

Walking on Mill Road is probably not the place that many people expect to experience an epiphany. You are more likely to have a near death experience from a speeding motorist careening around the sharp turns of the road. Yet, this past week on a regular walk, a car innocently passed me, and I glimpsed the license plate that became a revelation. The plates were Connecticut: ITHOU. For some, this means nothing. For others, it is fundamental to theology.

The nomenclature is what theologian Martin Buber used to describe the relationship of the human to the divine in his 1923 book, *I and Thou* (*Ich und Du* in the original German). Our connection is intimate. Familiar. Relational. Two subjects connect. The other way of engaging life is I/It. There the subject interacts with objects in the world around him or her. When engaging others, we do not encounter objects to be used; rather we participate with other subjects who complete our humanity in relationship. John Donne was right, “No man is an island.” Furthermore, in Buber’s view, all of our relationships bring us ultimately into relationship with God, who is the Eternal Thou.

The serendipity of the passing car with the ITHOU plates struck me not so much as a sign but as a reminder of how much we depend upon reminders. And how within the everyday, normal, and mundane moments of life there are opportunities for us to be reminded of core tenets of faith and life that focus our reflections, center our being, or invite us deeper into understanding our lives and our life together. Think of the countless moments where we could be prodded to reflect a bit further on the mystery of being, the gift of life, the grace of God, and the preciousness of each moment. Along with a license plate, what else might become an emblem that invites us into reflection?

Could a stop sign be a marker that calls us back each day? What about the various rhythms of our day? Folding laundry as an invitation to pray? Preparing food as a reflection on the moments of grace in the day? Starting the car as a reminder to give thanks? A daily walk or bike ride or other exercise that allows for an extended contemplation on the sublime? Waiting in line as an opportunity to welcome the holiness of the moment. Filling the dishwasher or doing the dishes as yet another opportunity to be reminded that we need to be reminded?

What we are reminded of is critical to this process as well. The license plate said it all: I/Thou. It didn’t say how everything would work out. It didn’t communicate abiding questions of work and calling. It didn’t reveal the deepest questions lingering in my subconscious. Yet, it did remind me of the ground from which all those ongoing queries emerge. The human and the divine--two subjects--inextricably linked and joined together. I find this promise so vital. Especially at this time of such disruption due to the pandemic and amidst the chaos of the political arena and the uncertainty of the upcoming election. Distraction and disillusionment become dominant expressions in our lives. It can be so easy to lose focus--or even sight--of the grounding reality of our being, that we lose hope as well.

Yet, Buber's insight draws us back. Buber himself did not write this from a Pollyanna perspective. He was only a few years removed from the horrors of World War I and the prior pandemic of 1918. He also recognized the chaos that disrupts. Yet, he returned as people have done throughout the ages to an affirmation that is fundamental to our being. While, as Buber notes, all of our relationships bring us ultimately into relationship with God, who is the Eternal Thou, the converse is also true. Our relationship with God ultimately returns us to further relationships with others. The cycle continues and replicates. And along the way, we not only see God in others, but we see others in God. The trick, in part, is remembering this and living into it. And among the many ways to remember is to get a personalized license plate.