Deus Absconditus

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INTRODUCTION: [*Si Deus existit, quid est Deus non manifesto et statim ad nos]: Deus absconditus et intellexerunt quod Deus abscondit* se - God is concealed also understood as God hides himself - *Quare Deus abscondit* se/why does God hide himself

If God exists, why is God not obviously and immediately present to us? Why is he concealed and hidden? The question presents us with multifaceted reasoning proposed by philosophers and theologians.

The argument, about divine hiddenness, was first elaborated by J. L. Schellenberg's 1993 in his book *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*. This argument asserts that if God existed (and was perfectly good and loving) every reasonable person would have been brought to believe in God. However, there exists reasonable nonbelievers, therefore, he concludes, God does not exist.

If God exists, why would He not want to make His existence clearly and plainly known to us? Since the truth of God's existence is not immediately obvious, then, we can conclude that God does not exist. \

If God loves us, God would desire our well-being. A genuine love leads the lover necessarily to seek a personal relationship with a beloved. Since this relationship is the nature of love, God would ensure that each of us possessed a rationally secure personal belief and that each of us could obtain this open relationship simply by willing it.

Consequently, we could easily enter into a conscious communion with God. Since this relational personal experience of love does not exist, this leads the non-theists to propose the existence of a God Machine and not the existence of a personal and a relational God. This perplexing aspect about the hiddenness of God makes the existence of evil and suffering a persistent connection to God's existence or non existence.

On the other hand, Theists posit the existence of God and presuppose that this God is compassionate, caring, loving, benevolent, holy, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent. This divine being desires what is best for creatures. According to Hebrew-Christian doctrines, God wants human creatures to live in full communion because this is the purpose for which humankind was created, to enjoy an intimate relationship with God.

However, many claim to have no awareness of God. Therefore, they profess no relationship to help them to reach a truly personal. God. Given the existence of violence, evil, suffering, and injustice it is difficult to believe that God is compassionate.

Why would a compassionate God look upon a five year old child being held through an open window after being maliciously abused, then, dropped to his death, and allow the horror to happen? Granted the perpetrator has the free will to act or not to act but is that free will granted/allowed at the expense of the innocent child's life.

The Hiddeness of God

Or why would a compassionate God favor the free will violent extermination of three million innocent children by the brutal Nazis and this God have no compassion for the lives of the children? Why does an all-loving God work one way, in favor of the free will horrific actions, and not desire the other way of action in favor of saving beautiful and handsome innocent children? Did God watch not caring as the parents cried for their children, the children cried for their mothers, fathers fainted during the earthquake in Turkey and Syria.

The objection is legitimate. How many of us have experienced God's physical and personal presence? Mother Teresa confessed, in her private letters, that she harbored "a deep longing for God" but all she had known, "deep down, was emptiness and darkness." The questions are difficult and lead us to conclude that the answers are beyond the reach of our grasp. If the answers to this challenge are beyond our grasp to reach, does this difficulty prove that God does not exist?

Theist philosophers and theologians have attempted to answer these questions. However, the responses to the problem fall short of satisfaction. One of those answers is related to the incorporeal nature of God; it suggests that God cannot be accessed by man's sense perceptions as easily as material beings can be accessed. Therefore, God is hidden to our sense perceptions. However, if God is all powerful, then, God presumable is able to make his essence fit our need for a personal relationship. It seems that those who question the hiddenness of God are not insisting that God must make Himself physically visible but only that God should, for an enhanced personal relationship, make His presence known. This question is what philosophers call an existential issue. We are defined by our existence, and our existence is defined by our relationship to other people and things in the world. Each person must choose and commit to his or her meaning and direction in life. Therefore, we can conclude that a personal relationship with God is required by our nature to complete our existence. If God is incorpoeal, we insist that God should adapt to the differences in our natures by finding ways to communicate with us on a personal level.

Other responders argue that God is transcendent, distinct from a created order, belongs to a different existence. Accordingly, they argue that we should expect such a transcendent being to be hidden from finite creation. While this is not an adequate explanation, Theists posit the transcendence of God but they also posit the immanence of God, that is, His presence, and involvement in creation. They conclude that we may expect hiddenness from a transcendent being but we should not expect an immanent being to be hidden.

This Theist position is an interesting, even if not fully adequate, explanation for the hiddenness of God. It concentrates on what God does rather than who God is. Namely, that God is free and self-determined, that God's thoughts, desires, and actions are not determined by external factors. Therefore, we are asked to understand that God acts according to His own will, Intent, and purpose, alone. A somewhat adequate-inadequate explanation for God's hiddenness that asks us to focus on God's intentions and not on his immaterial and transcendent nature. In other words, what action God is doing, and why God does not do more action, is grounded in His will, alone.

In his book, *Pensee*s;,the 17th century philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal stated, "We can understand nothing of God's works unless we accept the principle that he wished to blind some and enlighten others." Thomas Morris restates Pascal in his book, *Making Sense of It Al*l: "Now, it must be admitted that on first reading, this is truly a hard [difficult] saying. Why would a loving and just God blind some and enlighten others?" Indeed, It is difficult to understand, and seemingly unfair.

Morris explains that there is a relationship between the human condition and God's actions and non-actions, and between why God may be hidden to some but not to others. Pascal had further emphasized two opposite yet equally important aspects of humanity: man's greatness and wretchedness. Man has skills and talents to produce creative works, yet man also has the capacity to produce heinous and violent actions.

Deus Absconditus

Pascal further wrote, "Thus it is not only right but useful for us that God should be partly concealed and partly revealed, since it is equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own human wretchedness as to know his own human wretchedness without knowing God." The point is that the human condition serves as an explanation for why God seems to be hidden to some and not to others. It is plausible to think that God produces close encounters or clear evidence of Himself to those who are prepared for that encounter, because they are capable, without becoming puffed up with pride, to properly handle what is revealed to them. Certainly the response is appropriately existential by nature.

However, the question persists, where is God? Why does God's absence make us feel alone and abandoned? If God exists, where? If God is all-powerful why can God not reveal that essence in the most spectacular of ways that would make unbelief impossible? If God is all loving, then, why would God leave any room for doubt? Are there not days when anyone of us cries in exasperation, if not desperation: "God where are you?"

In religious literature, there is a long history of expressions of annoyance, anxiety, and despair because of the divine hiddenness. For example, ancient Hebrew texts lament God's failure to appear in finite experience to openly demonstrate compassion for people, or an afflicted person. Christian Gospels portray Jesus, in his cry of desperation on the cross, when he experienced abandonment by God, whom he regarded as "Abba, Father." The deus abdicatus is an experience shared by many mystics, saints, and faithful of different theistic traditions. It describes at its worst "the dark night of the soul." The divine hiddenness is a bleak existential problem for those who live in a dark hole [where it is always three o'clock in the morning as suggested by F Scott Fitzgerald].

If we are people of Faith, we are not drawn to the atheistic view that God is hidden from us. Therefore, we confront God's Hiddenness through Prayer. However, this recourse raises another objection that suggests if God is Sovereign why do we need to pray? And if we pray, how do we need to pray?

In places in Scripture we are told: God hears all your prayers (Psalm 139:4, 1 John 5:14–15, 1 Peter 3:12). In one sense, he answers all our prayers. But we do not always receive for what we ask. When we ask God for something, the response will be 'Yes' or 'No' or 'Wait'. We are assured by Isaiah [65:24] which assurance is expanded in Jeremiah [29:11]: "'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."

However, the questions prevail: We are led to believe that God exists. Yet, God does not want a personal relationship with us. We are urged to persist in prayer although, silent, God knows our desires, requests, and needs. We live in the darkness of uncertainty, not knowing if our prayers have pierced the transcendent divine ears.

It becomes for us a circle of confusion. However, the Theist rephrases the statement urging us to believe that prayer is necessary. While God does not need our prayers, we human beings need to pray. William Hendriksen [*Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*] states that while God clearly does not need the actual act of prayer, each person does need the act of praying, which open our minds, hearts, and souls to receive blessings. According to Albert Schweizer prayer is a gift from God. It is the comfort of humans prayer that we receive; it is not an action performed to seek a reward.

The Hiddeness of God

James William Fowler, American theologian, Professor of Theology and Human Development at Emory University, taught that the use of the phrase "our Father" [known as the Lord's Prayer] enhances the fatherly, personal aspect of God. Fowler suggests that Jesus is saying "there is no need to persuade or cajole God in prayer, a simple and sincere prayer would be the most effective way to offer homage to an exalted being."

Prayer is also a way to foster the opening of ourselves, to engage in meditation, needed for our growth as finite beings. Because we are asked in moral theology to repair our behavior for spiritual well-being, we can through prayer repair our behavior by replacing the seven deadly sins with the seven heavenly virtues: humility (opposed to pride), kindness (envy), temperance (gluttony), charity (greed), chastity (lust), diligence (sloth), and patience (wrath).

Saint Jerome suggested that it was heresy and mistaken dogma, to say that If God knows for what we pray, and, that before we ask, he knows what we need, therefore, our prayer is needlessly made to one who has such knowledge. Jerome said that "in our prayers we do not instruct, but entreat; it is one thing to inform the ignorant, another to ask for understanding. Informing refers to teaching; whereas our understanding is used to perform a service of duty."

John Chrysostom preached, with clarity, that we do not then pray in order to teach God for things we want, but to entreat God to become a friend. By the offering of our "prayers" to God, we are humbled, and likewise reminded that we are petitioners whose sins need remission, and our lives need enhancement.

Saint Augustine suggested that we use many words when we intend to insruct one who is learning, but we do not need many words to appeal to Him who is the Creator of all things. He says, "indeed, our heavenly Father knows what we need before you ask Him."

But Augustine adds that "we ought not to use words which suggest we seek to obtain from God what we would want as a gift, but rather that we seek a relationship through intense and fervent application of mind, with pure love, and suppliant spirit. And that with words we ought to stir ourselves more actively to increase this desire for friendship, so that after our prayer begins to wax warm, it may not be chilled and frozen without our continual care to keep it alive. Words therefore are needful only that we could be moved by them, that we would understand clearly for what it is we ask, not that we should think that by them the Lord is instructed or persuaded."

Augustine agrees that "prayer is not useful, whether made in words or in meditation of things, because God knows already what is necessary for us?" Augustine insists, however, that "the posture of prayer calms and purifies the soul, and makes it capable to receive the divine gifts which are poured into it. For God does not hear us for the prevailing force of our pleadings; He is at all times ready to give us His light; we may not be ready to receive it, but prone to other things.

There is, then, in prayer a turning of the body to God, and a purging of the inward eye, while worldly interests which we desire are shut out, that the eye of the mind be made single, might be able to bear the single light, and in it abide with that joy with which a happy life is perfected."

It is, after all, in prayer that we seek to eliminate the sins that are deadly so that we might increase in our lives the virtues which foster growth. In prayer, we need to listen more than we speak.

If we do not dispute the sovereignty of God, then where and how does prayer fit into God's plan? Or, why do we persistently ask: why should we bother praying if God has already determined the answers before we start to pray? Are we moving in a circle, nowhere closer to finding an answer to the question of prayer? If God is sovereign, and God knows the reason why we are praying, why do ne need to pray?

Deus Absconditus

Because these questions touch the inmost parts of our souls; we will continue to search for an answer.

Therese of Lisieux wrote: "*For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look, turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy*." [*Manuscrits Autobiographiques*, C 25rr].

Descriptions of prayer are abundant throughout Christian history. "*True prayer*," wrote St. Augustine, "*is nothing but love*." Prayer should arise from the heart.

"*Prayer*," said St. John Vianney, "*is the inner bath of love into which the soul plunges itself."*

"*Everyone of us needs half an hour of prayer each day,*" remarked St. Francis de Sales, "*except when we are busy, then we need an hour."*

Definitions of prayer are important, but insufficient. There is a difference between knowing about prayer and praying. The Rule of St. Benedict succinctly urges, "If a man wants to pray, let him go and pray."

St. John Damascene reminds us: *"Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God to request good things from God"* [*De Fide Orth.* 3, 24].

Citing St. John Damascene, The Catechism clearly defines prayer as a "vital and personal relationship with the living and true God" (CCC, no. 2558).

Prayer is Christian because *"insofar as prayer is communion with Christ"* (CCC, no. 2565), and in the Hebrew Scripture it is a *"covenant relationship between God and man."* We understand prayer through our celebration of the Sacraments and in the Liturgy of the Hours.

The word "prayer', in liturgy, becomes shaded with special meaning because liturgy [from the Greek word *leitourgia*] means a "public work done for or on behalf of the people." A work done by an individual or a group becomes a liturgy for the larger community. All worshipers are expected to participate actively in each liturgy, for this is holy "work," not entertainment or a spectator event. Every liturgical celebration requires the participation of the People of God in the work of God.

Liturgy is centered on the Holy Trinity. At every liturgy the action of worship is directed to the Father, from whom all blessings come, through the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit. We praise the Father who first called us to be his people by sending us his Son as our Redeemer and giving us the Holy Spirit so that we can continue to gather to pray, to remember what God has done for us, and to share in the blessings of salvation.

A circle is continuously drawn around two crucial religious questions: why does God hide himself from us, and why should we pray to a God who knows our needs and desires. In the circle we have diverged into the assertion that prayer is necessary for our personal moral growth, and that we confront God's presence, dispelling his Hiddenness, through Prayer. These two issues circle each other, suggesting that if God is hidden, does he, or does he not, exist? And of God exists, and is Sovereign who knows all things, why do we need to pray, and if we pray, how do we need to pray?

The Hiddeness of God

If there is a God who is a perfectly good and loving creator, it seems to follow that he would want the best for all his creatures. Consider, for example, St. Anselm, whom many philosophers view as the exemplar of theological triumphalism, the religious thinker with a priori logical certainties concerning the existence of God.

Toward the beginning of Anselm's *Proslogion*, we find the extended lament:

> ***"Lord, if thou art not here, where shall I seek thee, being absent? But if you are everywhere, why do I not see you present? Truly you dwell in unapproachable light. But where is unapproachable light, or how shall I come to it? Or who shall lead me to that light and into it, that I may see you in it? Again, by what marks, under what form, shall I seek you? I have never seen you, O Lord my God; I do not know your form.***
>
> ***What, O most high Lord, shall this man do, an exile far from you? What shall your servant do, anxious in his love of you, and cast out afar from your face? He pants to see you, and your face is too far from him. He longs to come to you, and your dwelling place is inaccessible. He is eager to find you; knows not your hiding place. He desires to seek you, and does not know your face. Lord, you are my God, and thou are my Lord, and never have I seen you. It is you that have made me, and have made me anew, and have bestowed upon me all the blessings I enjoy; and not yet do I know you. Finally, I was created to see thee and not yet have I done that for which I was made."***

Later, again, speaking about God, Anselm says: "Why did he shut us away from the light, and cover us over with darkness? . . . From a native country into exile, from the vision of God into our present blindness, from the joy of immortality into the bitterness and horror of death. Miserable exchange of how great a good, for how great an evil! Heavy loss, heavy grief, heavy all our fate!"

In the same text, there are numerous other passages which reiterate this tone of anguish, regret, and perplexity. Even within the pages of the Scriptures, such laments are found. Psalm 22 begins with the plaintive cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ... I cry by day, but You do not answer ...." and Psalm 88 adds: "But I, O Lord, I have cried out to You for help, and in the morning my prayer comes before You. O Lord, why do you reject my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me?"

From the biblical documents, through many of the great mystical writings of the western and eastern tradition, to the present day, the phenomenon of the hiddenness of God has been an unavoidable lament in the most sensitive and personal religious writing. Which leads some to question the existence of God.

The problem of evil is the single greatest existential lament for this religious disbelief which underscores that the hiddenness of God is a problem for theists. Of course, there are close ties between the two issues. The problem of the hiddenness of God is a limited version of the problem of evil. What could possibly justify a good God's allowing us to be afflicted with so great an evil as the deprivation of his presence, bemoaned by both the psalmist and the saint? Our lack of a clear vision of deity is seen as another widely suffered form of evil, counting prima facie as material, for launching an argument against the credibility of theism for the existence of God. Therefore, insightfully, the problem of evil is just a sub-category for the hiddenness of God.

What is so religiously problematic about all the suffering in the world is that it hides from our view the existence of the benevolent, loving providence proclaimed by the Judeo-Christian tradition. As many philosophers have realized, the problem of evil generates an argument, to the conclusion, that if there is a personal creator and sustainer of the world, then he is evil, or at least, in the words of Woody Allen, "an under-achiever." The hiddenness of God more directly supports the atheistic denial: there is not a personal creator and sustainer of the world.

Deus Absconditus

Pascal approaches the problem of the hiddenness of God not just as a convinced theist but also as a committed Christian who seeks to find God in humility and truth. For this reason he said: "Knowing God without knowing our own wretchedness makes for pride. Knowing our own wretchedness without knowing God makes for despair."

However, knowing Jesus Christ strikes the balance because he shows us both God and our own wretchedness. Jesus the Christ shows us God through his own divinity, and shows us our wretchedness in contrast with the standard he presents of human perfection. Jesus shows us how ro pray and why we need to pray.

We see our wretchedness as well in witnessing the fate he suffered at human hands. And it is not at all irrelevant, but extremely revealing that this fate, involving as it did extreme self-sacrifice and humility on the part of the God-man, reveals both the deepest truth about divinity as well as about the nature of perfected humanity. This is the Christian claim, so succinctly put by Pascal.

This thought seems to me to be a most promising beginning reflection on the hiddenness of God. It is the deep and subtle truth tied together that lies behind Pascal's adumbrations of God's purposes in refraining from manifesting himself in more astounding public spectacles. And it is thus more than obnoxious cleverness when Pascal finally writes: "Why does God not show himself? Are you worthy? *Yes*. You are very presumptuous, and thus unworthy.' or *No*? Then you are just unworthy."

It is in the Incarnation that we find our worthiness which is drawn from the Gospel of John [1:14] where he says "et Verbum caro factum est." It is earlier in the Gospel [1:1] where we reach a climax, about the hiddenness of God, with this magnificent phrase: "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us."

The Gnostic temptation has tugged at the Church, on and off, for nearly the past two thousand years. Authentic Christianity, inspired by this stunning claim of St. John, has consistently held off Gnosticism, for it knows that the Word of God took to himself a human nature and thereby elevated all matter and made it a sacrament of the divine presence.

The Greek phrase behind the words "made his dwelling among us" is literally translated as "tabernacled among us" or "pitched his tent among us." No Jew of John's time would have missed the wonderful connection implied between Jesus and the temple. According to the book of Exodus, the ark of the covenant, the embodiment of Yahweh's presence, was originally housed in a tent or tabernacle. The evangelist is telling us that now, in the flesh of Jesus, Yahweh has established his definitive tabernacle among us.

The incarnation implies three Faith facts:
(1) The Divine Person of Jesus Christ;
(2) The Human Nature of Jesus Christ;
(3) The Hypostatic Union of the Human with the Divine Nature in the Divine Person of Jesus Christ.

Without diminishing the divinity, there is added to it all that is involved in being human. In Christian belief it is understood that Jesus was at the same time both fully God and fully human, two natures in one person. The body of Christ was therefore subject to all the bodily weaknesses to which human nature is universally subject; such are hunger (Matthew.4:2), thirst (John 19:28), fatigue (John 4:6), pain, and death. They were the natural results of the human nature Jesus assumed.

The incarnation of Jesus, alongside humans made in the image and likeness of God, forms a Christian Anthropology. Specifically, incarnation is vital for understanding the concept of the Divinization of the Man, elaborately developed in Orthodox Christianity and expressed by Church Fathers, among whom are:

- Athanasius of Alexandria ("Therefore He was not man, and then became God, but He was God, and then became man, and that to deify us");

The Hiddeness of God

- Cyril of Alexandria ["For we too are sons and gods by grace, and we have surely been brought to this wonderful and supernatural dignity since we have the Only Begotten Word of God dwelling within us];"

- Ignatius of Antioch ["We have also as a Physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also man, of Mary the virgin"]; and

- Justin Martyr ["the incarnate Word was pre-figured in Old Testament prophecies"].

The Catechism of the Catholic Church discusses the Incarnation in paragraphs 461–463 and cites several Hebrew and Christian Bible passages to assert its centrality (Philippians 2:5-8, Hebrews 10:5-7, 1 John 4:2, 1 Timothy 3:16).

The Nicene Creed is a statement of belief originating in two ecumenical councils, the First Council of Nicaea in 325, and the First Council of Constantinople in 381. As such, is it still relevant to Christian Prayer in Liturgy today. The Incarnation is always professed, though different Rites using different translations. The Roman Catholic Church's current translation is: "For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit, he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man."

The Apostles' Creed includes the article of faith "He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary." According to Pope John Paul II, "by his incarnation Jesus is a figure of, and has united himself, to every human being, including the unborn at the moment of their life at conception."

Eventually, the teachings of Alexander, Athanasius, and the other Nicene Fathers, that the Son was consubstantial and coeternal with the Father, were defined as orthodox dogma. These led to the most widely accepted definitions of the incarnation and the nature of Jesus made by the First Council of Nicaea in 325, the Council of Ephesus in 431, and the Council of Chalcedon in 451. These councils declared that Jesus was both fully God (begotten from, but not created by, the Father) and fully man, taking his flesh and human nature from the Virgin Mary. These two natures, human and divine, were hypostatically united into the one personhood of Jesus Christ. According to the Catholic Church, an ecumenical council's declarations are infallible, making the incarnation a dogma in the Catholic.

We encounter the Incarnation through Faith. This union of the two natures in one Person has been for centuries called a hypostatic union, a Divine Hypostasis. What is an hypostasis? The definition of Boethius is classic: *rationalis naturae individua substantia* (P.L., LXIV, 1343), namely [a hypostasis is a complete rational individual]. St. Thomas defines hypostasis as *substantia cum ultimo complemento* (III:2:3, ad 2um) [a substance in its entirety].

To understand the discussion, we may need to read scholastic Philosophy. The Divine Logos identified with Divine nature (Hypostatic Union) means then that the Divine Hypostasis (or Person, or Word, or *Logos*) appropriates to Itself human nature, and takes onto itself every aspect of the human person. The human nature of Christ loses nothing of the perfection of the perfect man; the Divine Person supplies the place of the human.

When the Word became Flesh, there was no change in the Word; all the change was in the Flesh. At the moment of conception, in the womb of the Blessed Mother, through the forcefulness of God's activity, not only was the human soul of Christ created but the Word assumed the man that was conceived.

When God created the world, the world was changed, that is, it passed from the state of nonentity to the state of existence; and there was no change in the *Logos* or Creative Word of God the Father. Nor was there change in that Logos when it began to terminate the human nature.

Deus Absconditus

A new relationship emerged, to be sure; but this new relation implied in the Logos no new reality, no real change; all new reality, all real change, was in the human nature. Anyone who wishes to go into this very intricate question of the manner of the Hypostatic Union of the two natures in the one Divine Personality, may with great profit read St. Thomas (III:4:2); Scotus (in III, Dist. i); (*De Incarnatione,* Disp. II, sec. 3); Gregory, of Valentia (in III, D. i, q. 4). A modern text book on theology will provide various explanations in regard to the way of the union of the Person assuming with the nature assumed.

For example, John Hick, philosopher of religion, has written about this religious question in his search for an answer to the hiddenness of God., Hick addresses the Hiddenness of God in his book *The Myth of God Incarnate.* Hick proposes a reinterpretation of traditional Christology for the doctrine of the Incarnation.

He contends "that the historical Jesus of Nazareth did not teach or believe that he was God, or God the Son, Second Person of a Holy Trinity, incarnate, or the son of God in a unique sense." It is for that reason, and perhaps more for the sake of religious pluralism and peace, Hick proposes a metaphorical approach to incarnation. That is, Jesus was not literally God in the flesh (incarnate), but was metaphorically speaking, the presence of God. "Jesus was so open to divine inspiration, so responsive to the divine spirit, so obedient to God's will, that God was able to act on earth in and through him."

Hick says, "This I believe, is the true Christian doctrine of the incarnation." Hick avoids discussing the Apostolic interpretation of the incarnation, and avoids the need to explain Christian paradoxes such as the duality of Christ (fully God and fully human) and even the Trinity (God is simultaneously one and three). Hick's intent is to draw attention to the God's manifestation of himself through the presence of Jesus through his "intimate responsiveness to the Divine spirit."

The Incarnation is the mystery and the dogma of the Word made Flesh. ln this technical sense the word incarnation was adopted, during the twelfth century, from the Norman-French, which in turn had taken the word from the Latin incarnatio. The Latin Fathers, from the fourth century, make common use of the word [confer Saints Jerome, Ambrose, Hilary]. The Latin *incarnatio* (in: caro, flesh) corresponds to the Greek *sarkosis, or ensarkosis*, which words depend on John (1:14) *kai ho Logos sarx egeneto*, "And the Word was made flesh." These two terms were used by the Greek Fathers from the time of St. Irenæus [according to Harnack, A.D. 181-189 cf. Irenaeus, "Adv. Haer." III, 19, n. i.; Migne, VII, 939]. The verb *sarkousthai,* to be made flesh, occurs in the creed of the Council of Nicaea [cf. Denzinger, "*Enchiridion*", n. 86]. In the language of Holy Writ, flesh means human nature or man, by synecdoche, a figure of speech in which a part is made to represent the whole or vice versa , (cf. Luke 3:6; Romans 3:20).

Francisco Suárez deems the choice of the word incarnation to have been very apt. Man is called flesh to emphasize the weaker part of his nature. When the Word is said to have been incarnate, to have been made Flesh, the Divine goodness is better expressed whereby God "emptied Himself . . . and was found in outward bearing or features like a man" [cf. schemati: usually in the form of a drawing] (Philippians 2:7); He took upon Himself not only the nature of man, a nature capable of suffering and sickness and death, He became like a man in all save only sin (cf. Francisco Suárez, *De Incarnatione*, Praef. n. 5). The Fathers now and then use the word henanthropesis, the act of becoming man, to which correspond the terms *inhumanatio,* used by some Latin Fathers, and *Menschwerdung*, current in German. The mystery of the Incarnation is expressed in Scripture by other terms: epilepsis, the act of taking on a nature (Hebrews 2:16): epiphaneia, appearance (2 Timothy 1:10); phanerosis hen sarki, manifestation in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16); somatos katartismos, the fitting of a body, which some Latin Fathers call incorporatio (Hebrews 10:5); kenosis, the act of emptying one's self (Philippians 2:7).

The Hiddeness of God

The Word, then, is the Creator of all things and is true God. Who is the Word! It was made flesh and dwelt with us in the flesh (verse 14); and of this Word John the Baptist bore witness (verse 15). But certainly it was Jesus, according to John the Evangelist, Who dwelt with us in the flesh and to Whom the Baptist bore witness. Of Jesus the Baptist says: "This is he, of whom I said: After me there cometh a man, who is preferred before me: because he was before me" (verse 30). This testimony and other passages of St. John's Gospel are so clear that the modern rationalist takes refuge from their forcefulness in the assertion that the entire Gospel is a mystic contemplation and no fact-narrative at all The Holy Office, in the Decree "Lamentabili", condemned the following proposition: "The narrations of John are not properly speaking history but a mystic contemplation of the Gospel: the discourses contained in his Gospel are theological meditations on the mystery of salvation and are destitute of historical truth." (See prop. xvi.)

It is not the set purpose of St. Paul, outside of the Epistle to the Hebrews, to prove the Divinity of Jesus Christ. The great Apostle takes this fundamental principle of Christianity for granted. Yet so clear is the witness of Paul to this fact of Christ's Divinity in the Epistle the Romans, where Paul writes: "God sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh and of sin" (viii, 3). His Own Son (ton heautou) the Father sends, not a Son by adoption. The angels are by adoption the children of God; they participate in the Father's nature by the free gifts He has bestowed upon them. Not so the Own Son of the Father. As we have seen, He is more the offspring of the Father than are the angels. How more? In this that He is adored as the Father is adored; the angels are not adored. Such is Paul's argument in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Therefore, in St. Paul's theology, the Father's Own Son, whom the angels adore, who was begotten in the today of eternity, who was sent by the Father, clearly existed before His appearance in the Flesh, and is, in point of fact, the great "I am who am," the Jahweh Who spoke to Moses on Horeb. This identification of the Christ with Jahweh would seem to be indicated, when St. Paul speaks of Christ as ho on epi panton theos, "who is over all things, God blessed for ever" (Romans 9:5). This interpretation and punctuation are sanctioned by all the Fathers who have used the text; all refer to Christ with the words "He who is God over all." Petavius (De Trin., 11, 9, n. 2) cites fifteen, among whom are Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose, Augustine, and Hilary.

This identification of the Christ with Yahweh is clearer in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Christ is said to have been Jahweh of the Exodus. "And all drank the same spiritual drink; [and they drank of the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ]" (x, 4). It was Christ Whom some of the Israelites "tempted, and (they) perished by the serpents" (x, 10); it was Christ against Whom "some of them murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer" (x, 11). St. Paul takes over the Septuagint translation of Jahweh ho kyrios, and makes this title distinctive of Jesus. The Colossians are threatened with the deception of philosophy (ii, 8). St. Paul reminds them that they should think according to Christ; "for in him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead (pleroma tes theotetos) corporeally" (ii, 9); nor should they go so low as give to angels, that they see not, the adoration that is due only to Christ (ii, 18, 19). "For in Him were all things created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations or principalities or powers; all things were created by Him and for Him" (eis auton). He is the cause and the end of all things, even of the angels whom the Colossians are so misguided as to prefer to Him (i, 16). The cultured Macedonians of Philippi are taught that in "the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father" (ii, 10, 11). This is the very same genuflexion and confession that the Romans are bidden to make to the Lord and the Jews to Jahweh (see Romans 14:6; Isaiah 14:24). The testimony of St. Paul could be given at much greater length. These texts, among many others, bear Paul's witness to the Divinity of Jesus Christ.

Here it is necessary to recall out topic regarding the "Hiddenness of God." The assertion is made, then, that God is manifested in the historical person of Jesus Christ. Therefore,

Deus Absconditus

now it may affirm our purpose to prove that the Divine nature was really and truly united with the human nature of Jesus, i.e., that one and the same Person, Jesus Christ, was God and man. We speak here of no moral union, no union in a figurative sense of the word; but a union that is physical, a union of two substances or natures so as to make One Person, a union which means that God is Man and Man is God in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, it is foolishness to assert that God has abandoned us because it is emphatically denied by the reality of the Incarnation. The word made flesh gives us reasons and identifies greater goods, for which God chooses to Reveal and not to hide himself. And, furthermore, it is clear that God continuously provides gifts of his presence in Liturgy, especially through the Eucharist and Biblical, Scriptual, narratives.

The following contentions are summarily destroyed: that God is hidden from us; that God has abandoned; that God does not exists because if God loved us he would make himself known to us. At the heart of Christianity and the gospel is the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we discover salvation from the "Word becoming flesh" (John 1:14) and the incarnate Son of God living and dying in our place as our Savior, we are encountering the God who is omniscient, Omnipotent, and Compassionate.

When we discover salvation in the eternal Son, his taking on human nature and acting as our covenant representative, apart from which there is no hope for the world, we are encountering the God who loves us. The Incarnation demonstrates that God is not hidden from us. We pray, then, for spiritual growth to reach this God who has revealed himself. We grasp many images from the Incarnation for meditation:

1. The person or active subject of the incarnation is the eternal Son. John 1:14 is clear: "The Word became flesh." In other words, it was the Son from eternity who became incarnate in the divine nature. The Son, who is in eternal relation to the Father and Spirit, willingly humbled himself and chose to assume a human nature in obedience to his Father and for our salvation (Phil. 2:6–8).

2. As the eternal Son, the second person of the triune Godhead, he is the full image and expression of the Father and is thus fully God. Along with the Father and Spirit, the Son fully and equally shares the divine nature. As the image and exact correspondence of the Father (Col.. 1:15; Heb. 1:3), the Son is fully God. All of God's perfections and attributes are his since Christ is God the Son (Col.. 2:9). As the Son, he participates in the divine essence, receives divine worship, and does all divine works as the Son (Ps. 110:1; Eph. 1:22; Phil. 2:9–11; Col. 1:15–17; Heb. 1:2–3; Rev. 5:11–12).

3. As God the Son, he has always existed in an eternally ordered relation to the Father and Spirit, which now is gloriously displayed in the incarnation. It was fitting that the Son alone, who is from the Father by the Spirit, became incarnate rather than the other divine persons (John 1:1–2, 14, 18). In the incarnation, the Son displayed his divine-filial dependence on the Father and always acted in relation to the Father by the Spirit (John 5:19–30; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1–21). From eternity and in the incarnation, the Son never acted on his own or independently, but always in relation to and inseparably from his Father and the Spirit.

4. The incarnation is an act of addition, not subtraction. In the incarnation, the eternal Son who has always possessed the divine nature has not changed or set aside his deity. Instead, he has added to himself a second nature, namely a human nature consisting of a human body and soul (Phil. 2:6–8). As a result, the individual Jesus is one person, the Son, who now subsists in two natures, and thus is fully God and fully man.

5. The human nature assumed by the divine Son is fully human and completely sinless. Christ's human nature was not fallen and not tainted by the effects of sin. Our inborn inclination to anti-God rebellion was not part of Jesus's

The Hiddeness of God

human makeup. Jesus fully experienced the effects of living in a fallen world, but he did not share the guilt or disposition of Adam's sin passed on to the human race. In fact, Jesus never committed a sin, nor could he sin (Matt. 3:15; John 8:46; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 1:19). Although he was tempted like us, he perfectly obeyed his Father, even unto death, as our covenant mediator, thus accomplishing our salvation as the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 5:5–10). It was Jesus' intent to be a model to show us that sin can be avoided.

6. The virgin conception was the glorious means by which the incarnation took place. The incarnation was thoroughly supernatural and a demonstration of our triune God's sovereign and gracious initiative to redeem his people (Matt. 1:1–25; Luke 1:26–38). The virgin conception was the time and means by which the divine Son added to himself a human nature. By the virgin conception, the triune God created a new human nature for the Son, and as a result of this action, in Jesus we truly meet God face-to-face, not indwelling or overshadowing human flesh but in full undiminished glory. Although we behold Jesus as a man, he is much more; he is the Lord, the divine Son who humbles himself and veils his glory by becoming one with us.

7. From conception, the Son limited his divine life in such a way that he did not override the limitations of his human nature. As a result of the incarnation, the divine Son lives as a true man with the normal physical, mental, volitional, and psychological attributes and capacities of original humanity. As the incarnate Son, he experienced the wonder and weaknesses of a completely human life. He grew in wisdom and physical stature (Luke 2:52), experienced tears and joy, and suffered death and a glorious resurrection for his people's salvation (John 11:33, 35; 19:30; 1 Cor. 15:3–4).

8. But the Son was not limited to his human nature alone since he continued to act in and through his divine nature. This truth is best demonstrated in the incarnate Son's continuing to sustain the universe (Col. 1:16–17; Heb. 1:3), alongside Christ's other divine actions during his life and ministry. In Christ, there are two natures that remain distinct and retain their own attributes and integrity, yet the Son is able to act through both natures. For this reason, the Son is not completely circumscribed by his human nature; he is also able to act outside of it in his divine nature. When and how the Son acts through both natures is best explained in terms of Trinitarian relations worked out in redemptive history for the sake of our salvation. The Son, who has always inseparably acted from the Father and by the Spirit, continues to do so but now as the obedient Son acting as our covenant representative and substitute. In the incarnation, neither the Son's deity nor his humanity is diminished.

9. By taking on our human nature, the Son became the first man of the new creation, our great mediator and new covenant head. As the Son incarnate, our Lord Jesus Christ in his life, death, and resurrection, reverses the work of the first Adam and forges ahead as the last Adam, our great trailblazer and champion (Heb.2:10). As a result of the incarnation, God the Son becomes perfectly qualified to meet our every need, especially our need for the forgiveness of sin (Heb. 2:5–18; 7:22–28; 9:15–10:18).

10. God the Son incarnate is utterly unique and alone Lord and Savior. Jesus is in a category all by himself. Given who God is in all of his glory and moral perfection, and what sin is before God, apart from the Son's incarnation and his entire work for us, there is no salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:11). As the divine Son, he alone satisfies God's own judgment against us and the demand for perfect obedience (Rom. 5:12–21). As the incarnate Son, he alone can identify with us as our representative and substitute (Heb. 5:1). Our salvation's hope for the payment of our sin and our full restoration as God's image-bearers is only accomplished in Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 3:21–26; Heb. 2:5–18).

Deus Absconditus

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1) When we read those words, the inspired text communicates the wonder as we wander in the mystery of the incarnation to understand and appreciate this incredible story.

Being alone can feel dangerous like walking alone in a darkened street at night. But feeling the grasp of a loving hand can be comforting to feel safe. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, telling him the baby would be named Jesus and would save sinners, Matthew explains that a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah was heard: "'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)" (Matt. 1:23, quoting Isa. 7:14).

God with us. This is the incarnation. And this is shocking: That an infinite and holy God would voluntarily live with sinners, that he would leave his throne for a manger, that he would allow himself to be butchered on a cross at the hands of his creation—this is astonishing. Yet he did this to show his love for us—both to comfort and to make us feel safe. As the writer of Hebrews explains, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet who is without sin" (Heb. 4:14–15). In this, his with-ness destroys the hiddenness and brings us near to the comfort of divinity.

We are no longer alone, walking down a darkened path, for God is with us. As the writer of Hebrews continues:

> Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. (Heb. 5:7–9)

Reflecting on this little, overlooked word—with—ushers us into the Christ message: it reminds us to fill our hearts with curiosity and faith, to give thanks for making us people with the righteousness of Christ, and to marvel at the miracle of God with us. Indeed, "with" may be the most significant word for reminding us that Christmas is with us everyday.

But how do we remember the Incarnation everyday? Did Jesus' union with the Divine nature end bodily imperfections? The Monophysites were split into two parties by this question. Catholics hold that, before the Resurrection, the Body of Christ was subject to all the bodily weaknesses to which human nature, unassumed, is universally subject; such are hunger, thirst, pain, death. Christ hungered (Matthew. 4:2), thirsted (John 19:28), was fatigued (John 4:6), suffered pain and death. "We have not a high priest, who cannot have compassion with our infirmities: but one tempted in all things like us, as we are, except without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). "For in that, wherein he himself has suffered and has been tempted, he is able to succour those of us also that are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

The Transcendent God touches us through Jesus in the Incarnation along with the Holy Spirit [whom Jesus said would be sent to us]. Therefore the Hiddenness of God is pierced through the wall of reality with Jesus, in prayers, which have been given to us in the Christian and the Hebrew Testaments. In these Testaments, we learn that prayer encourages us to "Rejoice in hope, to be patient in tribulation, to be constant in petition," to "let our reasonableness be known to everyone. because The Lord is at hand, so we should not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving we are reminded to let our requests be made known to God. Jesus exhorted us many times to pray:

"Father forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34)
"My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46, Mark 15:34)
"Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46)

The Hiddeness of God

The gospels record words that Jesus spoke in prayer:

Thanking God for his revelation (Matthew 11:25, Luke 10:21)

Before the raising of Lazarus (John 11:41-42)

"Father, glorify your name" (John 12:28)

His prayer in John 17

Three prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane

We read in the Christian Testament in many places where Jesus included prayer:

At his baptism (Luke 3:21)

At a time of his withdrawal from the crowds (Luke 5:16)

After healing people in the evening (Mark 1:35)

Before walking on water (Matt.14:23, Mark 6:46, John 6:15)

Before choosing the Twelve (Luke 6:12)

Before Peter's confession (Luke 9:18)

At the Transfiguration (Luke 9:29)

Before teaching his disciples the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1)

Jesus says that he has prayed for Peter's faith (Luke 22:32)

In addition to these times, when Jesus said grace before the feeding miracles, at The first Supper at Emmaus, Jesus included sacramental gestures that he prayed both before and after the great events of his life, and "when his life was unusually full of busy-ness"

Through Jesus we are convinced that we have pierced the veil of transcendence, and know, believe fully that God is not hidden from us because he is revealed in Jesus Christ.

Recall my earlier questions when I asked: why should we pray, if God knows our needs? And, if God is loving and compassionate should God not want us to be filled with assurances of his love and compassion? We are assured that through Jesus we touch the hidden God, we can pray with confidence that God hears our prayers. The Church for centuries has affirmed this vision of God in the person of Christ and has exhorted us to pray with confidence in varying forms of prayers.

The most common prayer among Christians is the "Lord's Prayer", which according to the gospel accounts (e.g. Matthew 6:9-13) is the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray. The injunction for Christians to pray the Lord's prayer thrice daily was given in Didache 8, 2 f., which, in turn, was influenced by the Jewish practice of praying thrice daily found in the Old Testament, specifically in Psalm 55:17, which suggests "evening and morning and at noon", and Daniel 6:10, in which the prophet Daniel prays thrice a day.

The early Christians came together to recite the Lord's Prayer thrice a day at 9 am, 12 pm, and 3 pm, supplanting the former *Amidah* predominant in the Hebrew tradition, as such, in Christianity, many Lutheran and Anglican churches ring their church bells from belltowers three times a day: in the morning, at noon and in the evening summoning the Christian faithful to recite the Lord's Prayer. The Amidah [which literally is the Hebrew gerund of "standing"] important prayer in Judaism and is the central prayer used in worship services. It is often referred to as the 'standing prayer' as it is always recited while standing and facing Jerusalem .

This prayer consists of 19 blessings, which can be split into three sections: praising God. During the worship service, the amidah is first recited by each individual as a silent prayer, giving any sinner a chance to atone without embarrassment. The prayer is then repeated aloud by the reader.

Deus Absconditus

There is never a Jewish service without an *Amidah*. You are faithful to revive the dead. Blessed are You, Lord, who revives the dead. You are holy, and Your name is holy, and holy ones praise You daily. Blessed are You, Lord, the holy God. There are encompassed three important aspects: the prayer of protection, the prayer of transformation, and the prayer of restoration.

Prayer in the New Testament is presented as a positive command (Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). The people of God are challenged to include prayer in their everyday life, even in the busy struggles of marriage (1 Corinthians 7:5) because prayer brings us closer to God. Throughout the New Testament, prayer is shown to be God's appointed method by which the faithful obtain what God bestows (Matthew 7:7–11; Matthew 9:24–29; Luke 11:13). Prayer, according to the Book of Acts, can be seen at the first moments of the church (Acts 3:1). The apostles regarded prayer as an essential part of their lives (Acts 6:4; Romans 1:9; Colossians 1:9). As such, the apostles frequently incorporated verses from Psalms into their writings. Romans 3:10–18 for example is borrowed from Psalm 14:1–3.

In the Christian Testament Paul exhorts us to devote ourselves to prayer (Col. 4:2) and to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17). In reading the Bible, we see that prayer is saturated within God's Word. It impacts important events, interweaving with God's sovereign plan in history. The Bible refers to the word prayer or expresses a prayer in 61 of its 66 books, making close to 1,100 distinct references to and about prayer.

In the text "God in Theological Ethics," James F. Keenan, S.J., moral theologian, [is the Canisius Professor at Boston College] says "I. often turn to the works of mercy as they were developed in early Christian communities, the abbeys of the Early Middle Ages, the guilds in the 13th century or the confraternities of the 16th century."

In the early church the most interesting work of mercy is the last. While, as St. Augustine notes, belief in the resurrection is what separates Christians from all others, the Emperor Julian contended that one of the factors favoring the growth of Christianity was the great care Christians took in burying the dead. Though individuals often performed the task, the church as a community assigned it to the deacons. And, as Tertullian tells us, the expenses were assumed by the community.

Lactantius reminds us further that not only did Christians bury the Christian dead, they buried all of the abandoned: "We will not therefore allow the image and workmanship of God to lie as prey for beasts and birds, but we shall return it to the earth, whence it sprang." The significance of burying the dead is thus rooted in the profound respect that Christians have for the way we are related through the human body.

Where does that respect come from? The New Testament reveals not simply who we are in Christ, but who we will be. If our corporeality encompasses our existence and is the basis for our relational belief, then the resurrection of our bodies means that in our bodies we will be one with one another in glory. That promise also leads to the hope that we will never be at war within our bodies again.

In his study of the early church, the professor of comparative religion Gedaliahu Stroumsa announced that integrating the divinity and humanity of Christ was the major theological task and accomplishment of the early church. He writes: "The unity of Christ, possessor of two natures but remaining nonetheless one single persona, is, of course, in a nutshell, the main achievement of centuries of Christological and Trinitarian pugnacious investigations." To follow Christ meant that Christians were called to seek a unified self like Christ's: As Christ brought divinity and humanity into one, Christians were called to bring body and soul together. Integration became a key task for all early Christians, as Stroumsa noted, to "be an entity of body and soul, a Christ-bearing exemplar."

Such integration of body and soul was not a pagan task. As Meeks and others note, the self in Greek thought was distinct from the body. For Plato, "to know oneself—the reflexive attitude par excellence—meant to attend to one's soul, at the exclusion of the body." Thus when Christianity, on the belief that the

The Hiddeness of God

human is in God's image, made integrating the body and soul both a theological expression of humanity's integrity and a normative task, it proposed to the Western world a new claim on the human body. Stroumsa writes: "The discovery of the person as a unified composite of soul and body in late antiquity was indeed a Christian discovery."

In light of these investigations, in *A History of Catholic Theological Ethics*, I argue that the moral tradition developed from its inception pathways to holiness, embodied pathways that were collective, merciful, hospitable, inclusive, exemplary and grace-filled. Yes, Christians in the past confessed their sins, but they did so not as much out of a fear of damnation as out of a manifest love to become more like the One whom they followed, who called them from being lost into the field of service.

The transcendent God, visible through the historical actions of Jesus and his daily presence is visible in our participating in communion, in the Host of the Mass. "Love seeks understanding. It wishes to know even better the one whom it loves. It 'seeks his face," as Augustine never tires of repeating. The most intimate mystery of communion between God and man is accessible in the sacrament of the Body of the Risen Lord; conversely, then, the mystery lays claim to our bodies and is realized in a Body. The Church, which is built upon the sacrament of the Body of Christ, must herself be a body. And the Church must be a single body, corresponding to Jesus Christ's uniqueness.

Central to the tri-form body of Christ—the risen body of the Lord, his Eucharistic body and his ecclesial body—is its constitutive relationality. Through his Risen body Christ is totally communicable. His Eucharistic body is the sacramental realization and sharing of his new life. His Ecclesial body is the incorporation of the many into loving communication with their redeemer. There is a mutual indwelling among the participants, an enhancement, not a diminishment of personhood. For the outcome of Eucharistic relationality is not fusion but communion in the Spirit.

The Church is not a Community of separate social networks – The clubs and the projects and the meetings are important for development; but they must not become a substitute for the church as a unified community of faith and love. It is the mystical body that unifies us. This love and faith, in truth, that the Church is the mystical body of Christ, that all its members are being guided and directed by Christ the head, is defined by St. Paul in various passages, but more especially in Ephesians 4:4-13 and John 15:5-8). The motor driving love in the Mystici Corporis is trust [faith], and he defines that:

•The members of the Church are bound together by a supernatural life communicated to them by Christ through the sacraments (John 15:5). Christ is the center and source of life to whom all are united, and who endows each one with gifts fitting him for his position in the body (John 15:7-12). These graces, through which each is equipped for his work, form it into an organized whole, whose parts are knit together as though by a system of ligaments and joints (John 15:16; Colossians 2:19).

•Through them, too, the Church has its growth and increase, growing in extension as it spreads through the world, and intensively as the individual Christian develops in himself the likeness of Christ (John 15:13-15).

•In virtue of this union the Church is the fullness or complement (pleroma) of Christ (Ephesians 1:23). It forms one whole with Him; and Paul speaks of the Church as "Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12).

•This union between head and members is conserved and nourished by Eucharist. Through Eucharist our incorporation into the Body of Christ is alike outwardly symbolized and inwardly actualized; "We being many are one bread, one body; for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17).

We are people of Faith and Conviction; we believe that to love God with all our hearts, minds, and energies, and to Love our neighbors, as ourselves, are the two important aspects of life

Deus Absconditus

and commandment in the Jewish Torah and in the Christian Gospels [cited in Mark chapter 12: 28-34].

Saint Paul in 1Corinthians13:4-7, reinforces the Commandments of faith and love: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres." If I tell you that I love you, am I trapped forever? Yes, if I trust your love.

Through all the sadness and trauma in the world, we find peace in transcendent moments of reflection on our hope and promise in the ultimate demonstration of faith and love: in the death, and sacrifice, of Jesus, the Christ, on the Cross. It is to these ends, therefore, that Paul directs his message of love and faith in the Epistle to the Romans. Faith is belief, firm persuasion, assurance, conviction, fidelity to provide the assurances of love. Faith is confidence in what we hope for and the assurance that a higher power is working in our lives, even though we cannot see it. Faith knows that no matter what the situation of hatred or suffering, in our lives or someone else's, that the Jesus is working in it with love for us.

Faith, is then, the trust in the power of love through which God enters our lives to dispel anger and fear. Love sits down with us to comfort us during our discoveries of faith to reveal the invisible things of God to us. This kind of "lucky to love" is evident in Saint Paul's amazing twelve faith perspectives: If we are full of faith. or trust, in God's promises to love us, the gifts will overflow to others: problems will turn into solutions, fear will turn into hope, anger will turn into peace. We must ask ourselves if you don't trust me how can you love me? If I don't possess faith in you, how can I believe you love me?

Pope Francis's encyclical [29 June, 2022] "Desiderio desideravi" explains that the work of the Spirit in daily prayer draws us to God closely where he becomes us. This mystery remains at the center of our lives as the purest example of the interchange between Faith and Love. If we fail to understand this interchange, we misunderstand the transactional meaning of the paschal mystery because it begins not with our thirst for God, but with God's thirst for us; a God who is truth and who loves purely.

A relationship with the living Jesus is passionately proposed as essential. "Knowledge of the mystery of Christ, the decisive question for our lives, does not consist in a mental assimilation of some idea but in real existential engagement with his person," Francis explains (41). The work of the Spirit in the liturgy is to draw us to Christ so closely that we become Christ.

According to Pope Francis, "the subject acting in the Liturgy is always and only Christ-Church, the mystical Body of Christ" (15). Liturgical participation by the People of God, therefore—the goal so much desired by Vatican II—is a calling for the whole Body of Christ, by virtue of our baptism. Understanding this raises the stakes of liturgical formation considerably, making it the care and concern of all the faithful and their pastors. Pope Francis reiterates and emphasizes the point strongly: "Let us always remember that it is the Church, the Body of Christ, that is the celebrating subject and not just the priest" (36). Although Francis reflects upon the role of the priest and the gift of Holy Orders, and even presents a kind of mystical vision of the priest plunged into a furnace as the intermediary between the fire of Christ's love and the fire in the hearts of Christ's people, it is clear that liturgy is never just about the priest. It is the work of Christ in all of us.

Pope Francis's exposition begins with desire—not our desire, but the desire of Jesus. The letter starts by recalling Jesus' earnest desire to eat the Passover meal with his disciples and, by extension, with all people through time. The point here is that the whole program of liturgy originates in God's action, not our own. If we miss this foundational fact, we will misunderstand everything else because liturgical prayer begins not with our thirst for God, but with God's thirst for us.

The Hiddeness of God

With Christ at the center, we are united with people from Jesus' ministry, with whom we may identify, so that we can learn from their encounters with Jesus the deep meaning of the sacrament: "I am Nicodemus," Pope Francis writes, "I am the Samaritan woman at the well, I am the man possessed by demons at Capernaum, I am the paralytic in the house of Peter, I am the sinful woman pardoned, I am the woman afflicted by haemorrhages, I am the daughter of Jairus, I am the blind man of Jericho, I am Zacchaeus, I am Lazarus, I am the thief and I am Peter both pardoned" (11). In other words, I am you! We meet Jesus not only in the story of the Last Supper, or in the accounts of his passion, death, and resurrection. We meet him in his life and ministry through the Word that is proclaimed, and which invites our active listening.

Ironically we began with Philosophers and Theologians asking "where are you God? Do you exist, I can't see you, I don't feel your presence? God, you are supposedly almighty and sovereign, you know all things, you know what I need, why should I pray if you know my needs?

And we complete the irony by confronting that God in Christ who seeks an existential relationship with us. God in Christ, it seems, is asking, why are we hidden? God in Christ, it appears, is confusedly asking, "why can I not perceive your presence, your existence? God in Christ, in lamenation is asking "why can I not hear the almost inaudible sounds of your voice responding to the prayers I sent you,?