copper Crown* (New York: Penguin, Plume, 1991), 70-71.

³ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁵ Gregg-Schroeder, *In the Shadow of God's Wings: Grace in the Midst of Depression* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1997).

⁶ Gail Unterberger, *Through the Lens of Feminist Psychology and Feminist Theology: A Theoretical Model for Pastoral Counseling*, Dissertation, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, 1990.

⁷ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: University Books, 1963, 1902), 508; cf: 507-515, 485-486, 525-527, 1-52.

⁸ Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, "Hiddenness," 1979.

⁹ Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, "Tides and Tears," 1995.

¹⁰ Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, S.J. (New York: Paulist, The Classics of Western Spirituality, 1978), 125-127, 177-179; Grace M. Jantzen, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1987), 60-61.

¹¹ Julian, 125-130, 177-181.

¹² Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (London: SPCK, 1991), 133-159.

¹³ Hadewijch, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, trans. Mother Columba Hart (New York: Paulist, 1980), 4-5.

¹⁴ Paul A. Dietrich, "The Wilderness of God in Hadewijch II and Meister Eckhart and His Circle," in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and*

Marguerite Porete, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1994), 31-43; Hadewijch, 88-89, 127-258, esp. 230-234.

¹⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, *The God of Life*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), xi-xvii.

¹⁶ Langston Hughes, "Rising Waters," in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, eds. Arnold Rampersad and David Roessel (New York: Random House, Vintage Classics, 1994), 48.

¹⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

¹⁸ Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, "Rolling, Roaring, Shining, Shading, Touching, Reaching," 1998.

¹⁹ Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1995), 146-156; Jantzen, *Julian*, 89-164.

²⁰ Gustavo Gutierrez, *We Drink from Our Own Wells* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984).

²¹ Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Yolanda Tarango, *Hispanic Women: Prophetic Voice in the Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996).

²² Consider, for example: Kwok Pui-lan, "Unbinding our feet: Saving brown women and feminist discourse," in Laura E. Donaldson & Kwok Pui-lan, eds., *Postcolonialism, feminism & religious discourse* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Kwok Pui-lan, *Discovering the Bible in the Non-Biblical World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995); Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); Virginia Fabella, Peter K. H. Lee, David Kwang-sun Suh, eds., *Asian Christian Spirituality: Reclaiming Traditions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992); Chung, Hyun Kyung, *The Struggle to Be Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990); Elizabeth Tapia, *The Contribution of Philippine Christian Women to Asian Women's Theology*, Dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 1989; Virginia Fabella and Sun Ai Park, eds., *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women* (Hong Kong: Asian Women's Resource Center for Culture and Theology, 1988).

²³ Two prominent examples are: George Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Vine Deloria, Jr., *For this Land: Writings on Religion in America* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

²⁴ Walter L. Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1992); Will Roscoe, coord. ed., *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology* (New York: St. Martin's, 1988).

²⁵ Hughes, 135.

²⁶ Thomas Merton, *Seven Story Mountain* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998, 1948); Michael Mott, *The Seven Mountains of Thomas Merton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984).

²⁷ Victor Lowe, *Alfred North Whitehead: The Man and His Work, Vol. I—1861-1910* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1985), 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 112-145.

²⁹ Lowe, 315-318.

³⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, The Free Press, 1968, 1929); Brian Hendley, *Dewey, Russell, Whitehead: Philosophers as Educators* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1986).

³¹ Whitehead, *Aims of Education*, 14.

³² Lowe, 6, 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁷ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (New York: New American Library, Meridian Books, 1960, 1926), 16.

³⁸ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, xiv.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 337.

⁴¹ Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching from the Heart: Teaching and Educational Method* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity, 1998, 1991).

⁴² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 337-338.

⁴³ Ibid., 339.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 40-42, 220, 236-239. "The process of concrescence is divisible into an initial stage of many feelings, and a succession of subsequent phases of more complex feelings integrating the earlier simpler feelings, up to the satisfaction which is one complex unity of feeling" (220).

⁴⁵ Ibid., 350; cf: 349-350.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 111; cf: 110-112.

⁴⁷ Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, "Be Still," 1983.

⁴⁸ Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, "Spirit," 1986.

⁴⁹ Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, "Darkness," 1979.

⁵⁰ Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*; Peter Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Philip Sheldrake, *Living between Worlds: Place and Journey in Celtic Spirituality* (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1995); McGinn, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*; Park, *The Wounded Heart of God*; Fabella, Lee and Suh, *Asian Christian Spirituality*; Margaret R. Miles, *Desire and Delight: A New Reading of Augustine's Confessions* (New York: Crossroad, 1992); Miles, *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

⁵¹ Raimundo Panikkar, ed., *Blessed Simplicity: The Monk as Universal Archetype* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982). Pannikar draws upon the archetype of monk to identify blessed simplicity as a spiritual goal.

⁵² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 50, 40. Whitehead calls this the ontological principle.

⁵³ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁴ Hughes, 24.

⁵⁵ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans., Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987).

⁵⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 47, 43; cf: 222-223.

⁵⁷ Charles Birch and John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Liberation of Life: From Cell to the Community* (New York: Cambridge University, 1981); Jay B. McDaniel and Charles Pinches, eds., *Good News for Animals?: Christian Approaches to Animal Well-being* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993); McDaniel, *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995).

⁵⁸ Susan Nelson Dunfee, *Beyond Servanthood: Christianity and the Liberation of Women* (Lanham, N.Y.: University Press of America, 1989); Andrew Sung Park and Susan L. Nelson, eds., *The Other Side of Sin: Woundedness from the Perspective of the Sinned-Against* (Albany: State University of New York, 2001).

⁵⁹ Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples*.

⁶⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 263, 259; cf: 260-264.

⁶¹ Whitehead, *Aims of Education*, 97; cf: 92-101.

⁶² Elsa Tamez, ed., *Through Her Eyes: Women's Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989). We similar work in other parts of the world. See, for example: Mercy Amba Oduyoye, ed., *Transforming Power: Women in the Household of God* (Accra-North, Ghana: Sam Woode Ltd., for the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, 1997); Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Virginia and Dolorita Martinez, *The Oaxtepec Encounter: Third World Women Doing Theology* (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians, 1989).

⁶³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343, 346.

⁶⁴ Julian, 225; cf: 224-226, 231-233, 236-247, 197-199.

⁶⁵ Von Herzen, 196-197.