

02. The Prologue Part 1 John 1:1-13



NGC 1672: Barred Spiral Galaxy from Hubble

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Accordance Bible lands photo guide. Used with permission

Imagine yourself sitting in the Ephesus theatre. The drama is introduced with a rhythmic dance which places the life of Jesus in the context of creation.

‘In the beginning was the word’ (John 1:1)

We recall the opening words of the Book of Genesis: Israel’s ancient creation narrative

Genesis 1:1-2

‘In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters.’

Then we hear God’s word.

Genesis 1:3

‘Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.’

In his address to the philosophers in Athens, Paul quotes from Epimenides, a sixth century BC philosopher in Crete: 'In God we live and move and have our being' (Acts 17:28).

The word 'God' refers to the Reality that is the ultimate cause of everything that exists. Nothing could exist without this sustaining Presence. Any words we use to speak of this Reality can at best point us towards it. God remains mysterious. We do not directly experience 'God'.

People have intuited the Presence of this mysterious Reality in nature: in a mountain shrouded in cloud, in a grove of trees, in a spring gushing from the earth, in the sun or moon, in thunder and lightning and in the night sky. When people worship these, they are giving expression to their sense that there is more to them than what appears. They sense the presence of 'God' in them.



*from article Leaves Become Most Beautiful When They're About To Fall, On moving on.
Allison Sofia Bouffard Nov 07, 2016 Wartburg College, theodysseyonline.com*

There emerged in human consciousness an intuition that ultimately everything is inter-connected, that the spirit of the ocean and the spirit of the earth and the spirit of the sky are ultimately the one Spirit, the one Presence, the one Creator that accounts for the existence of everything and sustains everything in being. The notion of Monotheism was born.

It is, perhaps, rare to encounter a true monotheist. It is not enough to say 'I believe in one God'. True monotheism is certainly not found in people who say 'There is only one God and God is ours, not yours'. We know a monotheist by the fact that he/she treats everything as ultimately sacred.

We cannot expect to know God comprehensively. The best we can do is get to know God by getting to know the way God is revealed in the realities that we experience. When we encounter another's love, when a baby is born in the family, we learn so much more about God. To explore the Reality of God we need a profound humility. We need also to know that everyone has a contribution to make in this exploration.

The evolving universe continues to be chaotic, as matter struggles to go beyond what it is to find expression in ever more complex, but ever more unified, beings. It is the Presence that we call God that creates and sustains everything and that energises the random processes of an evolving universe.

A profoundly significant step happened with Jesus who knew and revealed God as love.

To love is to give your real self to another, to want what is best for them, to want them to 'live and live to the full' (John 10:10), to respect their freedom. It is not loving to seek to control them. Knowing that God is love, we must clear our heads of thinking that God controls what is happening in the universe.

It is God that is holding everything in existence and drawing everything to give created existence to love. This has profound implications for every religion, for every church, for all of us. It is love that sustains the universe. It is love that holds everything together in harmony. When we try to control, our behaviour is incoherent, and the God we worship is a false God.

God respects our limited but real freedom. The world is as bad as it is because we use our freedom badly. The world is as beautiful as it is because we use our freedom in ways that are loving.

Jesus showed us what we human beings are capable of when we are fully open to the gift of God's creating and sustaining presence. He showed us how to welcome the divine Spirit and how to open ourselves to let the Spirit act in and through us. He does more. He shares with us his Spirit, his personal communion with God, his prayer. God is constantly loving, constantly inspiring, constantly offering forgiveness, so that people will live to the full and help others live to the full.

When terrible things happen we do not ask why God allowed it, for we take seriously the freedom of our evolving universe, and God's gift to us of our own limited but real human freedom, even to act badly. We ask, rather, where God is in what is happening. Look at Calvary. God's presence is not seen in those who are acting unjustly. If we want to see where God is on Calvary we must look for where we see love, and we see love most clearly when we focus on Jesus. And when we do that we witness his terrible suffering, the kind of suffering that we see too frequently in today's world.

Jesus is real. He is suffering. He feels abandoned. But he can still pray that those responsible will find forgiveness. He can still care for his mother. He can still reach out to a man that is being crucified with him. And he can still trust God and confide his life to God's care. It is love that radiates the divine. When we love we are in communion with the mysteriously present God. As the medieval song has it: "Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est (Where there is charity and love, there is God)."

To love is to give one's real self to another. Where there is love, there we experience the 'Presence', the 'Mystery', the "Sacred"; there we experience 'God'. The universe is an expression of the divine. It is love that radiates the divine. When we love we are in communion with the mysteriously present God, the Ultimate Reality that sustains in existence everything we experience.

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Genesis 1:3

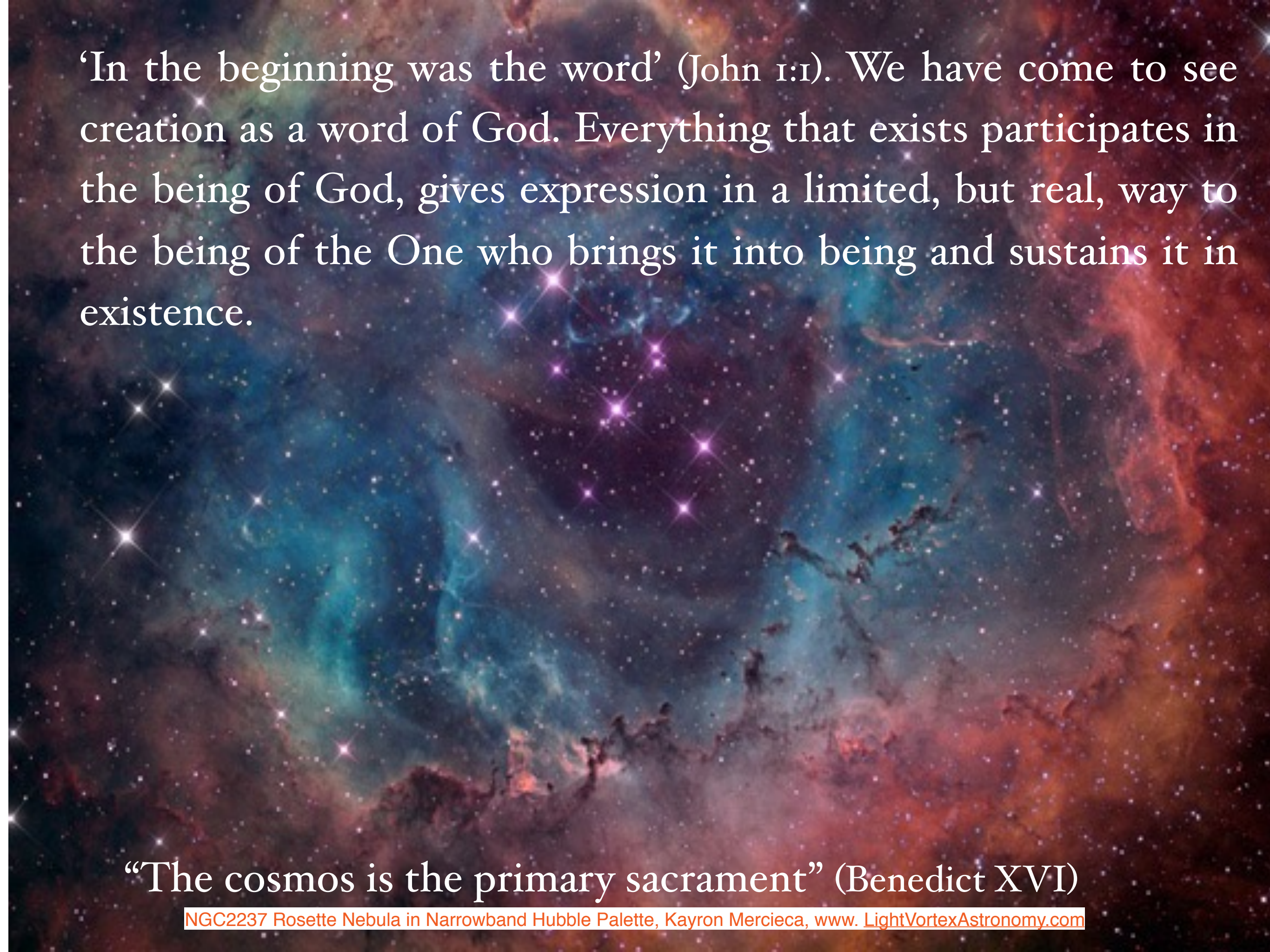
‘Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.’

Science takes us back to ‘**the beginning**’, described as the ‘Big Bang’ when, some 14 billion years ago, matter exploded and our continually evolving and expanding universe burst into being.



Blue Space Light, Wallpaper Safari

Matter is not self-explanatory. We have come to see God as the Creator of matter and as the One who sustains in existence everything that has evolved over these billions of years. We have come to see God, not as controlling the evolution as it were from outside, but as the ultimate sustaining Presence that breathes energy into the chaotic, random processes driving our evolving universe.



‘In the beginning was the word’ (John 1:1). We have come to see creation as a word of God. Everything that exists participates in the being of God, gives expression in a limited, but real, way to the being of the One who brings it into being and sustains it in existence.

“The cosmos is the primary sacrament” (Benedict XVI)

NGC2237 Rosette Nebula in Narrowband Hubble Palette, Kayron Mercieca, [www. LightVortexAstronomy.com](http://www.LightVortexAstronomy.com)

How we picture God is critical to how we see the universe. Thanks to Jesus, we see God as love. This means that everything that exists is a word of love, a realisation of God's gift of God's Self.

“Creation is like a first revelation, which has its own eloquent language. It is like another sacred book whose letters are represented by the millions of creatures present in the universe.”

(Pope John Paul II)

God's creating, life-giving **Spirit** is a **Spirit** of infinite self-giving love.

God's **Spirit** (God's life-giving breath) is working within creation, holding every creature in existence, enabling it to be, and to transcend itself: to evolve in the direction of increasing complexity.

Creation is a continuous receiving of the **Spirit** of God, who gives to creation all that it is and all that it has, including the impulse to transcend itself.



In the Prologue to John's Gospel we are reminded of God bringing about creation through his Word, echoing the "Let it be!" of the creation account in Genesis 1.

'The Creator is outpouring Love. The creation is the love outpoured.'
(Martin Laird. *'Into the Silent Land'* (DLT 2006, 17))

‘The word was towards God’ (John 1:1).

It is not sufficient to see creation as God’s word, God’s self-gift, an expression of God’s love. Everything that exists is drawn, as by a gravitational force, to its Source, to God.

‘The word was God’ (John 1:1).

God is not one being among many. God is. Everything created is an expression , a reflection, an icon, a sacrament, of God.

‘In the beginning, the word was towards God’ (John 1:2).

‘All things came into being through God’s word, and without it not one thing came into being’ (John 1:3).

‘Let there be lights in the dome of the sky’ (Genesis 1:14)

our solar system



c. 5 billion years

‘What has come into being through the word was life’ (John 1:4).

life: c. 3.8 billion years

Genesis 1:20

‘God said: Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures.

and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.’



‘Whenever something new arises, whenever life is awakened and reality reaches ecstatically beyond itself, in all seeking and striving, in every ferment and birth, and even more in the beauty of creation, something of the being and activity of God’s **Spirit** is manifested’ (Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 227).

John 1:4

‘Life was the light of all people.’



Michelangelo, The Creation of Adam, Sistine Chapel, Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons

‘God gives to creatures themselves the capacity for the new. Because of God’s creative and redeeming presence to creatures, they can become something they were not. When matter comes to life on earth, when life becomes self-conscious and personal, this occurs through God enabling creation to transcend itself and become something new’ (Denis Edwards, *How God Acts*, 158).

John 1:5

‘The light shines in the darkness,
but the darkness did not welcome it’ (καταλαμβάνω, verse 12).





John the Baptist Prepares the Way, LumoProject.com

John 1:6-8

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.
He came as a witness to testify to the light,
so that all might believe through him.
He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

John 1:9-11

The true **light**, which enlightens everyone,
was coming into the world.

God's word was in the world,
and the world came into being through God's word;
yet the world did not know it.

God's word came to what was God's own,
and God's own people did not accept it.

God's Word (God's gift of God's Self) was often rejected, even in Israel.

However, there were always those who welcomed God's gift and lived as God's children.

John 1:12-13

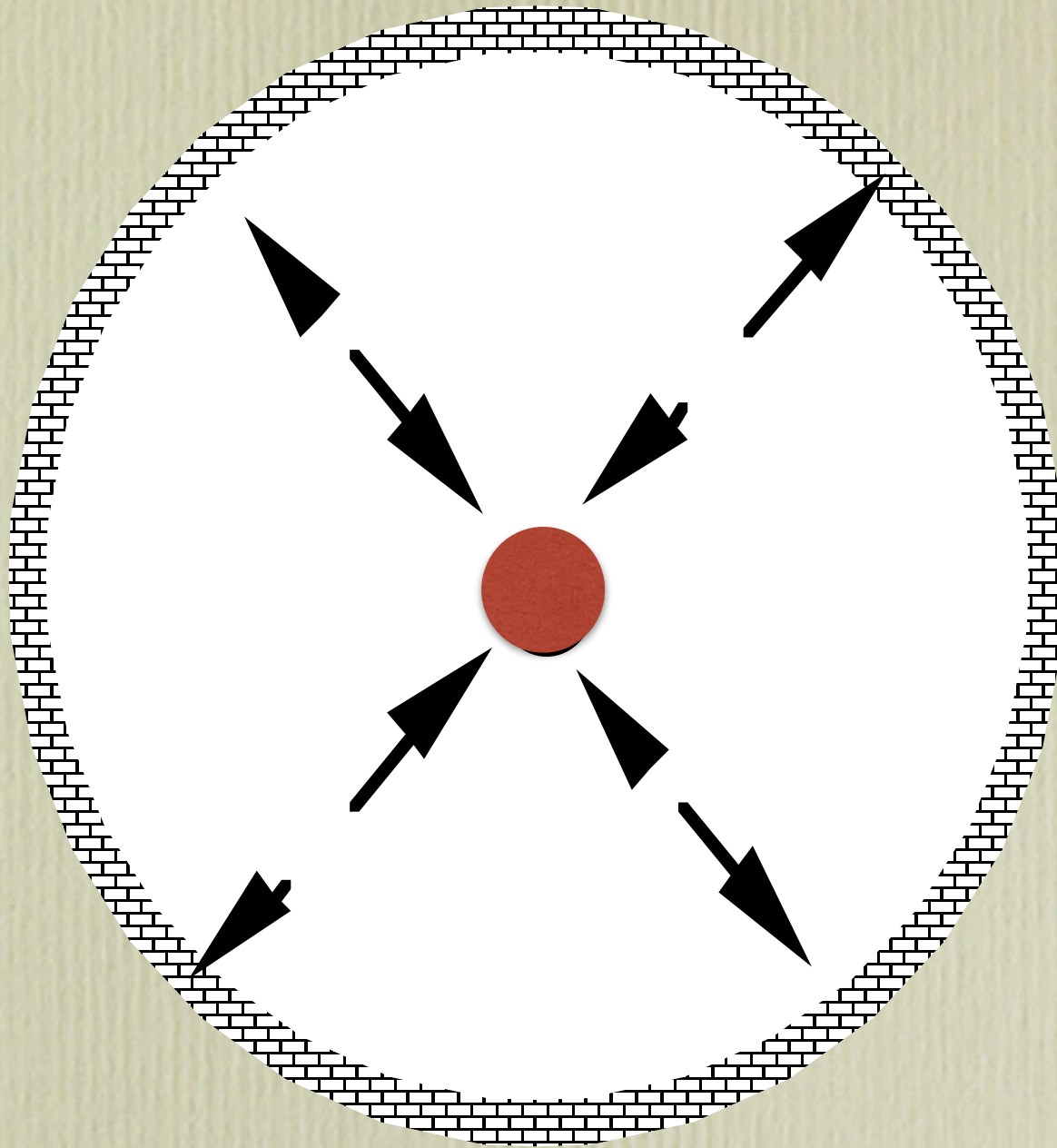
But to all who received the Word,
who believed in the Word,
the Word gave power to become
children of God, who were born
not of human generation
or of human striving
or of male power,
but of God.



Simeon Praises God and Blesses Baby Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth PartIV

Religious

Experience



Religion Re + ligare To bind back

The **Numinous** dimension of religious experience

Word



Starry Night Over the Rhone, Vincent Van Gogh,
1888, Musee d'Orsay, Paris, Public Domain
Wikimedia Commons.



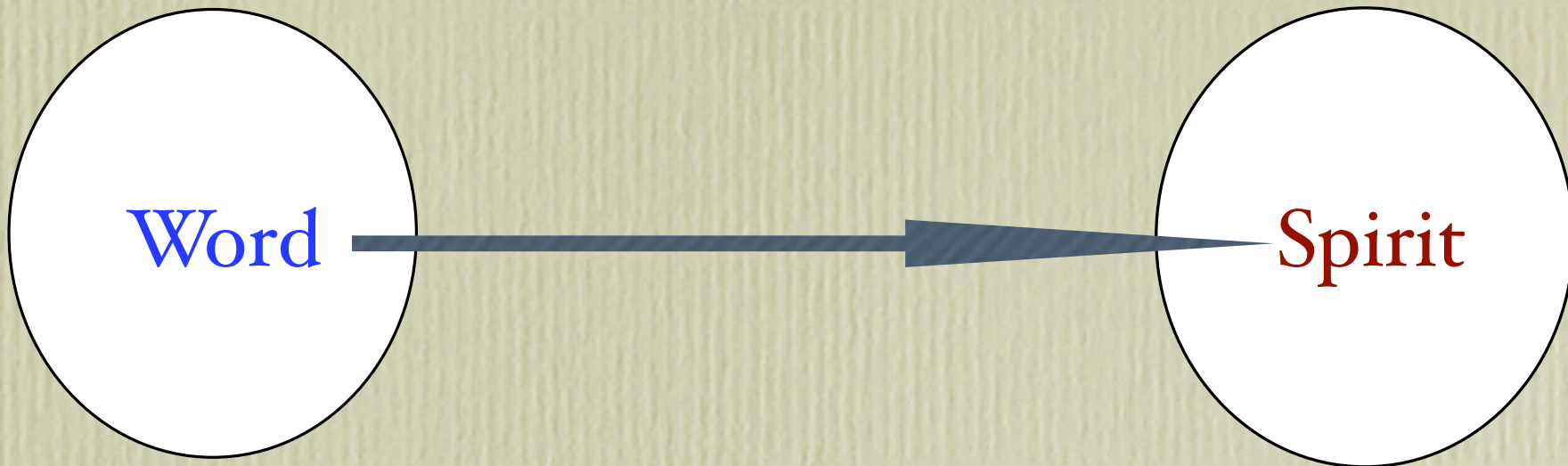
‘The world is full of God’s glory’(Isaiah 6:3)

The *Mystical* dimension of religious experience



‘God’s love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit
who has been given to us’(Romans 5:5)

Revelation



Numinous

Mystical

Heart

speaks to

Heart

God is revealed

- in nature
- in people & events
- in movements of thought & feeling
- in words spoken & written
- in works of art

They reveal something of the truth, beauty & goodness of the transcendent & mysterious God, the sustaining Presence in the universe.

This divine enlightenment finds expression

- in the Vedas & Upanishads
- in the sayings of Confucius
- in the sayings of Gautama the Buddha
- in the oracles of the Hebrew Scriptures
- in the Moslem Qur'an
- in the mystics, poets, artists of all cultures

John XXIII (died 1963)

On the Jews (shortly before his death)

‘We realise now that many, many centuries of blindness have dimmed our eyes, so that we no longer see the beauty of your chosen people, and no longer recognise in their face the features of our first-born brother. We realise that our brows are branded with the mark of Cain. Centuries long has Abel lain in blood and tears, because we have forgotten your love. Forgive us the curse which we unjustly laid on the name of the Jews. Forgive us that with our curse we crucified you a second time.’

‘The Church respects and esteems these non-Christian religions because they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people. They carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God, a quest which is incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart. They possess an impressive patrimony of deeply religious texts. They have taught generations of people how to pray. They are all impregnated with innumerable 'seeds of the Word' and can constitute a true 'preparation for the Gospel.’

John-Paul II, Mission of the Redeemer 1990, n.29

‘We must have respect for human beings in their quest for answers to the deepest questions of life, and respect for the action of the Holy Spirit in people ... Every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit who is mysteriously present in every human heart.’

John-Paul II, Mission of the Redeemer nn. 55-56

- ‘God does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression, even when they contain gaps, insufficiencies and errors ... The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God’s grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people.’
- ‘Dialogue with those of other religions is demanded by deep respect for everything that has been brought about in human beings by the Spirit who blows where he wills.’

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‘All things came into being through God’s word, and without it not one thing came into being’ (John 1:3).

‘What has come into being through the word was life’ (John 1:4).

‘Life was the light of all people’ (John 1:4).

‘The light shines in the darkness,
but the darkness did not welcome it’ (John 1:5).

‘The true light, which enlightens everyone,
was coming into the world’ (John 1:9).

‘God’s word was in the world,
and the world came into being through God’s word;
yet the world did not know it’ (John 1:10).

‘God’s word came to what was God’s own,
and God’s own people did not accept it’ (John 1:11).

‘But to all who received the Word, who believed in the Word,
the Word gave power to become children of God’ (John 1:12),

‘who were born not of human generation, or of human striving
or of male power, but of God’ (John 1:13).

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