

“Every Thing is Sacred” — 50-06
PAUSE TO CONSIDER: REFLECTIONS ON SESSION #6

1. Last week I opened with a prediction of good weather incoming and here it is! +8 by day's end. So much snow to go!! That last snow period set records for our place - most snow in 5 years. The snow piles are high — our trees will be happy this spring.
2. Opening featured Carrie Newcomer and Palmer Parker. During our study featuring Palmer Parker, we were introduced to Carrie Newcomer's music videos. Their ongoing website is <https://onbeing.org/blog>
3. Housekeeping with Brenda
 - a. **Flowers for Easter...** contact the office up to April 3, 2023
 - b. **Guided Meditation Pastoral Care Zoom** begins at 8:30 a.m. Thursday mornings during Lent. **ACTS Thursday morning Bible Study** on Jeremiah gathering will go as usual between 10 a.m. and 11 a.m.
 - c. **Broadview subscriptions can be purchased through St. David's** for \$25.00
 - d. **If crafting is in your life**, join others on Friday afternoon between 1 and 4 at Northminster. RSVP to Suzanne Vandervoort.
 - e. Opportunities abound with Calgary Alliance for the Common Good. Monthly meetings are attended by people like you from all walks of life with one goal in mind: Making Calgary the best it can be.
<https://www.calgarycommongood.org/> (Copy the link and insert in your search for weekly updates to this important Calgary initiative.)
4. Wayne's Reflections on Reflections 28 through 34. **Discussion as we move through the Reflections with Wayne seems to involve many of us. I have run comments for Pause to Consider together in an ongoing conversation. Forgive the paraphrasing of your ideas.**

Pause to Consider

• **Cruciform:**



This video features Joseph Campbell who published two books relating to the concept of Cruciform: “The Hero's Journey” and “Power of Myth.” As Wayne mentioned, the pattern is familiar — “the hero leaves home, struggles with adversities and adversaries then returns to his/her community.” ... groups can be heroes, bound together with guidance/leadership from one or two... the Bible does this with the story of Jesus— it was his followers that told his story... Hero's stories are not always outward but can be inward journeys of heroism.

- **Total Love:**

Patrick tells us about John Hume, 1988 Nobel Peace Prize winner, for his work towards peace in Ireland.



Photo from the Nobel Foundation archive.

John Hume
The Nobel Peace Prize 1998

Born: 18 January 1937, Londonderry, Northern Ireland

Died: 3 August 2020, Londonderry, Northern Ireland

Residence at the time of the award: United Kingdom

Role: MP, Leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party

Prize motivation: "for their efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Northern Ireland"

Prize share: 1/2

Jesus, on the cross, is an example of **true love**. For protestants, the cross is empty and the consensus is that Catholics have it wrong... however, if Jesus had not died on the cross, we would not be Christians today— the revelation of the resurrection.... image has changed over time — a visit to Ireland with the prevalence of the Celtic circular cross with no beginning and no ending has changed perception ... love and hate are very close elements as pride and jealousy, admiration and obsession ... it was in the 6th century that the cross took on such importance for Christians — initially it was the symbol of the fish... crucifixion was a shameful death.

- **One Suffering:**

Do we need to suffer?... Jacob had to reconcile with his brother and wrestle with an angel, resulting in his limp... we have celebrity examples of the trust fund babies who have lives much too easy, leading to narcissism.... "go within and through suffering... a story shared about losing a dear friend and through eulogizing his passing, found cleansing of pain and suffering... a story shared about the death of a grandmother and the bonding between grand sisters brought peace and healing... Mike's challenge comes to mind — advising us to write our own eulogy (see his example in Pause to Consider 50-05).

- **All in One Lump:**

...a loss that seemed so grievous is healed over time. ... a memory of a time when the book "Celestial Prophecy" played a role in life— humanity is evolving — we will all make it or not!... recalling Mark Carney's book "Values" suggesting that our prime value today is "market value" — a motivational force. Collective thinking is being bypassed (Common Good).

- **Resurrection:**

A quote from "Humankind" — 'make courage and confidence your message, not threat and fear.'...from the same book, the friendliest dogs were the ones who sired friendlier pups....

- **Revealed as Light:**

a recollection of an experience of dying at age 17 with parents called in — a passing over the threshold to beauty leaving behind a vision of peace... as Wayne said of the hero's journey through adversity and adversaries. ... abundance and scarcity are in balance... Resurrection Moments were shared... dreams, dark nights of the soul, continuous learning — takes awhile for light to shine through.

- **Hell:**

...sharing of the idea that Patrick is still working on his beliefs ... he is a practising Roman Catholic and it is a new idea to him that Christ is universal... the concept of an underworld predates Christianity — Sheol, Hades — but is added to Christian thinking about 725 CE — Jewish mysticism gives it seven divisions.

5. Closing with Joan: The Angel City Chorale were guests at the HIV Interfaith Conference in 2020. Enjoy! (Sorry about omitting a vital step to screen sharing last night!!)



6. Michael's Notes:
Exercise 14-2

I do think all 3 of these experiences I've identified, I was conscious of almost being a vessel, an avatar of something else, and of a kind of responsibility and almost a calling to a greater something than myself. That I remember those moments signifies that I have been able to retain, at least a little, that sense of greater-than-me.

I have crystallized that lately in a saying that I may have noted in our last book and will repeat again. I don't always succeed at this every day, but I *am* trying. I WOULD MUCH RATHER BE THE SMALLEST PART OF THE BIGGEST THING THAN THE BIGGEST PART OF THE SMALLEST PERSON. I really, really don't want to be the smallest person.

You want to find reasons to love,
not reasons to fear. I can get
onboard with that.

Exercises 15-1 and 15-2 (no change
or difference for me) Lots of things
and people. My family. My friends
—almost every one of them
becomes a focus of love for me
when I see and hug them. Why?

Because, at least for that moment
or that time, they have chosen to
spend some of their precious
emotional capital on me. A
beautiful mineral crystal. A perfect
glass of wine. Coming back from a
1-5 record to win a fantasy football
championship. From what I can
discern, a love object should serve
as an avatar or power-focus for you
to remember to and be able to love
yourself and others

15-3. I haven't journaled about this
yet, but my recently-deceased
friend Alexa...I was fortunate to
have been invited to her wedding
during Covid. And all of us were
moved to tears by David's incredible
self-written vows. I think he
exhibited so much love that it
spread over all of us like a benison.

It caused my friendship with both
of them to deepen and allowed me
to celebrate beauty during a bleak
time.

There's something at work here
beyond what they've set out,
something I think I alluded to in
Braving the Wilderness. You can
only truly be fully empathic if you
yourself have suffered pain

I think a lot of people, me included,
have suffered from depression at
some point for some period and
often have not identified it

Etty Hillesum. Victor Frankl talks
about some of this too, about
modulating your love objects to take
account of your surroundings and
circumstances. Theresienstadt
(Terezin) is surrounded by bucolic
countryside. The prisoners knew
they'd never set foot on it, but I
have to believe some took comfort
in seeing it and knowing it *existed*

Grin—I talk to myself all the time.
Have done it for years!

Exercise 16-1. I've tried to take
ownership of it, but I haven't always
succeeded. I do tend to dwell on
my failures, but not to the point of
obsession. Although I'm rather on
the feeling/affectionate side, my
mom gifted me with a sturdy
pragmatic streak that does look to
push forward some. One of the
ways that has worked well for me is
for me to ask 'what would X do with
this?', where 'X' is someone I really
look up to and admire.

Exercise 16-2. I do feel fine.
Cleaned, in a way. It's as he says—
when you look back to and think

about your suffering, you also a)
come to grips with the fact that you
did get through it, and b) focus on
your learnings from the experience

Remember, love and hate live on
sort of a knife edge with each other.
I talk sometimes about a world
where people are unconsciously
inconsiderate.

'The greater light you are, the
greater shadow you cast'. 2 more
sayings. With even a little power
comes great responsibility. And...it
is easy to be a bright light when you
bask in the glow of a supernova 😊

Exercise 17-1. Not defensive, but
maybe uncomfortable at not being
more conscious of when my shadow
self may be in play and what that
manifests as. When I read this
reflection, I was reminded of the
Litany Against Fear that Frank
Herbert developed in the Dune
science fiction series.

'I must not fear. Fear is the mind-
killer. Fear is the little death that
brings total obliteration. I will face
my fear. I will permit it to pass over
me and through me. And when it
has gone past I will turn my inner
eye to see its path. Where the fear
has gone there will be nothing.
Only I will remain'

Exercise 17-2, there is plenty to
unpack here. I think I do tend to

make friends easier than other
people for a couple of reasons.

First, because I see the best in
people, that tends to bring out the
best in people. Second, I have the
kind of breadth of knowledge and
interests where I can talk with
almost anyone about almost
anything. Paired with an extrovert's
curiosity and it's a working formula.

But at the core—friends have to be
interested. And they have to be
interesting. And they have to be
both. And the degree of friendship
is directly tied to the intensity of
interest. Some friends it's enough if
I call them or email, or see them
very occasionally. A next level are
those I will actively plan to travel or
organize an outing specifically to be
with them. And my best friends?

They are the people who teach me
about myself. And they are the
people who I would donate bone
marrow to, or throw myself in front
of a train for, because their lives are
as valuable to me as my own.

That said, I am constantly trying to
stay on guard against taking over a
conversation. It's a bad habit I
have not yet been able to break. I
do it out of enthusiasm more than
anything else, but it's still not good

We sure are creatures of habit, now
more than ever, living lives of rigid,
crystallized certainty

Exercise 18-1

Probably the big one was being fired from my work as a lawyer in Toronto. At the time, all I could see was my failure to myself and to my law firm. I have a critical saying that I have hung tightly to for a long time. Dead ends can make for new beginnings...if you're strong enough to build the bridge, and if you have help doing that. My parents, my friends and my mentor at the career coaching firm all openly believed in me. I could not but play along and believe in myself.

Exercise 18-2

I can say that it has, but it's very hard to pin down. I think when I made a 'breakthrough' in coming up with my participative divinity recipe (directly thanks to this group and the book we were reading at the time!), that represented a change.

I think I got an affirmation of God's care through his/her/its messengers when I was in Israel, reeling from the shock of mom's likely cancer diagnosis and the bombing of the synagogue in Pittsburgh and Deb called me to tell me many of you had attended a solidarity night vigil at one of the Calgary synagogues—for me. Mostly, though, I have been most aware of uncovering more and more facets of God—teacher, judge, forgiver, creator, destroyer—in some cases—even seeker maybe. And God who loves.

Exercise 18-3. You can pick from this list:

Exercise 18-4. This will sound decidedly odd, but I believe that especially in today's world, managing and embracing change requires resistance. Resistance against and resistance to the massive flow of certainty and inertia. It's a gigantic change in mindset—that lack of change isn't about staying planted in the ground. Instead lack of change is about uncaringly being swept along by the tide and torrent of 'popular opinion' and mass-movement or "groupthink"---I'm not sure there's a more pernicious word that's ever been invented. And that change has to start with swimming upstream, against the current. To do that, you have to start by planting your toes in the river bottom. Maybe change is about being less predictable. And in this milieu, that may well mean not being one of the billions that make up Isaac Asimov's idea of psychohistory.

Up there and down here. This was one of the more interesting chapters to me. I've been to the Great Triumvirate of the French cathedrals—Chartres, Reims and Auxerre. A quick excerpt from the Chronicles;

we had stopped, at my behest, in Auxerre, to see the last of the Great Triumvirate of French cathedrals---we'd seen Chartres and Reims, but never Auxerre. And we parked the car still a little too far down. Once again, I

forced dad to climb a long ascent. But then we debouched onto the square in front of the cathedral. Sat down to have lunch, staring at this magnificent tribute to mankind's ingenuity, determination, reverence and even valour. And he said to me "You know, sitting here, having lunch, looking at this incredible structure, and sitting beside my son there aren't any words to describe this moment" And I said to him "there don't have to be, dad. We can just BE here to enjoy it".

Dividing and categorizing is a very natural human-based trait

Climbing is also synonymous with living in Achievementopolis—which, good or bad, many people do. I've never before thought about whether the genesis of the achievement ethos is this aspiration to get 'up there' but it now seems very plausible to me

The crucifix also has a type of symmetry and an odd sense of balance. I am fairly sure that the design of the Star of David has historical and mystical roots but I haven't delved into them

Exercise 19-1. The big one is probably the ladder of white supremacy/privilege. I don't comport myself in a way which actively asserts it, but I've come to know it's there. I need to be more the smallest part of the biggest thing and less the biggest part of the smallest person. Working on it. Twined in—the ladders of selfishness and materiality-for-myself. I don't spend *much* time

on those ladders but I'd be lying if I said 'never'

Exercise 19-2. The liturgy, ritual and tradition would certainly be factors, and they probably hit biggest in reinforcing that God is so big (infinite wisdom, E.g.) and I am so small. I don't mind that so much, it fosters humility. But I could see it getting in the way of participative divinity. Where I am able to break away from that and move closer to what Father Rohr is saying is in recognizing that religion and yes, even God, are just parts of the greater whole of my spirituality and spiritual journey, just as faith and belief are only parts of that. Is a journey really a journey if you don't take note of all the sights along the way? Another way of putting this: "Don't make the journey and get somewhere and then look back and not be able to see the road that led you there"

Exercise 19-3. Hard to know where to begin. We have so many habitual behaviours. Easy one to start. My boss nags me very good-naturedly about using passive voice in my writing but honestly, I do need to get better using an active tone. I need to unlearn a lot of wasteful and harmful practices I still engage in about the environment. That is a long journey of which I've only taken the first steps. And there are times—very rare times—that I feel a sense of injustice. I really need to let go of that.

The concept of 'depth' brings up three 'frightening' ideas as first thoughts: drowning; being vulnerable; darkness. This is conditioning I should look to overcome. In fact, that seems a really great exercise. Pick any word. List the first 3 concepts that come to mind. Are any of them negative? If yes, it's worth investigating why and maybe look to take steps to change your orientation

I remember best the Birkman test, which I did during career transition. What I liked best (and it spit out a 60 page report) is that it more or less objectively told me about some strengths, weaknesses and tendencies that I wasn't fully aware of

Exercise 20-1. I think for me it's a fluidly symbiotic thing. If I become aware of an experience which is part of my spiritual journey, it will always be accompanied by a look inward to assess and to 'touch point' with myself and my held values to see if they are challenged, affirmed or modulated by the experience. Maybe even all three at once! It's my living painting, right? A painting needs paint and a painter. It needs a frame and imagination. It often needs a start point and end point. And it can certainly be a triptych or somesuch!

(Skipping exercises 2 and 3 for now)

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While I have commented on some secluded places and moments that have meant much to me, asceticism is not my normal way of life. I don't naturally and instinctively gravitate to it. So, ironically, it probably has more impact and meaning for me when it does happen.

I've talked to a couple friends (one of them Jewish) who have done some or all of the Camino. It has changed their lives

Note something. All 3 of these things, pilgrimage, retreat, labyrinth involve a journey of some kind and, perhaps to a lesser extent, an element of getting lost

Will save the exercises for another time.

Mary could be viewed as the Christian Abraham—one who unconditionally believed in God. I also repeat the caution I put forth in the discussion session—that even seeking the feminine aspect of God is an exercise that casts her in our image. That's not entirely wrong when the goal is expanded connection points to God but it does come with some peril

I can do little better but transpose my notes from pages 122-123 of Universal Christ:

“why did Christians so fall in love with Mary? I could give a possible answer. Because they had inherited the duality of the complete human picture from the parent religion. See Genesis Chapter 1. God created Adam. And then he created Eve. Eve was just as much God’s work. 2 of every animal in the ark. Read the Genesis stories again---the females have significant text devoted to them. While it may not paint them in the best or most feminism way, they are not left out.

how about this? Mary was the vessel—the crucible, even---by which the Christ became embodied in Jesus. In that sense, it is a reinforcement of the feminine creating, birthing, nurturing and ultimately humanly loving (though I don’t think we ever get the concept of Mary’s love for her child?)”

Exercise 22-1. This has been fine for me, since I have been lucky to have had a very strong and loving relationship with both parents, and have thoughts very similar to Patrick’s. The only discomfort is that it reminds me of my loss now that mom is gone, but there’s strength there too—that her love and the things that made her such an admirable person have left their imprint on me

Exercise 22-2. I’ll be quick here and go back to say again the thing that can be someone’s greatest gift to give. I suppose I’m lucky in that I feel no diminishment and only enhancement in doing it—in sharing my life with others and sharing their life with me. I will be candid and say that I am not too conscious of God’s presence when I do this—it is an inherently personal

and human part of my quest for participative divinity.

Gibran. Yes. I have a little different tilt on this, a very old Chronicles entry, and if I wrote this today, I’d probably remove the qualification at the beginning:

Let's take the premise that with the possible exception of mom, dad and siblings, your relationship with every other person on the planet starts out as strangers. This, of course, is a very neat dynamic and a great thing to remind yourself of every once in a while. Why? Well, here's 4 things to burble around. First, we take the premise as true. OK, then, what happens to the relationship with the stranger is very much up to us. We can choose to associate more closely on a positive level. We can choose to associate more closely on a negative level. Or we can choose not to associate at all. Or anywhere on that continuum. Next, it's a flowing dynamic that impacts us almost every second. And that leads into third and fourth. Third, it would be worth it to remember not to get complacent, even with close friendships. Even with a husband-wife relationship. Because there is...and I think there always will be....a little bit of stranger in every relationship you have. It's what makes us individuals, after all---our individuality---and at the most basic level, there will be a constant conflict between that and the interrelationship and interaction with another individuality. Fourth? No one, least of all me, said this was a <bad> thing. Recognizing and allowing the stranger to have an existence in a friendship (or a foeship/enemyship, or an acquaintanceship) means you give yourself always the opportunity to discover something new about the other person, to discover something more about the other person, to achieve a better understanding of the other person and weave it into the fabric of what you know about them and what you learn about you and them. Have I tied ya into knots yet?

Exercise 23-1. It **has** happened. I helped, I think, pull a friend back from the brink. It felt very important for me to do it and to be there and to be trusted enough to be let in for that. And, short-term, it deepened the relationship to the point that she was there for me in my darkest hour, the first few days after mom's passing when I needed an outlet to cry out my grief and she wrapped her arms around me and let me do that. But relationships—and people—are very tricky things, you know. This is the friend that abruptly cut off all contact with me a year and a half later and never connected again.

Exercise 23-2. I don't think it's happened---other than occasionally my mother telling me what to do, which is always allowed---but I candidly believe I'd only be partially open to this type of involvement. Another old journal entry illustrates this:

we humans have a great capacity to adapt and to change and to accept suggestions for improvement or change. But there's one thing on which us people seem to be pretty adamant. We bristle, sometimes violently, if anyone tries to tell us how to live our life at the core. I've seen it in others, I've seen it in myself---say whatever else you want but don't you dare tell me I'm living my life wrong. Am I that afraid that my decision-making in this sphere is flawed---fundamentally or not? Am

I worried that the pith of who I am is inadequate? It's a fertile field for thought---take someone's reaction to coping with addiction---maybe the equally serious thing being assaulted is the person's self esteem and worth because in kicking the habit, they're being asked to change how they live their life...and they're not the ones in control of that change. So yeah, maybe doing that takes a level of courage that is downright scarce. And so the second-most futile thing any person could do is try to tell or make another person change how they live. The most futile thing? Blaming yourself for not doing more to tell or make that person change. It <can't> be your fault. It just can't. You can't let it. Because it's not fair to you if you are silly enough to do so

This leads to a broader concept. Someone can only help you if you want to be helped. Someone can only support you if you accept support—and that you need it. You have to do something very, **very** hard. You have to believe that you alone are not enough. **THIS MIGHT END UP BEING MY MOST IMPORTANT LEARNING TO TAKE AWAY FROM THIS BOOK** Because I do think that's what they're driving at. **That God is here to be the enough when I myself am not enough.** That is the best expression of what God means to me that I think I've been able to come up with.

Exercise 23-3. Yeah. See above!

6.Homework: next week as we read Reflections 35 through 40. Read the Notes too.

Reflection #35: Universal Encounter

- a. Take a moment to reflect on long-standing relationships in your life where you've experienced frustration or conflict. Do you recognize who the other person has become? Does the other person see how you've changed and who you've become?
- b. Take some time to journal and pray about these relationships.
- c. Have you allowed your understanding of and relationship with God to develop and change from where it started?

Reflection #36: Paul's Personal Encounter

a. Reflect for a moment on some of your behaviours ... an addiction, greed, lust, a dismissive attitude... What aspects of your family and upbringing have shaped these behaviours? Are you reacting from a place of hurt, scarcity or fear? Are you usually conscious of these behaviours or are they part of your shadow (seen by everyone else but you)? Can you see the effects that these behaviours have on others? Journal about them

b. Reflect on your experience of church. In what ways have you experienced a collective "alternative society" that has stood up to corporate evil? In what ways have your religious communities remained 'a model whereby people live almost entirely in the world, fully invested in its attitudes toward money, war, power and gender?

c. What would it mean for you to further move from an emphasis on how right you are (orthodoxy) toward an emphasis on 'just doing it' (orthopraxy)?

Reflection #37: Both...And...

a. Are there areas in your life where you tend toward 'either... or...' dualistic thinking. Journal about your experiences of what's good and what's not so good about these dualisms.

b. Consider your situations; journal about how it feels to see your options from this non dualistic perspective. Does it change how you view or how you feel about these scenarios?

Reflection #38 Contemplative Practice

a. Follow the instructions for a "Contemplative Sit" at the conclusion to Reflection #38 then read Psalm 46:10 aloud (we have done this with Carey Landry in a previous session.) *Be still and know that I am God.*

b. Journal what this experience was like. Repeat it for a minimum of 40 days... to form a new habit. Embrace a more contemplative "both...and..." perspective of life.

Reflection #39: The Contemplative Path

a. Consider other types of contemplative practices you would like to try.

b. In what relationship or social situation could you choose a 'kind of dying' today?

Reflection #40: Finding Balance

a. Trace your own journey of the "Tricycle" model of theology. Which of the three wheels did you first emphasize in your faith life? How did this affect your day to day living? In what ways could revisiting this "Tricycle" from time to time encourage you to connect more holistically with your faith and spirituality.

b. Reread various Reflective Exercises and select a few that you would like to revisit and even develop in the future. (Patrick's suggestion— #6, #10, #21, #24, #25, #28, #29, #30, #38.

Michael's Challenge to us: Write your own obituary.

Thank you, so much, for your sharing of journal notes (now up to Reflection #23) — a generous contribution!!

7. Final Thoughts:

a. There is a numinous quality about our mother's views that can either yield comfort and freedom or fear and anxiety.

b. From Fr. Richard... his childhood belief was that God was the eternal torturer in an unsafe universe. His conclusion: Most of us need deep healing from this traumatic view of God.

c. From Patrick: our brains are part of the whole — we need safety and the landscape for each of us is unique.

d. John Wesley— founder of Methodism held that there were four pillars of faith with the fourth being 'reason.' Fr. Richard feels that if reason stands alone it takes over. He teaches that it is part of the experience wheel.



Happy reading and journaling!

Thoughtfully yours,

Brenda (have a great week!)



OPIE, Fr. Richard's Dog

See sduc.ca — Click on Ministries and on the second line is our page for ACTS and the slides for each week along with Pause to Consider which is sent out on Tuesday. See you next week.