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EXPOSING CATHOLIC CHRISTIANS TO "AN EVER
UNFOLDING GOD-IMAGE": USING THE NEOPHYTES
IN THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS (RCIA)
PROGRAM AS MY WORKING POPULATION.

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A ONE-PAGE SUMMARY OF MY PROJECT

This project is made up of five chapters, appendix and bibliography. Each chapter pays attention to some specific areas of the project. Thus the chapters clearly indicate how this work is divided. Chapter one presents the issue that the project is addressing, background to the project, context of the project and the relevance of the project to ministry. Chapter two discusses the theological and the psychological bases of the entire project namely, the theology of Revelation and Incarnation, and the psychodynamic theory/object relation theory. Chapter three presents the practicum, which is the execution of this project. It also x-rays the method of assessment of the outcome of this project. Chapter four is the analysis and the evaluation of the project. It deals with the expected and the unexpected developments and results of the exercises on the enlargement of God-Image. Chapter five treats of the implications of the results of the practicum/practical sessions, my contributions to the clinical-theological bases of this project, as well as, the implications of my project for future ministry.

The contributions of this project to Ministry include the following, the provision of a model for enlarging our congregants' God-Image and introducing them into the mystic path. This is in essence the translation of the collaboration between the theology of Revelation and Incarnation, and the psychodynamic theory/object relation theory to the practical or day-to-day life of the people of God.

My goal in this project was to explore the ever-unfolding God-Image. The results of this project indicate that as our God-Images enlarge or cease from being constricted, there is at the same time another form of growth taking place at a level deeper than the level of psychological process. It is the growth in the intimate, personal and direct relationship with God. There is growth in self-awareness. There is growth in the realization of homeostasis. That growth which takes place at the deeper level or at the level of meaning is what I referred to in this project as the mystic way of life or the communion of love. This growth could also be referred to as a growth in the search for and in finding the meaning/the ultimate meaning of life.

The materials I used in this project include, data from the practicum/sessions, Text Books, Internet materials and articles from Journals, Magazines and Newspapers, Film and feedbacks.

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THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS
[RCIA] PROGRAM AS MY WORKING POPULATION.

BY

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CHAPTER ONE

1:0:0. CHUKWUEBUKA! This is an Igbo word, which could be used in different contexts. It could stand for *an exclamation in praise of God's benevolence*. Though it is a word, it has the capacity to stand as a sentence of its own and in that case, it would mean, *God is Great or God is Almighty*. It also alludes to another Igbo word *Iheomimi*, which means *mystery* in that case it, refers to the mystery and the unfathomable depth of God. Yet this mysterious quality of God does not prohibit of exercises or projects focused on exploring God-Images and the living God's relationship with creatures.

Chukwuebuka! This is used in this project as an invitation to humankind to explore and enlarge humankind's God-image both collectively and as individuals. The depth of God is wonderfully rich and God-image is superabundantly multifaceted. Thus, the exploration of God-image invites us to savor the wisdom in the allegory of the ten blind persons and the elephant. In that allegory each of the ten blind persons felt only some portions of the largest mammal on earth – elephant- and gave his/her image of what an elephant is. In the case of the God-image however, first, we are not approaching God blindly as did those ten blind persons the elephant. The light of God's grace, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and resourceful contents of our Roman Catholic Church Tradition, Theology and Scripture guide us. We also have the necessary supports of psychology and other fields of studies. Second, we are not going to cling to any exclusive, ready-made God-image. Rather, we shall let our God-image enlarge via experience. We shall grow positively in our relationship with God as our God-image unfolds or enlarges via experience.

Chukwuebuka! This is an awareness campaign, which hopefully will bring pilgrim souls into a relationship of Union with their God. Then they could say like Saint Paul, "I live; no, not I but Christ Jesus lives in me" [Galatians 2:20] or as written in another verse of the Scripture, 'in him [God] I live and move and have my being.' This will come about as our God-image is allowed to unfold and to enlarge. As a corollary, we could relate to and with God as the great mystics of our religion/Faith have done. In that sense, the whole of the human family would become one united and loving family of the same and one God. This project is among other things an awareness project that is meant to bring humankind into a communion of love.

1:1:0. GOD AND OUR GOD-IMAGE: Who am I; Where am I; Where am I from; and where am I going? In and in-between these four questions rest the whole preoccupation of humankind on earth. Part of these questions is the issue of our origin and our end as human beings. From the Christian perspective [Catholic] the issue of our origin and our end as humans raises the fundamental question about God and our relationship to God.

Who precisely is God or who is God from the perspective of his essence? This is a question I cannot in all honesty claim to have an exhaustive and conclusive answer for. This is not to say that God cannot be known. We speak of God and we know God analogically. The fathomless mystery we call God has revealed himself to humankind as a Trinity of Persons – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [Handbook for Today's Catholic, p.11, CCC 234]. We speak of God as LOVE, WISDOM, JUSTICE, MERCY, and TRUTH, as well as, GOODNESS personified. We say God is mystery. This MYSTERY could be known through revelation, creation, the Church, the scripture and Tradition but God as mystery is never known exhaustively. This is the reason behind

Saint Augustine's statement regarding God to the effect that even when God reveals himself the human person cannot fully comprehend God: "If you understood him, it would not be God" [St. Augustine, Sermo 52, 6, 16:PL 38:360; Sermo 117, 3, 5: PL 38, 663; CCC 230]. Yet human beings cannot but continue desiring and searching for God.

We cannot comprehend the essence of God but we really could have a 'sufficient' God-Image, a representation, a likeness and semblance of God, which could be virtual and or actual/real. God-Image is humankind's powerful combination of thoughts and feelings/emotions arising from experience and giving birth to their picture of the God whose essence is known to no other person but to that God alone. This is the picture we have of God from our emotional experience of God. This is the picture of God we have from living and relating with others and with God in this world. It is the mystical manner of the representation of God that arises from experience. Our ability to image God, to have a God-image or God representation is connatural to us by virtue of the fact that God created human beings in the 'image and likeness of God', and 'breathed into him the breath of life' [Gen 1:26-27; 2:7]. Apart from our connatural capacity to have God-image by reason of creation, Revelation and Incarnation, our capacity to have God representations is also a matter of real life experience [CCC 457-463]. As Catholic Christians the image we have of God centrally derives from Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God who is himself God. Our God-Images require some complex factors to build up, maintain, and enlarge.

We shall latter discuss in chapter two, our bases for proposing the formation and the enlargement of the Neophytes' God-image and for disposing them to become

conscious of mystic experiences of God. Those are discussions on the psychological and the theological bases/principles on which this research/ project rests.

Sigmund Freud postulated that God-image is essentially an idealized father figure derived from the Oedipus complex. According to this understanding, the real and biological father is internalized during the resolution of the Oedipus complex. The image of the internalized father is then projected into the heavens as the almighty and protecting father [Freud. 1910, p.123; 1913, p.147]. Over the years various scholars and researchers have added some new dimensions to Freud's position. For instance, "Vogel [1937] and Vergote and Tamayo [1981] observe that the God-image bears a closer resemblance to the mother than to the father" [James Gollnick, 2000]. This is a feminist approach to the understanding of the God-image. Others like Benson and Spilka [1973] and Robert [1989] link God-images with self-images and self-esteem" [Ibid. 2000].

Carl Jung's understanding of God-image is elastic and complex. It owes its origin to his personal experience of the unconscious, the experiences of his patients and from the history of religion and religious ideas. One's "culture and personal history predispose and incline one to believe the images, voices and representations in dreams and vision as the representation or image of the Divine". Jung "presents the highest value and dominant element in the psyche as the God-image and emphasized that it is immediately related to, or even identical to, the self-archetype" [Ibid. 2000]. Though Jung's phenomenological analysis and understanding of God-image is elastic and slippery, he limited his treatment of the God-image to the domain of psychic processes. He did not meddle into judging the reality represented by those images. In his dialogue with Martin Buber, Carl Jung said:

It is certainly not the task of an empirical science to establish how far such a psychic content is dependent on and determined by the existence of a

metaphysical deity. That is the concern of theology, revelation, and faith. My critic does not seem to realize that when he himself talks about God, his statements are dependent firstly on his conscious and then on his unconscious assumptions [Jung. 1955; Gollnick. 2000].

Jung's careful distinction between the divine [God] and the way human beings experience and describe the divine [God-image] does not in any way ridicule or downplay the value of God-image. Jung maintains:

It is, in fact, impossible to demonstrate God's reality to oneself except by using images which have arisen spontaneously or are sanctified by tradition, and whose psychic nature and effects the naïve-minded person has never separated from their unknowable metaphysical background. He instantly equates the effective image with the transcendental x to which it points [Jung. 1958, Gollnick 2000].

Jung has his personal and private religious convictions. He believes in the reality and the existence of divinity –God. And he, for the sake of his scientific profession kept the two issues of God and God-image separate.

Ana-Maria Rizzuto's presentation of God-image is from the perspective of object relation theory. In this sense, God-image is a personalized, special transitional object. It is created from the primary objects the child has found in his life and from the circumstances of his life or from his needs. The primary objects and the circumstances of life that go into the formation and the continuous development of God-image are really complex. These include "multitude of cultural, social, familial, individual phenomena ranging from the deepest biological levels of human experience to the subtlest of spiritual realizations" [Rizzuto. 1979, p.182]. As God-image originates from multiple sources in human experience, so does it invoke multiple meanings – Such meanings would be dynamically integrated into the life of persons and of societies in diverse ways.

Though our God-Image is not God, it disposes us for an intimate relationship and it could also distract us from such an intimate relationship with God. It influences to a great extent our relationship to God and our fellow human beings. An enlarged God-Image facilitates our journey into the mystic way of life – into an experiential relationship with God. The observation made by Father Carlos G Valles concerning our concept of God is even truer for our God-Image. According to Fr Valles:

The religious crisis we are living today is a crisis of values, of credibility, faith, institutions, of the meaning of life and the burden of man's suffering, and, therefore, a crisis bearing on the concept of God which underlies them all and shows through them all, giving different shapes to the one basic and vital uneasiness. Who and what is God, the God who asks for those values, those institutions, those regulations, *and* those sufferings? [Pp.5-6, 1987] – *The and in italic above is mine.*

The crucial fact which Fr Valles call to our attention is that limited or constricted concept of God [in the context of this project, the constricted God-image] carries with it detrimental consequences.

A whole generation of believers has learned and lives on a concrete concept of God, legitimate but limited, as all human concepts of God are limited. It finds itself, by training or character, unable or unwilling to enlarge its catechism or contemplate alternative understandings, and, as a consequence, when they meet situations in life that do not fit in with that concept, they reject the concept and reject God. That is, they reject the God they imperfectly knew. If they had known him better, they would not have left him [Ibid, p.6].

As convincing and as factual as Carlo's observation is, the case is painfully truer of most of the Catholic Christians' God-image. At the center of the actions and omissions of most Catholics lies the image they have of God. The more constricted and blurred a person's God-image is, the more constricted and blurred such person's relationship with God and with other creatures. The God-Image we have also determines on the level of official religion whether our religion would be one of peace and love or one that promotes

violence and hostility. It also determines what our religious way of living/our spirituality would be. So our God-Image influences to a great extent the nature of our spirituality.

The centrality and the importance of God-Image for each individual person and for the entire human race at large cannot be overemphasized. I would focus my attention in the next section on the factors that motivated me to take up this project.

1:2:0. BACKGROUNDS TO THIS PROJECT.

I am not different from my fellow seekers – my fellow seekers of God. I am making the same journey of faith with the members of my congregation. In this journey of faith, I have encountered many earthly pilgrims that are seeking God. They are seeking the God that makes meaning in their lives. At the foundation and at the background of this project that aims to enlarge my congregants' God-image and to dispose them for mystic encounter with Jesus Christ is our common search for the God that makes meaning to us. This is the 'God of all seasons'. This is the God whose presence is felt in all situations. Their lives, the rites and rituals they carry out, the way they manage joyful and sorrowful events of life and all about them reflect splendidly their God as they image that God.

As a young boy growing up in my town Umumba – a town in Enugu State and within the Igbo tribe of Nigeria, I was privileged to live among a people that worship God according to the belief of African [Igbo] Traditional Religion. In that society then, their God image was clearly engraved in their daily lives. Their lifestyle, feasts and festivals, rites and rituals, naming ceremonies, marriages, and their means of livelihood [basically farming], good health, illness and death, showed clearly their God-Image. I could relate directly to the God-image they had because everything about them was also about their God. Their collective and individual God-images guided their lives.

For the Umumba people as for all Igbos, God is directly involved in all human affairs from life to death. There is no demarcation between the sacred and profane because the whole earth belongs to God. God is therefore a God that is ever involved in human affairs. This is to say that God is not a foreigner in any aspect of the Igbo life. So the God-image, which I, like most people from Umumba got from my culture is that of a God that is directly involved in my life from birth to death.

However, it is also true that the relationship between the Igbos [and by extension most of the African Traditional believers] was grounded in the fears of their God. This is the God that destroys those that go contrary to his injunctions. He is a God of justice in an extreme sense. The unjust and the crooked pay back with their life for going contrary to the ethos of justice and fair play. The relationship between this God and the believers in this God is highly legalistic and really threatening.

Then came the Christian Missionaries with their own God-Image. Zealous and charged with a superior image of themselves and their God over and against the God of the native Africans, they imposed their God-image upon their converts. They did that without any regard for the God-image, which the native Africans had before the advent of Christianity. Non-Christians, like non-Jews in the Bible, were considered as pagans whose gods are "idols, silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but they speak not, they have eyes, but they see not, they have ears, but they hear not; nor is there any breath in their mouths. Like them be those who make them! – yea, every one who trusts in them!" [Psalm 135:15-18]. The religious expressions of the Igbo People like most Africans were branded "pagan" or superstitious. I remember some of my experiences while attending the preparatory class for the reception of Communion [for

my parents already had me baptized as an infant]. In the 'missionary' version of the Catechism of the Christian Faith that we used, there were lists of mortal sins. The first, literally translated, reads: 'joining the pagans in idol worship, invoking the spirits, sacrifice, keeping of amulets and believing in them as God, making deadly charms, celebrating funeral rites in a pagan way, or participating in such rites'. There was little or no concern at all about how the Igbo relate to their God and who this God is for them.

Then as a student preparing to be ordained a Roman Catholic Priest my experiences left me questioning the God-image I was receiving from my Church. In one of our Ecclesiology classes with Rev Fr Dr Christopher Nwosu, we studied the contributions of early missionaries to the Igbo Church. In that class we read the letter that the Late Bishop Joseph Shanahan [an Irish Missionary and one of the foremost missionaries to Igbo Land] sent to his relations in Ireland. In that letter, he described the Igbo Land as a cursed and dark place. According to that letter, the whole of Igbo Land is under the control of the Devil. He reported that in his dreams he literally battled with Satan every night. This conception of a whole race as damned is not different from the Colonial Masters' conviction that Africa is a dark continent inhabited by people without souls. Time was when the major theological question was whether Africans have souls or not? These unsettling experiences did not bother me as much as I was disturbed when I read some of the official positions of the Catholic Church towards other religions as expressed in some documents.

The reason for which the official documents disturbed me being that such positions dictated the theological and pastoral directions that the missionaries followed. Pope Leo XIII in *Catholicae Ecclesiae*, instructed the missionaries to "bathe those

inhabitants living in darkness and blind superstition with the light of divine truth, by which they can become co-heirs with us of the kingdom of God" [Chidi D. Isizoh, p.2]. In *Rerum Ecclesiae*, Pope Pius XI encouraged missionaries to "bravely face all hardships and difficulties, as long as he can snatch a soul from the mouth of hell." Furthermore he urged them to be patient with people that live in the very heart of barbarous regions: "if you find extreme slowness of mind in the case of men who live in the very heart of barbarous regions, this is due to the conditions of their lives, for, since the exigencies of their lives are limited, they are not compelled to make great use of their intelligence" [Isizoh, p.2]. There is no doubt that the Pontiffs were very concerned about the welfare of the 'pagans', the 'heathens' and the 'barbarians' that lived 'barbarous' as well as, 'superstitious' lifestyle. My concern and doubt however about these documents and their implementation is based on the theology of discontinuity that they encourage, a theology, which sees nothing good in the belief system of the natives, and as such nothing of the image of their God ought to be continued.

Thanks to God for the gift of the Second Vatican Council [1962-1965]. This council contributed much to reshaping the relationship of the Catholic Christians to the people of other religions and to non-Catholic Christians [our separated brethrens]. Catholics are encouraged to develop a positive attitude towards the people of other Christian denominations and people of other Faith Traditions. In one of its documents titled *Lumen Gentium*, the Council Fathers affirmed that salvation is possible for other believers outside the visible Christian community:

The plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the creator, ... and ... adore the one, merciful God, mankind's judge on the last day. Nor is God remote from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, since he gives to all men life and breath and all things, and since the

saviour wills all men to be saved. Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience – those too may achieve eternal salvation [LG. 16].

This same document while upholding the importance of evangelization and while encouraging the members of the Church to lead souls to Christ Jesus maintains that whatever good found in persons or among any group of human beings ought to be preserved and supported to grow to its fullness.

The effect of her [Church's] work is that whatever good is found sown in the minds and hearts of men or in the rites and customs of peoples, these not only are preserved from destruction, but are purified, raised up, and perfected for the glory of God, the confusion of the devil, and the happiness of man [LG. 17].

In the *Magna Carta* of this Council on the relationship of Christians to the people of other faith, the Council Fathers maintains that, "all men form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth, and also because all share a common destiny, namely God." [NA.1]. The Church thus,

Urges hers sons [and daughters] to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture [NA. 2].

As it concerns my African background, I submit that Faith in God, Spirituality, and religion give coherence to the African person. There is no separation between the sacred and the secular, or between religion and society. God permeates all the facets of the Igbo [African] person's life. Our world-view is centrally religio-centric. It is also in this African world-view and ways of life more than from any other source that the African God-image could be found. The African God-image in turn influences and governs all the elements of the African ways of life. In *Africae terrarum*, Pope Paul VI praised the many

elements found in the African world-view. He maintained that the Church appreciates and cherishes those elements.

The constant and general foundation of African tradition is the spiritual view of life. Here we have more than the so-called "animistic" concept, in the sense given to this term in the history of religions at the end of last century. We have a deeper, broader and more universal concept, which considers all living beings and visible nature itself as linked with world of the invisible and the spirit. In particular it has never considered man as mere matter limited to earthly life, but recognizes in him the presence and power of another spiritual element, in virtue of which human life is always related to the after-life. In this spiritual concept, the most important element generally found is the idea of God, as the first or ultimate cause of all things. This concept, perceived rather than analyzed, lived rather than reflected on, is expressed in very different ways from culture to culture, but the fact remains that the presence of God permeates African life, as the presence of a higher being, personal and mysterious. People have recourse to Him at solemn and more critical moments of life, when they consider the intercession of every other intermediary unavailing. Nearly always fear of God's omnipotence is set aside and He is invoked as Father. Prayers made to Him, whether by individuals or by groups, are spontaneous, at times moving, while among the forms of sacrifice the sacrifice of first fruits stands out because of what it plainly signifies [Isizoh, Ibid. pp4-5].

The Pope recognized the influence of the African religious world-view and their God-images in the diverse aspects of the African life – anthropology, politics, and social life, education, and family life.

Respect for man is seen conspicuously, if not systematically, in the traditional ways of educating within the family, in initiations into society, and in participation in social and political life, in accordance with the traditional pattern of individual nations. ... For Africans the family thus comes to be the natural environment in which man is born and acts, in which he finds the necessary protection ... and eventually through union with his ancestors has his continuity beyond earthly life [Isizoh, p.5].

Openness to richer God-image was also expressed in the attitude of Pope John Paul II towards people of other religions. On February 4, 1993, he met with and addressed the followers of African Traditional Religion in Benin Republic.

I am happy to have this opportunity to meet you, and I greet you most cordially You have a strong attachment to the traditions handed on by your ancestors. It is legitimate to be grateful to your forbearers who passed on this sense of the sacred, belief in a single God who is good, a sense of celebration, esteem for the moral life and for harmony of society [Isizoh, p.6].

From the period when the Late Bishop Shanahan wrote to his relations in Ireland claiming that the whole Igbo land was under the control of the devil to the era when Pope John Paul II in his pastoral journeys addressed his audience in these words: "In you, Christ has become African"; "In you, Christ has become Indian", and so on, there has been a healthier and broader God-image [Aylward Shorter, p.2]. This is expected bearing in mind that there have been successive God-Image [Jesus-Image] as the gospel encounters different cultures, traditions and centuries – From the Jewish society and culture to the Greco-Roman culture of the Mediterranean, to the Christian Roman Empire, Byzantium, the Middle Ages of Western Europe, the Renaissance, Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, the Romantic Movement, the non-western experience of decolonisation and liberation, the Vatican Council II and so on. In those experiences and periods where the Christian Faith encountered people of other culture, tradition and age, the Jesus-image is never the same as before those encounters and experiences took place.

Jesus was depicted successively as Lord of History, Light of the Gentiles, King of Kings, True Icon of God, the Crucified God, the Bridegroom of the Soul, the Universal Man, Mirror of Truth, the Prince of Peace, the Poet of the Soul, the Liberator, the Ancestor, Master of Initiation, Healer and many more [Shorter, p.3].

History attests to the fact that great successes have been achieved in the Catholic Church as the Church opens up for fuller understanding and appreciation of God via God's presence as manifested through various means including through different cultures

and religions. Much work however is needed in the arena of the formation and the enlargement of individuals' God-image.

The unsolved riddles of human existence and the problems that weigh heavily upon the souls of human beings have continued. This situation makes a true case for the need in our Church for a more open approach to the ever-unfolding God-Image. It supports the call that I make regarding the need to dispose Neophytes in the Catholic Church to become conscious of their mystic encounter with Jesus Christ. The document of the Second Vatican Council on the relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions enumerates succinctly some of these riddles, which eventually recoil around our God-image.

The problems that weigh heavily on the hearts of men are the same today as in the ages past. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is upright behavior, and what is sinful? Where does suffering originate, and what end does it serve? How can genuine happiness be found? What happens at death? What is judgment? What reward follows death? And finally, what is the ultimate mystery, beyond human explanation, which embraces our entire existence, from which we take our origin and towards which we tend? [NA.1].

Our God-image is a reality we cannot escape. It is either we invest both our resources and our energies in letting our God-image blossom and through it we reach our best possible fulfillment or we remain content with lying under the weight of the crushing riddles as enumerated by *Nostra Aetate* [NA] above.

Since the beginning of my formation for the Catholic Priesthood at Saint Augustine's Junior seminary Ezzamgbo, Abakaliki- Nigeria in 1982, I have been directly involved in the preparation and training of those [candidates] for initiation into Jesus Christ [God] and into the Roman Catholic Church [CCC 1216, 1262-1270]. As I prepared the candidates for initiation, in all the sacraments of initiation –Baptism,

Confirmation and Eucharist [CCC 1212], I encountered people that yearned for a fulfilling God-image. They wanted the God they could relate to and relate with. I was constantly asked, "who is God; what is God, How is God like; Does God feel; Does God cry; Is God ever happy or Is he always angry and looking for offenders; Does God know that I am here; Does God care about me; Is God a man or a woman; Why is Jesus a white man and why is the devil black; Have you ever seen God; Is God in your house; Where is God and Where is heaven; Does God have a wife? By now you may be imagining that infants asked these questions. You are only partly correct. Those questions were the concern of both the young and the old alike.

In July 1996 I was ordained a Roman Catholic Priest. I was assigned as the Chaplain of the Catholic Community at the Ebonyi State University Abakaliki, Nigeria [1996-1999]. In the same time frame, I served as the Parochial Vicar at Saint John De Evangelist Parish Okpaugwu Abakaliki. From 1997 to 2003, I was the Diocesan Chaplain of the members of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria. Am I presenting my autobiography here? No! not at all. I am demonstrating that the issue I am handling in this project is a real issue encountered by real people in the Church and within my congregation. I am digging out from my background and experience how the issue of God-image, which is central to this project have consistently appeared at various points in my life as a Christian and in my Ministry as a Roman Catholic Priest.

Working with young University students who were literally asking me to give them God, to lead them to a God that is fulfilling for them and to guide them to personal experience of God posed an unprecedented challenge to me. Their requests and their pressurizing presence were very compelling. Some of them chased me with such energy

and zeal such that they paid little attention to my privacy. They forced themselves into my personal spiritual exercise and took my desert day experience by storm for themselves. Handicapped by their genuine yearning for God and for the God-image that would give peace to their souls, I allowed them join me in spiritual exercises on the days when and in the venue where I had such exercises. This experience gave birth to a group called 'The Prayer Network Apostolate' which is dedicated to teaching, praying and guiding persons into personal experience of Jesus Christ. There is no instant and ready-to-use manual. It is an experiential group that learns through experience. Each individual has his/her own manual that reflects his/her experiences and image of Jesus Christ.

Earlier in this section, I cited Aylward Shorter who among other things presented one of the God-Images in Christianity as the Healer. As the Chaplain of the Abakaliki Diocesan Catholic Charismatic Renewal, I encountered many people whose only God-Image is that of a Healer and the Helper of the helpless. Fulfilling and satisfying as this God-Image could be for the sick and the needy, I have also seen it gravely abused by the sick and the needy, by the healthy and those not in need. In such cases, the relationship between God and the sick/the needy becomes very commercial or business-like in nature. God turns into a shopkeeper of material and sometimes, spiritual goods. The reason for which the needy/sick searches for God under this situation is the utilitarian outcome of such a relationship. Some of the spiritual leaders do not help matters as they turn the painful predicament of the sick into an avenue to make quick and easy money and fame. This ugly situation has further disastrous consequence namely; it creates a group of Christians that would not want to have anything to do with the God that is Imaged as a Healer and a Provider. For the people in this population the God-Image as a Healer and a

Provider is simply an exploitative tool at the hands of crafty spiritual leaders with which they defraud and exploit their 'ignorant' and unsuspecting followers. This whole scenario where God as the Healer and the Provider has in some quarters become an exploitative tool for cheating on the other unsuspecting persons is also one of the background factors prompting me to explore the ever-unfolding God-Image among the population I have chosen for this project- the newly initiated members of the Roman Catholic Church that are still within their Neophyte Year in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults [RCIA].

As a human being, as a Catholic Christian, as a seminarian, and as a priest- the Parochial Vicar of Saint John De Evangelist Parish Okpaugwu Abakaliki,; the Chaplain of Saint Joseph's chaplaincy Ebonyi State University; the Chaplain of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal of Nigeria, the Spiritual Director of the Prayer Net-Work Apostolate and the Pastor of Saint Jude's Parish Umuezeokoha Ezza- the great majority of the people I have encountered in my ministry have either an unexplored God-image or a very constricted God-image. This situation does not do those individuals, the Church and the entire human society any good. Yet I was not motivated to explore the phenomenon of the ever-unfolding God-image and how necessary it is that our God-image be explored and enlarged. Moreover, I was not motivated to canvas or work for disposing the Neophytes in the RCIA to become conscious of their mystic encounter with God in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The need and the importance of exploring the unexplored God-image and of enlarging the constricted God-image of those I serve in the Church began ringing the bell of urgency in my mind when in the fall of 2005, I studied a tract in God-image in the Doctor of Ministry program at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion,

New York. The books, *Sketches of God* written by Reverend Father Carlos G. Valles, SJ, *The Jewish Spiritual Guidance* which Carol Ochs co-authored with Kerry Olitzky and *The Birth of the Living God* written by Ana-Maria Rizzuto made some nice and deep impressions on me that I began pondering to do some research on God-image. During this same period I had an experience that called to my conscious mind the importance of the unavoidable task of exposing Candidates in the Initiation Program [the sacraments of Initiation] in the Roman Catholic Church to 'an ever-unfolding God-image' and the need to dispose them to the mystic relationship with Jesus Christ.

It was Tuesday evening April 19,2005. I was teaching a group of young Catholics at the Church of the Magdalene in Pocantico-Hills Sleepy Hollow, New York – USA. The members of this group were already baptized, are receiving Holy Communion but are yet to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. The topic of our discussion in that class was "JESUS CHRIST YOUR GOD AND YOUR FRIEND." They raised some astonishing and mind-bugling questions. They made some disturbing comments. Below are the remarks that some members of that class made.

MT: I do not know Jesus; how do you say he is my friend?

SD: What kind of friend is this God that I talk to and he ignores me by keeping silent? I mean I don't hear him.

AY: I came here for this God thing because my mother would yell at me if I don't come. I only want to make her happy. Of course, God does not need me. He is too big and mighty.

AN: Do you think God cares about poor little ones like those of us here? You must be kidding!

AR: They say God is a Judge and that when the world comes to an end, God will throw a whole bunch of people in hell, so we had better have enough fun before that disaster happens.

TA: But I have heard that God is Love and Mercy; that Jesus died in order that humankind would be saved, could such God of love be so hard-hearted to do what AR said?

DA: I am confused. You said that God is just; why do small kids die? What wrong did they do; does God not love small kids?

TY: Father what we say here is different from what our science teacher tells us in class. Here you talk about what you do not see and in fact, what we do not even know exists but in science class we talk about something we can see, touch and hear. Are we sure there is God? We were told in class that the universe was not created but that there was a big bang and after that bang things came into existence. Some other things came through evolution. Human beings, they said, evolved from ape.

LAU: God is an old man that does not love fun. He is out there in heaven by himself with some angels serving him. That is what we were told. So may be God does not really have friends here on earth.

FIN: What does God look like; how do we know God when we meet God; How is God and how does God act? I want to know because there are so many churches out there. There are also the Jews that go to the synagogue to meet God and there are the Moslems and others. Father, do you know what I mean? Are they all talking about the same God or not? If they are talking about the same God why are they divided? How do we get the true picture of God?

That class was very engaging and the students showed great interest in the God-matters, which came up in class. The questions, comments and reactions that my students in that preparatory class put forward signaled to me that the time was ripe for me to carry out a project in my ministry that will focus on God-image- What is God-image; could one enlarge one's God-image; How could one explore one's God-image; what benefits could accrue to my ministry and to my congregants via the exploration and the enlargement of my congregants' God-image? How could one's rich God-Image dispose one for a mystic encounter with God?

For this project, I have chosen a particular population, specifically young persons of catechetical age. Catechetical age begins at the age of reason, which according to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church is, under normal circumstance, from seven years. The actual living persons that are the focus of this project are between the ages of thirteen and fourteen years.

1:3:0. ENLARGED GOD-IMAGE AND THE MYSTIC EXPERIENCE OF JESUS

CHRIST: A SPECIAL NEED IN MINISTRY

In this section, I am exploring and presenting the structure and the contents of the initiation of 'adults' in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. My intention is to show how this program (RCIA) could be suitably adapted to serve in enlarging the initiands' God-Image. It is also meant to show how this program could be utilized to disposed the Initiands to the mystic experience of Jesus Christ.

1:3:1.THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENTS OF THE RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS IN THE RCIA PROGRAM.

The Modern Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is an adaptation of the rites of the early Church especially the fourth century Church to the needs of the twentieth-century Church [Edward Yarnold. *The Awe-Inspiring Rite of Initiation*, p.2]. It is "designed for adults who, after hearing the mystery of Christ proclaimed, consciously and freely seek the living God and enter the way of faith and conversion as the Holy Spirit opens their hearts. By God's help they will be strengthened spiritually during their preparation and at the proper time will receive the sacraments fully" [The RCIA Text, n.1]. A special note should be taken in this section of this project on the use of the word 'adult'. Adult in this context is not used in the secular and general sense where it stands for a mature person beginning from about the age 18 or 21 or as agreed upon by law of the State. Rather based on the stipulation of the Code of Canon Law regarding when children reach 'the age of reason', *adult* as is being used in this section of this project stands for persons not baptized before the beginning of the age of reason – after seven years. The Text for the celebration of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adult however made some special provisions for those that are not adult in the classical understanding of that word but who also have reached the catechetical age [nn. 2252-239]. The young persons that have reached the catechetical age are the central focus of this project. I am using the more elaborate and richer form of the RCIA program for this population instead of the abridged version as found in numbers 252-239 of the RCIA Text.

The rite of Christian initiation of Adult program consists of four periods and three liturgical steps. The periods are moments for making inquiry and for maturing and the

steps mark the Catechumens' progress as they enter each level on their journey to becoming Catholic Christians [RCIA Text, n.6]. The periods and the steps flow one into the other:

The first period consists of inquiry on the part of the Candidates and of evangelization and the precatechumenate on the part of the Church. The second period, which begins with the rite of acceptance into the order of catechumens and may last for several years, includes catechesis and the rites connected with catechesis. It comes to an end on the day of election. The third and much shorter period, which follows the rite of election, ordinarily coincides with the Lenten preparation for the Easter celebration and the sacraments of initiation. It is a time of purification and enlightenment and includes the celebration of the rites belonging to this period. The final period extends through the whole Easter season and is devoted to the postbaptismal catechesis or mystagogy. It is a time for deepening the Christian experience, for spiritual growth, and for entering more fully into the life and unity of the community [RCIA Text, n. 7].

Those four periods are namely:

- (1) Evangelization and precatechumenate,
- (2) The Catechumenate,
- (3) Purification and Enlightenment,
- (4) The Neophyte year.

While the three liturgical steps are namely,

- (1) Rite of acceptance into the order of Catechumens,
- (2) Rite of sending and election and,
- (3) Sacraments of Initiation.

Consistent with the objective of this project, I will present at this point the contents of each component in the RCIA Structure. The said contents would center on the journey of the unbaptized persons, the Catechumens, or the Candidate for initiation, the newly initiated members [Neophytes] as well as, the responsibilities of the Church in the

Catechumenal process. Such presentation would clearly show at what point in the RCIA Structure and Time frame where I am situating my project. Once positioned in that context, we shall pursue aggressively and zealously the exposition of the Neophytes to the ever-unfolding divine self-manifestation with the intention of enlarging their God-image and disposing them for an awareness of the mystic encounter with Jesus Christ. Even as we do this, we must acknowledge this fact: "the rite of initiation is suited to a spiritual journey of adults that varies according to the many forms of God's grace, the free cooperation of the individuals, the action of the Church, and the circumstances of time and place" [n. 5]. Consequently, in the Rite of Christian initiation of Adults, we have the unbaptized person, the baptized but uncatechized persons, as well as, the baptized and catechized persons who are not Catholics.

The periods and the liturgical steps put in place for the first group [the unbaptized persons] of those formed in this initiation program are more elaborate than those meant for the remaining two groups above. I however expect all the three groups to benefit immensely from this project since all the members of those three groups share in the formation and the experiences stipulated for the Neophyte year. My expectation owes to the fact that all three groups participate in the seven weeks mystagogy or the post-baptismal catechesis that forms part of the Neophyte year in the initiation program.

1.THE FIRST PERIOD: EVANGELIZATION AND PRECATECHUMENATE.

It is a time for inquiry and introduction to the Gospel values. There is no fixed duration or structure for this period mainly because it is an era and an opportunity for the beginnings of faith [n.36]. In the case of the baptized and uncatechized persons, as well as, the Catechized and baptized persons who are not Catholics, the period is also flexible

for them but for different reasons. The preparation of the baptized and uncatechized persons requires a considerable time, during which the faith infused in baptism must grow in them and take deep root through the pastoral formation they receive [n.401, n.36]. The baptized and catechized persons who are not Catholics are already Christians so they need only instruction in the Catholic tradition and a degree of probation within the Catholic Community. They should not be asked to undergo a full program parallel to the Catechumenate [App. III, n.31].

For the unbaptized persons, it is therefore a flexible period in the sense of how long it takes and the structure it would take. What is not flexible however is the responsibility of the Catholic Christian Community towards these inquirers or the candidates for acceptance into the order of Catechumens. Through their words and deeds the Community of Catholics endeavors to handover or to communicate the Christian Gospel Values to the inquirers or the candidates [n. 9.1; n.38]. The contents of the responsibilities of the Church or the Christian Community towards the Inquirers are classified under three categories namely, pastoral aspects, catechetical aspects, and liturgical aspects. It is in the contexts of these aspects that they are formed in Gospel values during the period of their initiation program.

The Pastoral Aspects: The Church is involved in the following.

- ❖ The Inquirers are to receive help and attention so that with a purified and clear intention they may cooperate with God's grace. Opportunities should be provided for them to meet families and other groups of Christians [n.38].
- ❖ A sponsor accompanies any Candidate seeking admission [n.10].

- ❖ In preparation for the Rite of Acceptance, inquirers should show evidence of an initial conversion and intention to change their lives and to enter into a relationship with God in Christ;
- ❖ Inquirers should show evidence of the first stirrings of repentance;
- ❖ Inquirers should show evidence of a start to the practice of calling upon God in prayer; and they should show that they have a high sense of the Church;
- ❖ Inquirers should also have some experience of the company and spirit of Christians through contact with a priest or with members of the Community of the Catholic Christians [n.42].

The Catechetical Aspects: The Church is involved in some catechetical functions and has some expectations of the Candidates for the rite of acceptance into the order of the Catechumens

- ❖ During this period, priests and deacons, catechists and other laypersons are to give the candidates a suitable explanation of the Gospel [n.38].
- ❖ From evangelization, completed with the help of God, come the faith and initial conversion that cause a person to feel called away from sin and drawn into the mystery of God's love [n.37].

The Liturgical Aspects: Liturgical rites are very important aspect in the journey to a fulfilling relationship with God. At this point however, there are no liturgical rites because the inquirers have not yet entered into formal relationship with the Church through the Rite of Acceptance. Pastors are therefore encouraged to support the Inquirers in this period of the Catechumenal process with some suitable prayers [n.40].

The type of formation given the baptized but uncatechized adults is different from that meant for the unbaptized person. In the case of the former, such persons by baptism are already 'members of the Church and children of God'. They are expected to develop the effects of the baptism they received. Therefore, "a program of training suited to their needs, their contact with the community of the faithful, and their participation in certain liturgical rites are needed in order to strengthen them in the Christian life" [nn.400-401].

As for the baptized and catechized persons who are not Catholics, they are to receive both doctrinal and spiritual preparation, adapted to individual pastoral requirements, for reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church. The candidates should learn to deepen an inner adherence to the Church, where they will find the fullness of their baptism [n.477].

A. THE FIRST LITURGICAL STEP.

The first liturgical step is subdivided into the RITE OF ACCEPTANCE INTO THE ORDER OF CATECHUMENS [n.7.2, 75-117, APP. III, n.6] for the unbaptized persons and the RITE OF WELCOMING [nn.405, 411-415] for both the baptized, uncatechized persons and the baptized, catechized persons that are not Catholics.

A i. RITE OF ACCEPTANCE INTO THE ORDER OF CATECHUMENS: It is celebrated on some annual date or dates. It could be celebrated two or three times per year [n.18.3]. It marks the beginning of the Catechumenate proper. The Candidates express their intention to respond to God's call to follow Christ the way, the truth and the life [Jon 14:6-7]. The Church, represented by the priest, or the deacon, and the community of believers accepts the Candidates' intentions to become its members [n. 41]. This is when they are officially accepted as *Catechumens* in the Catholic Church [n.

6.1]. The prerequisite for making this first step is the conviction that the beginnings of the spiritual life and the fundamentals of Christian teaching have taken root in the candidates [n.42]. It is expected and believed that God showers his grace on those candidates [n.41].

The elements of the Rites of Acceptance for the unbaptized persons include the following:

- ❖ Receiving the Candidates [n. 48-50].
- ❖ Candidates' First Acceptance of the Gospel [n.52].
- ❖ Signing of the Candidates with the Cross [n.54].
- ❖ Presentation of a Bible (optional) [n.64].
- ❖ Presentation of a Cross (optional) [n.74].
- ❖ Blessing of Candidates [n.431].
- ❖ Dismissal [n.432].

Having completed the rite of acceptance into the order of the catechumens the names of the catechumens are to be duly inscribed in the register of catechumens [n.46].

A. ii. THE RITE OF WELCOMING THE BAPTIZED: The baptized are welcomed into the community and they acknowledge themselves to be part of it because they have already been marked with the seal of baptism [n.405, n.412]. The elements of the rite of welcoming the baptized into the Church are the following:

- ❖ Candidates' declaration of intent [n.418-419].
- ❖ Affirmation by the Sponsors and the Assembly [n.420].
- ❖ Signing of the Candidates with the Cross [n.421].
- ❖ Presentation of a Bible (optional) [n.428].
- ❖ Blessing of Candidates [n.431].

❖ Dismissal [n.432].

The similarity of the elements in the rite of acceptance into the order of the Catechumens and the rite of welcoming of the baptized in this liturgical step is expected. They are introductory in character considering the contents of the other liturgical steps that come after them. Both rites are geared towards forming the catechumens and the baptized in the life of Christ, the image of the unseen God, who is at the same time the second Person of the Godhead [Blessed Trinity].

2.THE SECOND PERIOD: THE CATECHUMENATE PERIOD.

For technical purposes the term *Catechumen* strictly speaking, refers to the unbaptized person who has been admitted into the order of Catechumens. The term *convert* is reserved strictly for those converted from unbelief to Christian belief [[App. III, n.2]. The baptized but uncatechized Catholics are called *candidates for catechetical instruction leading to the completion of Christian Initiation* in Confirmation and Eucharist [n.434, 509]. The baptized but uncatechized Christians who are not Catholic are called *candidates for catechetical instruction leading to reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church* [n.473, 509]. In the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, the term *convert* is never used for baptized non-Catholic Christians who are received into the full communion of the Catholic Church [App. III, n.2]. The baptized but uncatechized Christians who are not Catholic are called *candidates for catechetical instruction leading to reception into the full communion of the Catholic Church* [n.509, 473]. They are never called converts [App. III, n.2].

The Catechumens are joined to the Church and thus are part of the household of Christ. The Church nourishes them with the word of God and sustains them by means of

liturgical celebrations [n.47]. The period of catechumenate extends for at least one year of formation – from at least the Easter season of one year until the next. Preferably it should begin from Lent in one year and extends until Easter of the following year. It may last for several years if that is for the good of the Church and the Catechumens [App, III, n.6, See App. III, n.20-21, 76].

The key pastoral, catechetical, and liturgical elements of this period of the training of the Catechumens in the Christian life are outlined thus:

The Pastoral Aspects: The Catechumens learn in this aspect of their training:

- ❖ To turn more readily to God in prayer,
- ❖ To bear witness to the faith,
- ❖ To keep their hopes set on Christ,
- ❖ To follow supernatural inspiration in their deeds,
- ❖ To practice love of neighbor [N. 75.2].
- ❖ How to work actively with others to spread the Gospel and build up the Church by the witness of their lives and by professing their faith [n. 75.4].

The Catechetical Aspects: In this dimension of their formation, a suitable catechesis is provided. This catechesis is planned to be gradual and complete in its coverage, accommodated to the liturgical year, and solidly supported by celebration of the word. The contents, structure and the manner in which this catechesis is rendered to the Catechumens leads to an appropriate acquaintance with dogmas, precepts and to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation in which they desire to participate [n. 75.1].

Moreover, a thoroughly comprehensive catechesis on the truths of Catholic doctrine and moral life ought to be provided during this period [App, n.7]. Such a

presentation of the Catholic faith in its entirety would serve these useful goals: "Enlighten faith, directs the heart toward God, fosters participation in the liturgy, inspires apostolic activity, and nurtures a life completely in accord with the spirit of Christ" [n. 78]. The lifestyle, the attitudes and the dispositions of those imparting catechetical lessons on the Catechumens would either facilitate the attainment of the above goals or act as obstructions towards the realization of those goals.

The Liturgical Aspects: The liturgy and liturgical events are very essential during the catechumenate period just as they are indispensable in the Christian life too. During this period, "the Church ... helps the catechumens on their journey by means of suitable liturgical rites, which purify the catechumens little by little and strengthen them with God's blessing" [n.75.3].

The main liturgical elements during this period include the following:

- ❖ Celebration of the word of God [n. 75.3, 81-89].
- ❖ Minor Exorcism [n.89, 90-94].
- ❖ Blessings [n.89, 95-97, App. III, n.8].
- ❖ Anointing with the Oil of Catechumens [n.79, 98-103].
- ❖ Special teaching and encouragement to keep holy the Lord's Day [n.83].
- ❖ Presentations [of the creed, of the Lord's Prayer and Ephphetha Rite [n.157-162, 178-183, 197-199] (optional).
- ❖ Sending the Catechumens for election (optional) [n.106-110].

This ought to have been a very experiential aspect of this period of formation but unfortunately, it is done in most cases without any focus on the experiential character of liturgy. It has turned very mechanical and formalistic in most parishes. It would definitely

be of great benefit to the Church and the Catechumens to maintain the experiential character of the liturgical aspects of the catechumenate period.

B. THE SECOND LITURGICAL STEP: ELECTION OR ENROLMENT This is again subdivided into two namely, RITES OF SENDING AND OF ELECTION for the unbaptized persons [Catechumens], and the RITES OF SENDING AND CALL TO CONTINUING CONVERSION for the baptized. The rite of election or enrollment of names is celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent. The Church formally ratifies the catechumens' readiness for the sacrament of initiation while the Catechumens who are now the 'elect' express their willingness to receive the sacraments of initiation.

B. i. THE RITES OF SENDING: Whether this be for the unbaptized [catechumens] or for the baptized [candidates], the Local Church Community sends them to the Local Ordinary or the Bishop for recognition. The ceremony could be done in the parish church. For the unbaptized, it involves the following elements: presentation of the Catechumens [n.111], affirmation by Godparents [n.112], signing of the book of the Elect [n.113]. Through this celebration, they are recognized and are officially set for election or enrollment. The elements of this rite for the baptized are presentation of candidates [n.439], and affirmation by Sponsors [n.440]. Through this rite, they are encouraged and supported to continue in their journey to intimacy with Christ.

B. ii. RITE OF ELECTION AND CALL TO CONTINUING CONVERSION.

Through these rites, the unbaptized persons are elected to continue their journey to baptism. The priest, deacons, catechists and the representatives of the local community deliberate and take decision regarding the suitability of each of the unbaptized persons to continue in this formation for baptism [n.122]. Their acceptance is founded on the God's

election of them [n.119] and the Bishop, in the name of the Church carries out the act of admitting them as the elect [n.125]. The elements of the Rite of Election of the unbaptized are presentation of catechumens [n.129], affirmation by the Godparents [n.131], and enrollment of names/election [n.132-133].

The 'candidates' – the baptized- are called to continuing conversion. They join the Church in a spirit of repentance and hear Jesus' calling them to conversion [n.454]. The members of the Christian Community prepare them for fuller life in the Church- the Body of Christ. The elements of the call to continuing conversion are presentation of the candidates, affirmation by sponsors, and act of recognition [n. 451-454].

3. THE THIRD PERIOD: PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT.

The third period is usually situated within the Lenten season that precedes the celebration of the sacrament of initiations at the Easter Vigil. It is a six-week period that is mainly meant for spiritual preparation rather than a period for instruction. Though in the fourth century instruction was emphasized more than spiritual preparation. The period of purification and enlightenment is designed in such a way that it contains some number of rites meant to contribute to the process of illumination of the elect.

The Pastoral Aspects of the formation of the elect include the following:

- ❖ The fully incorporated members of the Church are "to give good example to the elect and along with the elect to prepare themselves for the Easter solemnities" [n.125].
- ❖ After the election, all those involved in the formation of the elect and the entire parish community [clergy, sponsors, team, and parish] should surround the elect with prayer. The entire Church will accompany them to encounter Christ [n.121].

- ❖ The elect are expected particularly to progress in genuine self-knowledge through serious examination of their lives and true repentance [n.142].

The Catechetical Aspects: The focal point of this aspect as we said earlier is not on instruction or intellectual formation. It consists more of interior reflection and it is intended to 'enlighten the minds and hearts of the elect with a deep knowledge of Christ the Savior [n. 139]. Such intimate knowledge of Christ and of his Church is called for because the elect are asking for the three sacraments of initiation. It must also be clear that the elect have the intention of realizing intimacy with Christ and His Church.

Through the rite of scrutinies, the elect are provided the opportunity for self-searching and repentance intended to uncover, then heal all that is weak, defective or sinful in the hearts of the elect, to bring out, then strengthen all that is upright, strong and good [nn.25, 154, See, Yarnold, p.11]. In another sense, by means of the scrutinies, the elect are instructed gradually and schooled about the mystery of sin, their spirit is filled with Christ the Redeemer and they are expected to advance in their perception and rejection of sin, as well as, in their desire for salvation [n.143].

The Liturgical Aspects: The teaching of the Second Vatican Council that the liturgy is "the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed [and] the fount from which all her power flows" [SC. 10] is strongly echoed and clearly perceived in this context. The whole activities of the *elect* in this period are geared towards joining the rest of the members of the Church in worshipping God in spirit and in truth as a family of God, as well as, being focused towards gaining the power to be true followers of Christ. The rites belonging to the period of purification and enlightenment are:

- ❖ First scrutiny - celebrated on the third Sunday of Lent [nn. 150-156].

- ❖ The presentation of the creed – Done on the third Sunday of Lent [nn. 157-163].
- ❖ Second scrutiny – celebrated on the fourth Sunday of Lent [nn. 164-170].
- ❖ Third scrutiny – celebrated on the fifth Sunday of Lent [nn. 171-177].
- ❖ Presentation of the Lord's Prayer - on the Fifth Sunday of Lent [nn.178-184].
- ❖ Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday, Ephphetha Rite, Choosing of Baptismal Name and concluding Rites [nn. 185-205].

The penitential Rite is celebrated for the *Candidates* on the second Sunday of lent [nn. 459-472]. And the Sacrament of reconciliation is celebrated prior to the Easter Vigil, [n.482, App. III, nn. 27,36]. Meanwhile, the Candidates could also benefit from some of the rites belonging to the catechumenate such as the presentation of the creed, the Lord's Prayer, and presentation of the book of the Gospels. Others are rite of welcoming, and penitential rite [nn. 407, 478].

C. THE THIRD LITURGICAL STEP: SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION: The sacraments of initiation are Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. The *Candidates* do not receive baptism within this step because they were already baptized. The sacrament of baptism has an indelible character and this means that it is administered on each person once and only once in lifetime. The Candidates therefore could receive the remaining two kinds of the sacrament of initiation – Confirmation and Eucharist.

The Elect on the contrary receive the three kinds of the sacrament of initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. The elements of the sacraments of initiation for the Elect are the following:

- ❖ Presentation of the elect that are now candidates for the Sacrament of initiation [n.129].

- ❖ Litany of the Saints [n. 221].
- ❖ Renunciation of sin and profession of Faith [nn. 223-225].
- ❖ Baptism [n. 226].
- ❖ Explanatory Rites – clothing with a baptismal garment; presentation of a lighted candle [nn. 227-230].
- ❖ Confirmation [nn.231-240].
- ❖ Eucharist [nn. 241-243].

We shall briefly establish some essential facts about these three sacraments of initiation since we would be referring to them in subsequent chapters of this project.

BAPTISM: This is the first of the sacraments of Initiation. It is 'the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the spirit [*vitae spiritualis ianua*], and the door, which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word" [CCC.1213; Council of Florence: Ds 1314; RCIA, Intro. n.2].

CONFIRMATION: Through the Sacrament of confirmation the baptized are more perfectly bound to the Church; they receive the seal or the mark of the Holy Spirit and thus are enriched with the special strength of the Holy Spirit. In the power of this Spirit, they are true witnesses of Christ and are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed [CCC. 1285,1295; RCIA, Intro. n.2].

EUCCHARIST: It completes Christian Initiation as the Baptized join the whole community of believers in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ by means of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is 'the source and summit of the Christian life.' The other sacraments, and

indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch. The baptized eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man in order that they may have eternal life. This is also the sacrament of Christian unity [CCC 1322, 1324; RCIA, Intro. n.2].

4. THE FOURTH PERIOD: THE NEOPHYTE YEAR: According to the current format of the RCIA program, the neophyte year is subdivide into the "Post-baptismal Catechesis or Mystagogy" and the "Remainder of the Neophyte Year." The word 'Mystagogy' as I use it in this project means, "to reflect on the mysteries, to savor the mysteries, and to deepen our faith in THE MYSTERY- that is GOD. By mysteries, we do not mean something to be solved or a puzzle. Rather, it is the experience of God that is both alluring yet causes us to stand back in awe. Our word 'Sacrament' comes from the same Greek root as 'mysteries'" [Thomas H Morri, The RCIA (Transforming the Church), p. 210]. The post-baptismal Mystagogy lasts for seven weeks of Easter season. From the seven-week period of Mystagogy all the newly baptized are called neophytes until the anniversary of their initiation. This is "a time for deepening the Christian experience, for spiritual growth, and for entering more fully into the life and unity of the Community" [n. 7.4] so that through our experience of the mysteries we could embrace a shift in life, a new perception of reality and new ways of living [Thomas H Morris, p.210]. It is expected that "to close the period of post-baptismal catechesis, some sort of celebration should be held at the end of the Easter season near Pentecost Sunday [n. 248].

The RCIA program gives a breakdown of the responsibilities of the Church towards the Neophytes during the seven-week period of Mystagogy under three aspects, namely

pastoral, catechetical and liturgical aspects, as has been done for the first three periods of the Catechumenal process.

Pastoral Aspects: The pastoral responsibilities of the Church towards the neophytes are specific and concrete in some areas. In other areas the details and concrete forms of such responsibilities are left to the discretion of the Local Church. It is also evident that both the neophytes and the Community of Believers benefit from the post-baptismal catechesis. These facts are also true in the catechetical and in the liturgical aspects.

- ❖ During the period immediately after baptism, the faithful should take part in the Masses for neophytes, welcome the neophytes with open arms in charity, and help them to feel more at home in the community of the baptized [n.9.5].
- ❖ This is a time for the Community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal Mystery and in making it part of their lives through ... doing the works of Charity [n.244].
- ❖ To strengthen the neophytes ... the Community of the faithful, their godparents and their pastor should give them thoughtful and friendly help [n. 244].
- ❖ With the help of their godparents, neophytes should experience a full and joyful welcome into the Community and enter into closer ties with the other faithful [n.246].

Catechetical Aspects: The program states as follows:

- ❖ This is a time for the Community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal Mystery and in making it part of their lives through meditation on the Gospel [n.244].

- ❖ The neophytes are, as the term 'mystagogy' suggests, introduced into a fuller and more effective understanding of mysteries through the Gospel message they have learned ... out of this experience they derive a new perception of the faith of the Church, and of the world [n. 245].

Liturgical Aspects: The responsibilities of the Church, or of the entire Catholic Community towards the neophytes and to each member of the Church from the perspective of the liturgy include:

- ❖ This is a time for the Community and the neophytes together to grow in deepening their grasp of the Paschal Mystery and in making it part of their lives through sharing in the Eucharist [n.244].
- ❖ The neophytes should begin the period of mystagogy by participating in the principle Sunday Eucharist of the Community throughout the Easter season. ... They should do this as a body in company with their godparents and those who have assisted in their Christian formation [APP. III, n. 22].
- ❖ At the Masses for the neophytes, special places in the congregation are to be reserved for the neophytes and their godparents [n.248].

THE REMAINDER OF THE NEOPHYTE YEAR: During the remainder of the Neophyte Year [APP. III, n.24], "the Bishop ... should arrange ... to meet the recently baptized at least once a year and to preside at a celebration of the Eucharist with them" [n.251].

Moreover, 'on the anniversary of their baptism the neophytes should be brought together in order to give thanks to God, to share with one another their spiritual experiences, and to renew their commitment' [n.250].

1:3:2. SITUATING MY PROJECT: The normal program of formation in the RCIA beginning from Evangelization and Pre-Catechumenate to the administration and the reception of the Sacraments of Initiation would be carried out as stipulated in the RCIA Program. It is however within the Neophyte year that I am situating this project. It is here that the Neophytes are supported to enlarge their God-Image. It is here that they are encouraged to experience Jesus Christ in an intimate, direct and personal way in the different circumstances, situations and stages of their lives. The Neophyte year is therefore the period and the context when and where my project would be executed. On account of the similarities of purpose and goal between the RCIA and the CCD [Confraternity of the Christian Doctrine] programs, candidates in those programs could benefit from my project if they are given the opportunity to use my proposals.

1:4:0. THE RELEVANCE TO PASTORAL MINISTRY. I am convinced that my project is of great relevance to pastoral ministry in the Catholic Church that is the reason behind this project. The facts in support of the relevance of this project to pastoral ministry would become outstandingly visible when I execute the said project.

Suffice it to present briefly some facts or matters of experience in view of which my project is definitely of tremendous relevance to pastoral ministry:

- ❖ There is a conspicuous absence of any treatment of God-Image or the formation of the baptized in the phenomenon of God-Image during the catechumenal formation process and even outside of the catechumenal formation process.
- ❖ Parents, Members of the Formation/RCIA Team, and Systems that propagate a constricted God-Image end up forming a prototype of themselves in the newly baptized members of the Church.

- ❖ Individuals that have constricted and stereotyped God-Image become prisoners of their formation style. In their search for the God that makes meaning to them, they cannot realize the fullness of the resources that are available to those that have an enlarged God-Image
- ❖ This project is a desired apparatus for growth of the Christian person in authentic Christian life – a growth that is ongoing and progresses with an openness of spirit.
- ❖ Members of the Church that have enlarged God-Image would easily promote the mission of the Church for universal salvation, common brotherhood and sisterhood of the human race unto the glory of God.
- ❖ There would be a better appreciation of Jesus Christ, who He is and the values he stands for within the Church and within the entire human society. When some of the trappings of culture, age and other worldviews that cloud our visions of Jesus are understood and clearly separated from the person of Jesus Christ qua tale, the Gospel values are revitalized.
- ❖ This project would avail those involved in pastoral ministry an avenue to offer their congregants a well-deserved opportunity to explore their personal experiences with God and thus to become at home with the God that in Jesus Christ gives them peace, satisfaction, love and meaning. In a sense too, this becomes a panacea to the problems of unhealthy dogmatism and indoctrination.
- ❖ This project would provide participants with a stepping stone for launching into a mystic – direct, personal, intimate- relationship with Jesus Christ because I agree with the mystic Dante that the God-Images point beyond themselves to “The Love that moves the sun and the other stars” [Dante, Divine Comedy, Paradise: Canto

XXXIII, line 145; Chris Mackenna, p.13]. That LOVE is GOD because God is Love [1John 4:16].

- ❖ It serves pastoral ministry in a particular way by creating a sense of openness to growth in the relationship between humankind and God, as well as, for openness to growth between peoples among themselves in the Church.

By faith and reason, we are convinced of the existence of a Supreme Being- God. Yet the essence of God cannot be grasped. St Paul said that we know now in shadows and images but in the fullness of time we shall know God as he really is – face to face. Though no human person may know the essence of God, though God is a mystery, we must not allow ourselves fall victim to harboring constricted God-Image. The harmful effects of maintaining constricted God-Image are too disastrous for humanity. Among such harmful effects are:

- ❖ War in the name of God and of religion
- ❖ Sexism in religion and in society
- ❖ Prejudice in religion and society.
- ❖ Deprivation of the 'mystic encounter' with Jesus Christ.
- ❖ Unfulfilling relationship and unsatisfying relationship with God as experienced by those that have constricted God-Image.
- ❖ Expansive Institutionalized Religion devoid of life-giving spirituality.

It is therefore, not an overstatement to submit that my project promises valuable contributions to pastoral ministry. It promises to encourage those involved in pastoral ministry to pay close attention to the experiences of those under their care and to the contents of what is presented to them. My project echoes the resourceful wisdom in the

old Latin saying, '*muttandum ut viviendi*' – Changing by beholding. Those in the Neophyte Year of the RCIA program would encounter the ever-unfolding God-Image and through their experiences enlarge their own God-Image, if the RCIA Program and the Facilitators of this program, would in the language of object-relation theory remain 'a holding environment' and the 'Good Enough Parents' for them. Finally, the overall relevance of this project to ministry in general is clearly seen in its promise to introduce the neophyte to the MYSTIC WAY – a life with God that is based on person to person relationship.

CHAPTER TWO

2:0. CLINICAL-THEOLOGICAL BASES OF THIS PROJECT.

This project has both the clinical and the theological components to it. The clinical dimension is anchored on some of the principles from the clusters of theories that make up what is known as the psychodynamic theory.

The theological/Religious base of my project is Roman Catholic theology and Tradition. The central themes from this Religious tradition on which this project rests include, the MYSTERY of God, The Principle of Divine Accommodation --
Condescension and Ascension that made way for INCARNATION, and then the theology
of REVELATION. These three major principles/doctrines of the Catholic Church flow one into the other in the divine economy of salvation. This means that they are simply interconnected and inseparable.

2:1:0. PSYCHODYNAMIC THEORY: MY PROJECT'S CLINICAL BASE.

Psychodynamic theory could rightly be conceived as a set of theories. According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Psychodynamics is "the psychology of mental or emotional forces or processes developing especially in early childhood and their effects on behavior and mental states." Consequent upon this understanding of psychodynamics, Psychodynamic theory studies "the inner energies that motivate, dominate, and control people's behavior. These energies are based in past experiences and present reality" [Joan Berzoff, et al, p.4]. In another sense, it is the science dealing with "*any forces*, internal or external, that have an impact on mental and emotional development" [Ibid. p.5]. There is therefore a complex network of forces --internal and external-, persons, events and circumstances that influence people's response to reality.

Sigmund Freud and the Psychoanalysts after him, the Self Psychology theory and the Object-Relations theory accurately falls within this broad-base understanding of Psychodynamic theory as used in this project. Among the key terms central to the psychodynamic theory and some of which would be utilized in this section of my work include the following *Object relations and Object representations* [Images], repression, *sublimation, transference, and projection, identification, object, 'holding environment'* and *'the significant other', the unconscious, id, ego, superego, empathy, mirroring object.*

In this Psychodynamic study of the formation of God-Image, the findings of Object-relations theory would be of immense value for me. Therefore, it is pertinent that I give a brief discussion concerning the Object-relations theory. Object-relations theory focuses on the complex relationships of the self to the other. 'The other' here is technically called 'object' whether such be God, human beings, and animate or inanimate beings. Objects as understood here could be real or internalized. When an individual relates to 'objects', those objects are internalized in the psychic life of that individual such that images of those objects are formed. The objects internalized and the images thus formed via this internalization influence one in forming one's self-structure, point of view and belief systems.

Forces of libido and aggression are not at the center of the studies done in object-relations theory, as it is the case in the Freudian style of Psychoanalytic theory. Melanie Klein presented the central concern of the object-relations theory in these lines: "There is no instinctual urge, no anxiety situation, no mental process which does not involve objects, external or internal; in other words, object relations are at the center of emotional life" [1952, p.53]. From birth to death, human beings are influenced by 'the significant

others' in their lives. They are influenced by the 'internalized significant other' that they encounter in the life-long complex relationships. The 'significant other' could be one's parents or guide, teachers, peers, heroes, models and so on. Groups or Communities like the Church/worshipping community is also within this classification or categorization of the 'significant other' that impact upon the development of the life of an individual person. Once internalized, they become internal authorities that guard and direct, bless and punish the person. The internal authority, according to Freud is the superego.

There is a transitional space between 'me' and 'not me'. Relationships involve changes, formation of new images and abandoning of old images. Those changes occur within the transitional space — a transitional space that remains throughout one's lifetime. Having 'good enough' objects and 'holding environments' is necessary for the forming, abandoning, and re-forming of one's God-Image [Winnicott, D.W, 1951]. This means that the Objects, including the environment, should on one hand not be excessively intrusive and on the other hand should not be completely detached from one whose God-Image is evolving, forming and re-forming. The assimilation of the ever-unfolding God-Image involves complex network of factors, and so does the formation and re-formation of God-Image.

2:1:1. SOME OF THE PRECURSORS OF PSYCHODYNAMIC THEORY AND THE FORMATION OF GOD-IMAGE.

1. SIGMUND FREUD: Sigmund Freud is an outstanding forerunner among those that presented a psychodynamic view of the formation of God-Image. Freud's position is dependent upon his drive/structural theory in which the sexual and aggressive drives, as well as, the forces of the unconscious play some fundamental roles in the formation of

God-Image. Freud presented his position regarding how God-Image is formed and transmitted under the following three stages:

1. The anthropological process in history.
2. The transmission of the God-Image by direct inheritance by males and by indirect inheritance by females.
3. The formation during childhood of the individual God-Image.

The anthropological process in history: Freud set out to explain the genesis of the formation of God-Image in the history of the human race. His theories, thoughts and ideas on this issue are found in his two works *Totem and Taboo* [1913] and in *Moses and Monotheism* [1939]. Freud's sources for his articulations on how God-Image is formed include his personal life experiences, some of his clinical works and from the study of some people's autobiography.

Freud's position built heavily on the anthropological and the evolutionary current of his day. According him, "men originally lived in hordes, each under the domination of a single powerful, violent and jealous male" [1925, p.67; Rizzuto, p.16, 1979]. One day the brothers who had been driven out by that powerful male [father] came together, killed and ate him [their father] and thus ended the patriarchal horde [1913, p.14]. Later on, they commemorated that act of patricide by holding a totem meal. In order to become the God-Image for the human race, the image of the primeval father underwent some changes/evolution. First, it was repressed. Next, the totem animal that was used in the totem meal represented the image of the primeval father. The totem animal could according to Freud be known as the first father-surrogate. Finally, the repressed image of

the murdered primeval father returns and is projected into heaven. Thus, God-Image is nothing but the image of the murdered primeval father.

Freud claims that this evolved God-Image is located in human race's collective lost memory. Through some cultural and historical processes or events, that God-Image is reactivated. He claims that the Jews' favorable response to Moses' presentation of monotheism is only meaningful and possible because Moses' message struck a positive cord with the God-Image that was latent in their collective mind [Freud, 1939, p.129].

The transmission of God-Image according to Freud's theorization is through direct inheritance for males and indirect inheritance for females. Freud actually like most men of his age did not concern himself with women. He did not bother himself with detailed explanations of how females get their God-Image.

The formation during childhood of the individual's God-Image: Freud in his theory of psychosexual development traced the genesis of the God-Image in the individual persons to the period of the resolution of the Oedipus complex. According to Freud, at this point in the psychosexual development, the young child submits to his father's supremacy and omnipotence. There is a sublimation of his narcissistic libido. He identifies with his father and does not struggle with his father for the possession of his mother any longer. It is in this context of the resolution of his Oedipal conflict that he projects the image of his father into the heavens and that yields him the God that is all-powerful and omnipotent. So his father's image becomes God-Image.

Psychoanalysis has made us familiar with the intimate connexion between the father-complex and belief in God; it has shown us that a personal God is, psychologically, nothing other than an exalted father.... Thus we recognize that the roots of the need for religion are in the parental complex; the almighty and just God, and kindly Nature, appear to us as grand sublimations of father and mother, or rather as revival and

restorations of the young child's ideas of them [Rizzuto, p.15, 1979; Freud 1910, p.123].

It must be noted however that Freud placed emphasis on the father-son relationship as the source and origin of the God-Image thereby leaving out the mother and other possible sources of influence in the genesis of the God-Image.

The psychoanalysis of individual human beings, however, teaches us with quite special insistence that the god of each of them is formed in the likeness of his father, that his personal relation to God depends on his relation to his father in the flesh and oscillates and changes along with that relation, and that at bottom God is nothing other than an exalted father [Rizzuto, p.16, 1979; Freud, p.147, 1913].

According to this perspective, one's God-Image is simply the image of one's father when such image of one's father is projected to an absolute level.

Freud made some reasonable contributions in the study of the formation of God-Image by pointing out the fact that God-Image could be formed. He also stressed the importance of 'the-significant-other' in the formation of our God-Image. That significant other for Freud is the Child's father. Having acknowledged that, I have many reservations about Freud's claims and his theory about the origin of the God-Image. Freud behaved like someone whom finding a treasure with his right hand turns around and throws it away with his left hand. His concern for the search for the origin and the development of God-Image is a great treasure. Unfortunately, Freud postulates that God and God-Image need to be left behind as one advances in life. This is where Freud threw away our treasure. Those that fail to drop God and their God-Image according to Freud do so because their lives make them feel small, fragile, helpless and dependent like children.

Biologically speaking, religiousness is to be traced to the small human child's long-drawn-out helplessness and need of help; and when at a later date he perceives how truly forlorn and weak he is when confronted with the great forces of life, he feels his condition as he did in his childhood,

and attempts to deny his own despondency by a regressive revival of the forces which protected his infancy [Freud, 1910, p.123].

I feel that Freud and his supporters ought to have known that Religion and the Religious, Spirituality and the ground of spirituality, cannot be spoken of adequately in biological terms [even if one speaks analogically]. This is because to do so would create confusion of categories of thought and of misplacement of meanings in two different fields of human knowledge. They seem not to have been able to make that necessary demarcation. That left a big flaw in his claims.

Though his theory seems logical in the case of the formation of God-Image in males, it is not really meaningful in the case of the formation of God-Image in females. Freud does not, for instance, offer any convincing presentation in the case of the females' formation of God-Image. It is not a sufficient and acceptable explanation that the females' God-Image came as a result of indirect transmission from males. If anything, this is an affront on the humanity of the female gender. It would mean that females' God-Image is completely dependent on the males'. It passes on an erroneous message to the effect that females are second-class citizens in the relationship between God and humankind.

Why does a child have to transmute his father's imago into God? How would one maintain one's equilibrium if one drops one's God-Image? Suppose such a person does not believe in God, as possibly Freud did not, where did the idea of 'God-Image' come from since according to such a one, there is no God? Freud's primeval father, the conflict, the totem meal and the murder of Moses are clever formulations meant to counter the account of creation in the Bible. The Bible records that God created man in his own

[God's] image. Male and female he created them [Gen 1:27]? Xenophanes and Nietzsche before Freud did such counter presentation of the Biblical account of creation.

I wish to leave the rest of my observations and critique about Freud's notion of the formation of God-Image. Despite the things that I observe as the shortcomings in Freud's presentation about God-Image, his affirmation that God-Image could be formed and that God-Image is man's psychic inheritance, serve a worthwhile purpose for this my project. It is also to Freud's credit that the history of the study of God-Image would not be complete without mentioning his pioneering work regarding the psychical agency – the superego. The superego could hinder or support one in the birth, death and rebirth of one's God-Image. Freud also highlighted the importance of the father-child relationship in the formation of God-Image. The work of discovering other component elements that go into the formation of one's God-Image and the tasks of utilizing the values of the same God-Image for the good of one's religious life and spirituality are left for other persons to discover. This project fits well as a part of the response to those tasks in the context of the Christian Religion and specifically, the Catholic Church.

In the course of the years after Freud some thinkers and clinicians have tried to enlarge Freud's teaching on the origin of the God-Image. Vogel [1936] and Vergote and Tamayo [1981] claim that the God-Image is better traced to the mother rather than to the father. Carl Jung has a different take on this issue of the origin of the God-Image. Ana-Maria Rizzuto also has her own take on the formation of God-Image.

2. CARL G JUNG: Jung's understanding of God-Image is centered on his personal experience of the unconscious, the experiences of his patients and on the history of religious ideas. Thus according to Jung there are diverse sources of God-Image. Talking

about the history of religious ideas, Jung admits that cultural and personal history incline persons to believe in images. For some of such believers, voices in dreams and visions represent the divine. He opines that the dreams in which the dreamers claim to have encountered revered Religious figures as Moses in Judaism, Jesus Christ in Christianity, Mohammed in Islam and Buddha in Buddhism and so on contribute in forming their God-Image. God-Image is also according to Jung traceable to the dream appearance of classical deities from cultures like Greece, Rome, and India, as well as, to the appearance in dream of animal gods as is the case in Native traditions. People thus adhere to the representations of God as presented them through the medium of dreams and visions.

Jung referred to the highest value and dominant element in the psyche as the God-Image. He emphasized that it is immediately related to, or even identical to, the self-archetype [James Gollnick, "Development of the God-Image in Carl Jung's Psychology and Spirituality" assessed from www.godimage.com]. Jung therefore does not accept the view that the formation of God-Image owes its origin solely to the early object relations especially the father- son relationship proposed by Freud. For him the God-Image does not coincide with the unconscious but with a special content of the unconscious, that is, the archetype of the self. And upon this archetype the individual builds up his own God-Image [Jung, p.468, 1943; see Rizzuto, p.37, 1979]. The archetype is empty, and blank but it is a possibility for representation that is given apriori. But, he agrees with Freud that God-Image is man's psychic inheritance.

Jung included two other elements of tradition and migration as important factors in the transmission of God-Image: "The archetypal motives presumably start from the archetypal patterns of the human mind, which are not only transmitted by tradition and

migration but also by heredity" [Jung, 1938, p.63]. Thus, God-Image as built on one of the archetypes is connatural to human beings but this God-Image is not identical to the God, which it is its representation.

3. ALFRED ADLER: Alfred Adler unlike Freud makes God a highly metaphysical value. He however, agrees with Freud and Jung that human beings inherit from generations before them the God-Image or representation. "This ... conception of God is innate in man's nature ... God is viewed as a synthesis of Being and value" [Hall, 1971; Rizzuto, p.37, 1979]. There is in the nature of human beings the capacity to form God-Image. From birth already we have this capacity and it remains with us for life. Adler introduces the value judgment to the nature of God-Image. However, his notion of God and of God-Image smacks of reductionism. His notion of God-Image is too impersonal.

NOTE: For Freud, Jung and Adler, there is a psychodynamic origin of God-Image. These three figures do not agree on the specific contents and sources of God-Image in their psychodynamic postulations. However, their views are important to understanding the psychological aspect of the formation of God-Image.

In order to deepen our understanding of the important factors that contribute to the formation of God-Image, as well as, to deepen our appreciation of the importance of the God-Image formed; let us explore the contributions of Ana-Maria Rizzuto.

2:1:2. OBJECT-RELATIONS AND THE FORMATION OF GOD-IMAGE IN ANA-MARIA RIZZUTO.

In Ana-Maria Rizzuto, the formation of God-Image is more complex and richer than presented by the Psychodynamic theorists before her like Freud, Jung and Adler. Rizzuto clearly states that her main focus is not on Religion but on object relations especially of the Object called God. And following Winnicott [1953], she postulates that God exists in the transitional space.

This is not a book on religion. It is a book on object relations. Indeed, a book about one object relation: that of a man with that special object he calls God. God psychologically speaking is an illusory transitional object ... [and] the transitional space ... is the locus where God comes to existence [Rizzuto 1979, p.177].

It is obvious that Rizzuto would be addressing the issue of the formation of God-image through the lenses of object- relations principles not through those of theology.

Unlike in Freud, in Rizzuto the formation of God-Image preceedes the Oedipal conflict because in agreement with Fraiberg [1969], she admits that the ability to form representations and the capacity for symbolization precedes Oedipal conflict [Rizzuto, p.43]. The elements that constitute God-Image, as well as, the sources of those elements are complex. The origin and the sources of God-Image in any individual person are not limited to only the father imago.

The type of God each individual produces as a first representation is the compounded image resulting from all these contributory factors – the pre-oedipal psychic situation, the beginning stage of the oedipal complex, the characteristics of the parents, the predicaments of the child with each of his parents and siblings, the general religious, social, and intellectual background of the household. As though all those antecedents were not complex enough, the circumstances of the moment in which the question of God emerges may color the God representation with insubstantial coincidences that become linked to it by primary process [Rizzuto 1979, p.45; See also p.182].

The factors involved in the formation of God-Image are not only complex they are also interrelated. The many different images gathered through various sources give rise to a person's God-Image. The God-Image that has been formed helps in defining the personal identity the individual person and the person's identity in turn contributes in fashioning his own God-Image. There is a symbiotic relationship between one's identity and one's God-Image. Rizzuto agrees with Ricoeur [1970] and Langer [1974] that as God-Image is traceable to multiple sources so it has the potential for multiple meanings [p.182] both for the individual and for the groups.

When a person's God-Image has been formed, it "is given all the psychic potentials of a living person who is nonetheless experienced only in the privacy of conscious and unconscious processes [P.87]. This God becomes an undeniable reality to this person just as day, night or the stars in the heavens. The interpretation a person gives to the events of his life depends upon the state of harmony or conflict or ambivalence existing in the relationship between him and his God representation. This God becomes very influential in his life. It becomes a 'myth' in a very positive sense – an explanation that enables one to make meaning out of the so many situations, circumstances, and events of life. This sense of reality attributed to God may depend upon the dialectical relation of the God representation with the parental representation and with the sense of the self" [pp.50-51]. It depends also upon the value of all the other factors that contribute in the formation of his God-image.

The formation, the destruction and the re-formation of God-Image could continue to happen throughout one's life span in accordance with one's stages of development and the concrete situations of one's life. Such situations include making a new friend, gaining

a new job, and entering into marriage, leaving one's culture and country, meeting with people of other races, religion and culture, failures, disappointments and deaths. "The God representation changes along with us and our primary objects in the lifelong metamorphosis of becoming ourselves in a context of other relevant beings. Our description of God representation entitles us to say only that this is the way God is seen at this particular moment of a person's psychic equilibrium" [p.52].

Since Rizzuto's treatment of God-Image is from the perspective of object relations and object representations, does her work have anything positive to contribute to the aim and goal of my project? Does her work on the formation of God-Image undercut the importance of religion? Does it quash the reality and importance of a GOD that is metaphysically and ontologically real, living and interacting with believers? How does Rizzuto's view relate to the living God and to the living Christian in quest of this God?

Having made it clear that she talked about the 'God of object relations' or God as an object representation in object-relations theory, she went further to paint a picture of a God that is alive and interacting with those that believe in that God.

What I have said so far does not deal with the phenomena of actual belief in God as real, existing, alive, and interacting with the believer. This belief makes God a truly amazing object. He is the only relevant object who has not undergone and cannot undergo reality testing. Belief is usually ego-syntonic, however, although God is not cognized through the senses and cannot be called to a forum to explain himself. The religious person, nonetheless, feels the relation to be real and intense. He does not experience God as a symbol or a sign but as a living being, whose communications the believer interprets. The believer, in spite of the uncommon nature of the relation, is not psychotic, or even necessarily neurotic. He or she may be an emotionally mature person [p.49]

This God cannot be called to a conference or to a symposium to explain his own part of the story in the relation between him and creatures. Yet believers in God have some

representations, images and concepts of their God. Their God-Image enables them to maintain psychic equilibrium. It "serves to soothe and comfort, provide inspiration and courage – or terror and dread – far beyond that inspired by the actual parents. This reasoning also provides an explanation for belief in God by people who are neither so infantile nor so regressed as to make us suspect that they constantly reactivate their childhood drama or cling to a parental divinity" [p.46]. It gives meaning to their existence and to the universe, the absence of which would precipitate mental or physical breakdown [Victor Frankl [1973]. In a well-researched sociological studies, Emile Durkheim, "identified 'anomie', the collapse of the world as we know it, with all its associated meanings, as a precipitating factor in suicide [Durkheim 1952, p.241; Chris Mackennna 2003, p.2]. I expect that my project in the RCIA program with the newly initiated members of the Roman Catholic Church [the Neophytes] will help them to acquire the God-Image that gives meaning to their life and to the universe. Hence, in this lies the relevance of Rizzuto's work on the formation of God-Image to my project.

Rizzuto's studies shades light on how important the many and different sources of the origin of God-Image are crucial to organized religion and by inference to spirituality. The faith and beliefs of our ancestors, our parents, and community or culture assist us in forming a mature or self-fulfilling God-Image: "... the reality of the parents and their actions bestows a powerful sense of reality to that nonvisible being. The consensus of the worshiping community of adults gives the child the sense that the natural order of things includes the existence of this being to whom all adults come with weekly solemnity or at least at times of major events – weddings, births, deaths – in order to submit to his wishes" [Rizzuto, p.50]. They could likewise lead one towards forming a God-Image that

is not consistent with and not attuned to one's experiences in life. In this second instance, such a person could deny the existence of the God that does not make meaning to him and thus abandon such God. Is this abandonment of God and the denial of God's existence not what my official religion calls loss of faith and atheism? No Church leader may encourage or endorse loss of faith and atheism. I am however of the opinion that there are times when atheism and loss of faith in God would lead to God.

For any meaningful and fulfilling God-Image to remain so, it has to continue undergoing processes of birth, death, rebirth and transformation. The "psychic process of creating and finding God never ceases in the course of human life. It is a developmental process that covers the entire life cycle from birth to death" [Ibid. p.179]. Everything that happens in a person's life and everything that does not happen in a person's life too ought to remain the context for the revision of a person's God-Image. And a person's God-Image influences, controls and determines his relationship to the living God. It is no surprise that the Catholic Church encourages her members to go for spiritual retreats. For spiritual retreats provide opportunities for a reassessment and review of one's relationship to one's God and the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of this God to one. It is a way also of keeping one's sense of self in balance amidst the various vicissitudes of life. This "dynamic process of keeping one's own sense of self in balance, and the recognition of the affectual connectedness of that God-representation and the present self-representation give the experience an 'overwhelming' sense of reality. From this, 'a rapture of devotion to God' ensues. We call it conversion" [Ibid. P.52].

Though Rizzuto operated at the psychological level and I am operating at a psycho-religious cum theological level, her psychodynamic contributions to the treatment

and understanding of God-Image is a part of my Psychological base for this project. Within the mystagogical sphere of experience [Deepening of faith in the mystery of Christ and his Church], I propose to assist my population in this project to discover the God that is meaningful and fulfilling to them.

Rizzuto while being conscious of her area of expertise still offered some timely suggestions for those involved in pastoral ministry. Echoing Erikson, she said that we could not fool children at least for a long period. When the God we present them is too out of match with the experiences we offer them, our words/utterances will confuse them and encourage them to flee from us and from the God of whom we speak. Special care ought to be taken by all those in pastoral ministry in making sure that the God we present and the experiences we offer are characteristically in agreement. When we say that God is love, the children have to experience love from us in a way that they could use their experiences to shape and reshape their individual God-Images according to their individual needs. Since this is a very delicate affair, it would be counter-productive to utilize manipulation or violence [overt and covert] to change their 'distorted and restricted God-Image'.

It is worthwhile, as Rizzuto suggested that the wishes and sufferings of the children in our ministry be explored. Their fears and difficulties ought also to be assessed in an atmosphere of loving concern.

In this subsection of my project, the psychodynamic theory has offered some useful resources that I need for exposing the candidates in the neophyte year of the RCIA program to an ever-evolving God-Image in their lives. Whether such contributions came in terms of Freud's pioneering work on psychodynamic theory; whether it be the

resources given by Carl Jung in identifying God-Image with a special content of the archetype located in the realm of the unconscious; whether it be Alfred Adler discovery of the innate character of our God-Image; whether it be the job done by Ana-Maria Rizzuto in the treatment of God-Image as a special type of object representation or the other numerous contributions of other psychodynamic theorists, I very highly value and appreciate those contributions.

The God-Images point beyond themselves, as Dante said, to "The Love that moves the sun and the other stars" [Dante, Divine Comedy, Paradise: Canto XXXIII, line 145; Chris Mackenna, p.13]. It is to this LOVE [God], according to Dante's expression, that I now focus my attention.

2:2:0. THE LESSONS FROM REVELATION AND INCARNATION: MY

PROJECT'S THEOLOGICAL BASE.

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power [Heb 1:1-3].

In the above scriptural text is the theological base of this whole project: REVELATION AND INCARNATION. The SON, which this text speaks about, is JESUS CHRIST. According to Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, Jesus Christ "the Word of God dwelt in man and became the son of man in order to accustom man to perceive God and to accustom God to dwell in man, according to the Father's pleasure" [St. Irenaeus, Adv. Haeres. 3,20]. This is a part of the Divine Pedagogy that aims at bringing humankind to an intimate and fulfilling relationship with God, humankind's source, origin and end. The lessons that the theology of Revelation and Incarnation offers are very useful for us.

2:2:1. FROM REVELATION TO INCARNATION: God said, 'let us make man in our image, after our likeness;' and God went on and 'created man in His own image; male and female he created them' [Gen 1:26, 27]. God manifests constant evidence of himself via his creatures especially man [CCC 54]. After the fall, the Original fall of humankind's first parents, God's imprint on human beings, as creatures made in God's image did not leave humanity [Gen 3:1-24] neither did his self-manifestation cease. God desired to bring humankind back into the family of God - the family from which humanity came into existence- in order to share the divine life. Thus the plan of God to bring humankind back into the family of the Blessed Trinity set the course of divine Revelation in motion as was never before. Full membership in this family is the ultimate fulfillment of each human person and the apex of the peace, which the realization of the human psychic balance on earth is only but a prefiguration. Let us focus on this Divine self-manifestation so as to see the lessons we could learn from it and apply such lessons as we introduce the newly initiated members of the church to the ever-unfolding God-Image on their journey towards personal relationship, intimacy and union with the living God.

God, the Great incomprehensible and intimately present [Karl Rahner, p.498], the unfathomable but ever unfolding mystery, in his goodness and wisdom was pleased to reveal himself and his plan of salvation [DV. 2, CCC 51]. The self-manifestation of God is realized simultaneously 'by deeds and words which are intrinsically bound up with each other' and shed light on each other [oikonomia, DV #2, CCC 236]. It involves a specific divine pedagogy: God communicates himself to man gradually. He prepares him to welcome by stages the supernatural Revelation, which is to culminate in the person and mission of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ [CCC 53].

The divine pedagogy whereby God revealed himself gradually, progressively and developmentally happens in history, in time and in space. It occurs in various circumstances and situations. It involves the various contributions of some personalities that perform some essential roles in the program/plan of divine revelation. Care ought however to be taken that the historical character of divine revelation does not obstruct our journey towards mystic relationship to God. Such obstruction is a real danger.

God's revelation began with creation and his self-manifestation to Adam and Eve. He spoke to Adam and Eve and invited them to intimate communion with Him, as well as, clothed them with grace and justice [CCC 54]. And after Adam and Eve had fallen, God promised and gave them the hope for salvation [CCC 55]. This is the God of both males and females. Neither males nor females have more rights than the other in the divine economy or in the divine manner of ordering the universe. This battle of gender supremacy in our society is an aberration when viewed via the lenses of divine pedagogy.

The purification of the earth by flood did not end God's plan and self-manifestation. God entered a covenant with humankind via Noah. This is the manifestation of divine love towards the 'nations', that is, "towards men grouped in their lands, each with [its] own language, by their families, in their nations' [CCC 56]. The God that is perceived here is God as the God of groups and sections of people. There is little of a Universal character in this God.

In order to gather the scattered human race, God called Abraham and chose him to be father of faith, the father of the multitude of nations and through him all the nations shall be blessed [Gen 17:5, 12:3]. The descendants of Abraham would be the trustees of the promises made to the Patriarchs, the prophets and all the Chosen people called to

prepare for the day when God- the Universal God- would gather his children into the family and the unity of the Church [CCC 59-61]. The universal nature and character of God is beginning to emerge in the historical context of the relationship between Abraham [the father of the entire human race by faith] and God.

Humankind's understanding of God and of their relationship to God continues to wear new dimensions. After the Patriarchs, Israel [the small but the first unit of the family of God being prepared for her role in the universal family of God] went into Egypt. At certain historical point in their life in Egypt [after the death of Joseph], they became slaves [EX.1: 10]. God demonstrated his love for Israel and his almighty power by delivering Israel from the yoke of slavery. He entered a covenant with them at Mount Sinai and through Moses gave them the law that they should keep. Gradually and progressively, God has also manifested himself as the provident father and just judge, the lawgiver and the liberator, as well as, the God of Covenant – a God in relationship with human beings. As understood in this context, this is also the God that kills some of his creatures [Egyptians] in order to make some of his creatures [Israelites] free, happy and fulfilled [EX. 1:1 – 20: 26]. In this description the justice and law, power and triumph over enemies have characteristically colored the perception of this God. This particular characterization of God was pretty much the same even as Israel fought its way into the promise land and as it fought its neighbors while in the promise land. This is the God that fought and massacred the Philistines at various times via David [later made King of Israel], through Samson, and so on. It is the God of war – presented as really very warlike and masculine. It is the God that empowered Israel to crush the opposition of the Canaanites, the Jebusites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Philistines, the Moabites, the

Ammonites and so on [Joshua 9:1-2, 1Sam. 17:1-54]. This is the God, which the Colonial Masters and those that live according to the expansionist ideology would like to worship. This same God would not want any form of infringement upon his authority and law. He would want to destroy the whole nation of Israel after they committed idolatry - they made and worshipped the golden calf: "Let me alone, then, that my wrath may blaze up against them to consume them. Then I will make of you a great nation" [Ex. 32:10]. Though the text says that Moses interceded on the people's behalf and God relented in the punishment he had threatened to give those that committed idolatry [Ex 32:11-14], the text also records that through the command of Moses the Levites slaughtered about three thousand of the people" [Ex 32:15-29]. Where is the divine forgiveness or his relenting in the punishment he had threatened to give his people? However, the scriptural text we are considering did not tell us that God ordered Moses to command such a massacre. The fact is that not even Moses or any of the prophets has a complete grasp of God and his revelation even though 'Moses spoke with God face to face' [EX 33:7-11]. The 'significant others' could distort our God-Image too.

We have seen how God manifested himself gradually, progressively and developmentally in history. We have considered how human understanding of the relationship with God has gone through various stages. We saw how this understanding has been influenced by some parental figures, factors/elements of history and culture.

The process of God's self-manifestation and humanity's relationship to and understanding of God came to its apex in the **Incarnation**.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was

the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it [Jon 1:1-5].

In Jesus Christ, God fully and definitely revealed himself. In him God made a definitive and everlasting covenant with humankind, a covenant which would neither pass away nor will anything new be added to it before the glorious manifestation of Jesus Christ at the end of time [CCC 65-66].

Prior to Incarnation – God taking human flesh in Christ Jesus- it would have been unheard of to speak of God as taking human flesh. Even today, some of the world religions like Judaism and Islam would consider this Catholic Christian theology of incarnation a heresy. In Christian theology and specifically in Catholic theology, it is normal and proper to speak of God in terms of incarnation because the Word [Jesus Christ] took flesh and dwelt among us [Jon 1:14]. However, not even among the Apostles do we see a uniform understanding and encounter with God in Jesus Christ. Matthew's description in one of the synoptic Gospels presents Jesus as Emmanuel – God with us. He is the Messiah that would save his people from their sins [Matt 1:18-23]. Luke the physician and the writer of the Gospel of Luke and of the Acts of the Apostles presents Jesus Christ as the Healer, the Savior that went about healing, doing good and setting those in bondage free [Luke 4:31-44; Acts 4:12, 10:38]. For John, God is love, the good Shepherd, and One that has come to give life abundantly to his people [I Jon 4:16, Jon 10:7-18]. They presented the same person of Christ Jesus albeit differently.

The revelation of God as found in the two-fold but single deposit of Faith [Scripture and Tradition] is handed over to the whole Church [CCC 84, DV #10]. The task of interpreting the deposit of faith is entrusted to the Bishops in communion with the successor of Saint Peter, the Bishop of Rome [CCC 85] while the Spirit of God [Holy

Spirit] is the guarantor of the truth of revelation found in the deposit of Faith. In the Catholic Church, the understanding and the relationship with God as revealed in Christ Jesus has been unfolding in stages across centuries and cultures and nations. From the time when the first Council of the Church was held in Jerusalem [Acts 15:1-29] to this twenty-first century, there have been twenty-one ecumenical Councils, hundreds of synods, conferences and seminars that focused in the on-going discovery, deepening and re-deepening of the Roman Catholics understanding of and relationship to the true and living God in Jesus Christ.

It is obvious, I must admit, that an elaborate treatment of the controversies handled by the various Ecumenical Councils are beyond the scope and goal of this project. Nonetheless, it is worth stating that those controversies like the christological controversy, the pneumatological controversy and the Trinitarian controversy created opportunities that enhanced the Christian understanding and relationship to the God that revealed Himself in Christ Jesus. One could say that the understanding of God in Jesus Christ has been codified in dogma. Yet it must also be understood that dogmas are apophatic; they serve to exclude errors about Jesus and are negative definition of revealed truth of the self-manifestation of God. For instance, in Nicaea the error of Arius was excluded and condemned so were Nestorius' error in Ephesus, Eutyches error in Chalcedon and so on. Yet we neither can say that dogma is Jesus Christ nor that the combinations of dogmas are Jesus Christ. This does not mean in any case that dogmas are of no values. Rather it means that we have to transcend the contents of dogmas.

Indeed the mystery of the person of the risen Jesus transcends all positive definition; it is attained by faith, an act at once obscure and very bright, which in no way exhausts its object but which nonetheless puts us into true contact with it, as living being with living being. We cannot reach the

reality by ways other than those laid out in the dogmas [and it is in this that their perennial value resides], but we cannot reach it if we halt at the dogmas. Human beings are not converted by having truths about Jesus presented to them but by having Jesus himself presented to them [Raniero Cantalamessa, 1994, p.43].

Words fail us – the written and spoken words have their limitations- for as I write about this God that transcends gender, I still use the masculine gender. And of course, all evidences about Jesus presents Jesus Christ as male though Jesus did not segregate against any gender. Gender issues never hindered his public ministry. My submission remains that even controversies as this gender case assist us to understand and relate better to the living God. The crisis at the different stages of human life and their proper handling could assist one in having an enlarged God-Image. A psychic life that is in equilibrium and a fulfilled life is the outcome of one engaging the controversies of one's life in dialogue, especially controversies in the relationship between God and man.

Most Christians today profess that Jesus is God but that belief and the relationship to Jesus as God did not come easy. It took some time and efforts. Pliny the Younger in his Epistle left us the oldest surviving pagan report about the church in which Christians were described as gathering before sunrise and "singing a hymn to Christ as though to [a] god" [Pelikan, 1975, p.173]. The Christian New Testament Bible is replete with passages that profess Christ as God. The oldest surviving preaching of the Church after the New Testament preaching is that of Clement of Alexandria. He exhorts Christians to accept Jesus Christ as the God that he is: "Brethren, it is fitting that you should think of Jesus Christ as of God, - as the Judge of the living and the dead [2 Clem. 1:1]. In the oldest surviving liturgical prayer Jesus Christ was addressed as God - Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus. There is therefore a progressive evolvment and expansion

in the understanding and relationship of Christians with Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word of God.

Clearly it was the message of what the Church believed and taught that 'God' was an appropriate name for Jesus Christ. But before this belief and teaching developed into the confession of the Trinity and the dogma of the person of Christ, centuries of clarification and controversy had to intervene, and the relation of this belief to the full range of Christian doctrine had to be defined [Pelikan, 1975, PP.173-174].

Do we have to allow for conflicts? Do we have to allow for individual opinions about God, especially opinions as originating from experience? Do we have to negotiate our fears, worries and doubt about Jesus our God? Are dogmas important? Should Faith be married with Reason [FR 43]? Are the teaching and experiences in the RCIA as are obtained today crucial? The answer to all these questions in varying degrees is YES. For it is only in this honest YES could our enriched, enlarged and mature God-Image translate into an exploration of the living God via experience. The experience of this God gained in this manner illumines the seeker with such peace and joy which are indescribable but which could in all truth radiate from such an illumined person into a non-illumined person in a way that the non-illumined person becomes illumined. This brings us to the next article or sub-section in this chapter, which is concerned with how the revelation of God in Jesus Christ translates into personal encounters between Jesus Christ and believers in Jesus Christ.

2:2:2. FROM INCARNATION TO PERSONAL ENCOUNTER AND FULFILLMENT.

The Roman Catholic Faith is not a set of principles, concepts, doctrines and dogmas. It transcends intellectual exercise and the accumulation of information. It is fundamentally a way of life. It is not any way of life or an arbitrary manner of living. It is a way of life in imitation of Christ Jesus. The imitation as I use it and mean it here is devoid of any derogatory sense – it is a life transformed, transfigured and configured in Christ Jesus. The Roman Catholic Faith is therefore *ab initio* an experiential faith. It came into existence at least on earth via historical experience and it is also at its core a relationship with God and a relationship forged in experience. At the heart of the Catholic Faith is the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and on Pentecost Sunday, the Church was born in the event of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles [Acts 2:1-47].

The experience of God in the person of Jesus Christ via his Spirit was prior to the formulation of the Christian doctrines and dogmas. The intimate relationship of believers with Jesus Christ via His Holy Spirit is at the center of all authentic and fulfilling Christian life. Therefore the Incarnation introduces Christians in a special way into the mystic way of life. The corollary of this position is that Christianity and specifically the Roman Catholic Faith is fundamentally mystic in nature and in character.

The words *Mysticism* and *mystic* unfortunately have within some quarters become very derogatory. These words have fallen into reproach in this age of science and technology. Consequently, some people use them as substitute expressions for bizarre, senseless and worthless, irrational and vague phenomena. It is worthy of note that there has been some exaggerated passivity that led to the aberrations of extreme quietism at the end of the seventeenth century on the one hand and to the exaggerated activity as

expressed in the idea of the rebirth at the beginning of the eighteenth century on the other hand. The Catholic Church condemned the extreme form of quietism, that is, the so-called "passive orison" as found in the teaching and the writings of Antoinette Bourignon [1616-1680] and a devout Spanish priest Miguel de Molinos [1640-1697] among others. The latter aberration that originated from Boehme occurred mostly outside the Catholic Church. The famous Latin maxim, "*abusus non tollit usum*" [Abuse does not destroy value] still makes perfect sense. Abuses of mysticism do not destroy the pristine value and the immense importance of mystic life to the individual persons and to Society.

Mysticism is a way of life, an experience of Reality – not a philosophic account of reality [Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, 2002, p.455]. It is in the language of Saint Catherine of Siena to gaze into "the Abyss of Love Divine" [Ibid. p.174]. It is the personal and inward communion of love between the human person [the mystic] and God. A mystic is then one that partakes of the Divine life in a personal and intimate way:

To be a mystic is simply to participate here and now in that real and eternal life; in the fullest, deepest sense which is possible to man. It is to share, as a free and conscious agent – not a servant, but a son – in the joyous travail of the Universe: its mighty onward sweep through pain and glory towards its home in God. This gift of "sonship," this power of free co-operation in the world-process, is man's greatest honour. The ordered sequence of states, the organic development, whereby his consciousness is detached from illusion and rises to the mystic freedom which conditions, instead of being conditioned by, its normal world, is the way he must tread if that sonship is to be realized [Ibid. p.447].

The sonship as used here is not limited to the male gender. It could also read daughterhood because the mystic experience is not limited to any exclusive human gender. Having cleared off that gender bias, I wish also to leave for latter treatment the stages of development in the mystic life, which was referred to in the citation above.

An American Philosopher and Psychologist William James in lectures sixteen and seventeen, which he delivered at Oxford between 1902-1910 proposed four marks, which qualify an experience as mystical and the marks by which one could identify mysticism and the action of the mystic. Those marks are Ineffability, Noetic quality, Transiency and Passivity [William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 1987, p.345]. By ineffability James means that mystical experiences cannot be transferred from one person and imparted unto another. The mystic has the first hand encounter with what is known as the mystical experience. Mystic experience has some semblances with states of feeling but it is also a state of knowledge – a kind of knowledge beyond the discursive intellect [noetic quality]. They may be inarticulate but they are ‘illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance and are source of authority for after life.’ These experiences cannot be sustained for a long time and their contents could be remembered and reproduced though imperfectly. There is a sense of progressive development in such experiences in spite of the fact that they are not permanent in character [Transiency]. There is a sense of positive passivity associated with mysticism. The Mystic could voluntarily start the quest for the communion of love between the Creature and the Creator. Later he would experience that God or the superior power has taken complete hold of him. This kind of divine invasion of the human is not interruptive or disruptive. Some of the contents of the mystic’s experiences are remembered and such contents and experience shape the inner life of the mystic. And as testified to by history, such inner modification also guides and enriches the mystic’s relationship with the rest of creatures. This is seen in the life of Saint Francis of Assisi who translated the communion of love

he encountered in God into the relationship he had with his fellow human beings, animals like birds and other creatures.

In Saint John (the author of the Gospel and the epistles of St John) and in Saint Paul we see the beginning and the richness of the mystic way as an expression of the Christian life. In Saint John's Gospel we encounter a soul-to-soul relationship between the Christian and God. We also encounter God inviting the Christian to the mystic way. In the fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel, Philip asked Jesus to show them [Jesus' disciples] God the Father so that they would be satisfied. And Jesus responded in statements that are really very mystical in nature: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? ... Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me....'" [John 14:8-11]. Later in Chapter fifteen, Jesus advises his followers in these words: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me [John 15:4]. The whole Gospel of John could rightly be called the mystic gospel because of the communion of love experienced and expressed via that gospel. In the epistles attributed to the same author, the same intimate relationship with God pervades the entire epistles. In the first Epistle of John for instance, we read, "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" [1John 4:15-16]. This sense of authentic and intimate personal relationship with God is the hallmark of the mystic way of life.

Saint Paul of Tarsus is also a great example of the fundamental mystic nature and character of the Catholic Faith. Though Saint Paul has been criticized and re-criticized by various interest groups and for even the most ignorant, frivolous and selfish reasons, he remains one of the greatest and most exemplary figures in the Christian faith. His conversion and the beginning of his Christian life was characteristically mystic as evident in his encounter with Jesus Christ as he was on his way to Damascus to continue his zealous persecution of Christians [Acts 9:1-9]. Paul, though a highly learned person, did not carry out his testimony and witness to Jesus Christ under the power of philosophy or human knowledge but in the power of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. Paul expresses his intimate and personal relationship with Jesus also in his epistles. In one of his epistles, he said, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" [Gal. 2:20]. The mystic Paul is an example of an authentic Christian and he speaks of himself as the steward of God's grace; as one that has been given the mystery [of Christ] by revelation [Ephesians 3:1-4]. He calls all Christians to be imitators of God and to walk in love like Christ Jesus [Ephesians 5:1-2] as lovers that reach towards the interior life of the beloved. This is how it is with the Holy Spirit, the Love of God, for the spirit explores the depth of everything even the depths of God [1Cor 2:10]. The mystic Paul is really a tremendous asset to the Church and to my project.

Apart from Saint Paul and the Johannine writings, the earliest liturgical writings, and religious poetry [like the 'Odes of Solomon', the Hymn of Jesus' and so on], show that mystical life is congenial to the life of the Church. They indicate that the Church

could also absorb and transform the mystic elements of other cultures and religions like those of the Essenes, the Orphic, and Neoplatonic thought [Underhill. P.455].

In the works of the many Fathers of the Church among whom stand conspicuously Saints Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Anselm (amidst their intellectual depth and practical life), we encounter the mystic path that vivify and propel their teachings and writings. The *Confessions* and the *De Trinitate* of Saint Augustine testify to the intimate and personal communion between Saint Augustine and God. For no genius devoid of mystic communion with the One Reality (God) could have written the vivifying and animating work in chapter four of book one of the *Confessions* or the whole chapters in the seventh and the eight books of the same work. In a section of chapter four Book One, Saint Augustine alluding to the relationship which ought to exist between God and the human person said: "someone did well to call his friend 'half of my soul'" [Confessions IV, 6:5-6]. How else could we explain the richness of Saint Thomas Aquinas' works such as the *Summa Theologica* and the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, or the hymns in adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist, which he composed? Saint Thomas talks of the lover as one that dwells in and identifies with the beloved while the beloved dwells in the lover insofar as the lover wills and acts in the interest of the friend, whom the lover considers another self [ST I-II, q.28, a.1 and 2; Chenu, P.57]. It is only someone that has dwelt in the abode of 'that greater than whom nothing else is and nothing else can be conceived' that could draw Souls into the castle of love personified. Such a person alone can properly support others as they make their journey of abiding in the ONE that dwells in the abode of endless light and love [God].

The marvelous contributions of Saints Anthony, Macarius and the rest of the fathers of the desert whose spiritual wealth not only led to the founding of the Western style of monasticism but brought in the fresh breath and life into the entire Church's life, owe their achievements to their mystic orientation. In the tradition of mystics too, we see Saint Francis of Assisi (born Francesca Bernardone) whose main influence is the New Testament Bible and the person of Jesus Christ. With Saint Francis, "mysticism comes into the open air, seeks to transform the stuff of daily life, speaks the vernacular, turns the songs of the troubadours to the purposes of Divine love; yet remains completely loyal to the Catholic Church" [Underhill, p.461]. The good fruits of his communion of love with God have continued in the good works done by the different groups of the Franciscan Orders. The depth of transformation that mysticism engenders in persons is clearly expressed in the famous prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.

This prayer clearly points to what the mystic life could offer our society and our Church. It offers us the translation of the message of incarnation to the daily life of the followers of Jesus Christ. And that is authentic Christianity and Spirituality.

Some impassable abyss of mucky and deadly divide does not cut off the mystics from us. They are part of the human society and they contribute to the good of the society. We share with them the solidarity of the human family. Experience links us with the mystics. Our experiences in life also stand to test the results of their claims to

intimacy and union with God. The mystics are not esoteric, not fundamentally eccentric and are not whimsical. They lead us to understand that the God "we crave is revealed, and we are living within [that God] not on some remote and arid plane ... [not] in the cunning explanations of philosophy; but in the normal acts of our diurnal experience, suddenly made significant for us; Not in the backwaters of existence, not amongst subtle arguments and occult doctrines, but in all those places where the direct and simple life of earth goes on. It is found in the soul of man so long as the soul is alive and growing: It is not found in any sterile place [Underhill, p.449-450].

The mystics live not merely for the sake of themselves but for the sake of more abundant and fruitful lives in others. Most of them, in helping other human beings encounter God, worked to end corruption in Society, in the Church, and in the Religious life. It is in this context of their living for God and for humanity that we appreciate the contributions of great mystics like Dionysius the Areopagite, Saints Catherine of Siena and John Tauler. Their contributions had great influences on some mystics that came after them. Bridget of Sweden helped to end the exile of the Papacy. Teresa of Avila is known for her wonderful resources for mystic and deep Christian life as espoused in the record of her mystic experiences in the Interior Castles. John of the Cross threw more light into our understanding of the dark night of the senses and the dark night of the soul. Ignatius Loyola is among other things remembered for his popular spiritual work namely, the Spiritual Exercises. Dante, Thomas A Kempis and the Unknown author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* among others have each made meaningful contributions to those that are interested in genuine and fulfilling mystic relationships.

The Mystics' experiences with God took different forms but the test of the pudding as it is said, is in the eating. The authenticity of their experiences is not dependent on the form in which it occurred or it was expressed but "solely on the quality of life that follows the experience. The mystical life is characterized by enhanced vitality, productivity, serenity, and joy as the inner and outward aspects harmonize in union with God" [Assessed from <http://www.connect.net/ron/mysticism.html> 8/1/2005]. *Productivity* as one of the marks of authenticity ought not be confused with the current materialistic and consumerist tendencies in human society. Productivity here stands for the fruits or fruition of the mystic encounter with God as seen in life transformed in the Holy Spirit. They experience some of the fruits of the Holy Spirit like fulfilled, joyful and peace-filled life. Productivity points to the reign of divine love and the communion of love among those that inhabit the universe - humans and other creatures.

Mystic life is in degrees and there are level or stages in the mystic life. Different mystics classify these stages differently. Thus the mystic and the psychological process by which a person establishes an intimate personal relationship with God differ from one person to another. It is therefore unrealistic to strictly classify and compartmentalize the spiritual-psychological process that mystics pass through. Apart from the observed differences in the mystic life of the various mystics, the other factor that renders unrealistic the attempt to systematize the stages of mystic life is the God factor. We cannot determine, pre-determine or program God. As it is true of relationships between human persons, no two relationships are ever the same. The most we could accept is picking some common elements in the life of the different mystics from the mosaic presentation of their lives. So even as I propose to encourage the newly initiated members

of the Catholic Church to expand their God-Image and ultimately to enter into a mystic relationship with God, I do not pretend to claim that all of them would turn out to be exactly another Saint John of the Cross or Teresa of Avila. What must remain obvious is that the mystic way and the psychological processes whereby one enters into an intimate communion of love with God oscillates between the two poles of "states of pleasure" and "states of pain" [Underhill, p. 168]. This observation calls us to remain humble and open in our mystic researches.

In Saint Teresa of Avila, there are about seven interior castles or seven degrees of contemplation. In St John of the cross, the movement is from awakening stage to union. I shall however follow the classical five-fold grouping of the phases of the mystical life namely, *the awakening, purgation, illumination, Dark night of the Soul, and Union*.

The first Phase is the **Awakening** phase; which is as the name goes, the awakening of the self to consciousness of God and of God's presence and actions. It is usually remarkably instantaneous and a markedly joyous experience. This is the moment when the reality of Jesus' presence and his divinity wears a visible meaning for the newly initiated in the Catholic faith. There is a high sense of peace and a feeling of being in the peaceful presence of Jesus. The person in this first rung of the mystic ladder feels the joy of doing every daily activity of his/her life in the company of Jesus Christ.

The next phase lacks the peace and the joy of the first phase. In this phase, the person that has experienced the awakening of the self to God-consciousness realizes his limitations. His lack of beauty contrasts with the Beauty who himself is God. His lack of holiness and perfection is in stark opposition to God who himself is holiness and

perfection personified. There are then attempts, via mortification and discipline to cleanse oneself of all obstacles to union with God, hence the name **purgation**.

Via purgation the self having been set free from the shackles of the senses and sensual life is positioned through the acquisition of virtues to see the divine radiance. Like the prisoners in Plato's allegory of the cave, this person has through the grace of God whose presence he has become conscious of, gone through the ordeals of purgation and is at the gate of the cave where he beholds the sun – in this case God. This is the state of **illumination**. Illumination, we must acknowledge has within itself some other stages of contemplation like 'degrees of orison or degrees of passive prayer/communion with God, visions and adventures of the soul'. Those stages of contemplation serve the purpose of educating the pilgrim soul as he moves towards union with God. It is a joyful and peaceful phase. Many mystics do not go beyond this phase [Underhill, p.169].

The next phase is what Saint John of the Cross has called the purification of the Spirit. This is **the dark night of the Soul**. As the senses were purged or cleansed of obstacles militating against the communion of love with God at the second phase in this mystic way, so too in this phase the spirit or the soul is purged of all human instincts to be attached to one's personal happiness. The center of a person's life, the will or in Buberian expression the "I-hood" is purified. This is what some of the mystics call 'spiritual crucifixion.' The self surrenders itself completely to God without any iota of resistance. Saint John of the Cross described it this way:

He [God] denudes the faculties, the affection, and the senses – spiritual and sensual, inner and outer. He leaves the understanding dark, the will dried up, the memory vacuous, and the affections tormented by bitterness and anguish. He takes away from the soul the feelings of pleasure she used to enjoy from spiritual blessings. This deprivation is one of the principal

requirements for the union of love [St John of the Cross, *Dark night of the Soul*, p.96].

This situation is very painful but as Saint John of the Cross has shown in the above citation, it launches the person into the final phase of the five phases of the mystic way.

Union is the final stage of the mystic way, the terminal point of the Psycho-Spiritual process that began with the awakening of the sense of Divine consciousness. This is the phase wherein the seeker of God becomes one with God. Some of the Fathers of the Church and some of the Mystics like Saint Irenaeus call it the 'deification' of the human person. It is a state of equilibrium, of purely spiritual life; characterized by peaceful joy, by enhanced powers, and by intense certitude

What becomes of one that has entered union of love with God while such a one still lives here on earth? Does he abandon active life? Does he look and behave in awkward and bizarre ways? Is he asocial and anti-social? I suppose the answer to these questions is in the negative – It is a big No! The pendulum thus is swinging towards a balanced life in the context of the interconnectedness between passive and active life. This position stands in agreement with that taken long ago by Delacroix as cited by Evelyn Underhill.

The Christian mystics ... moves from the Infinity; to the Definite; they aspire to infinitize life and to define Infinity; they go from the conscious to the subconscious, and from the subconscious to the conscious. The obstacle in their path is not consciousness in general, but **Self-Consciousness**, the consciousness of the Ego. The Ego is the limitation, that which opposes itself to the Infinite: the states of consciousness free from self, lost in a vaster consciousness, may become modes of the Infinite, and states of the Divine Consciousness [Underhill, p.172].

Delacroix's position is also collaborated by the instruction of Saint Teresa of Avila to her spiritual daughters: "You may think, my daughters ... that the soul in this state [of Union]

should be so absorbed that she can occupy herself with nothing. You deceive yourselves. She turns with greater ease and ardour than before to all that which belongs to the service of God, and when these occupations leave her free again, she remains in the enjoyment of that companionship [Ibid. p.172; Saint Teresa of Avila, The Interior Castle].

It is worthy of note that the mystic life oscillates between the temporal, finite, and natural, and the permanent, infinite and supernatural. Jesus having carried out his public ministry with the Apostles and the Disciples sent them out to proclaim the message of salvation, to preach the Kingdom of heaven to the whole world [Matt. 28:18-20]. Prior to their embarking upon that Apostolic mandate, Jesus instructed them to wait for the power from on High (the Holy Spirit) through whom they would receive the heavenly energy to work in God's name throughout the world. The Union between God and man in the power of the Holy Spirit translates into Godly life and relationships on earth. There is a marriage between earth and heaven.. This is the heart of INCARNATION. This is in a sense what Saint Teresa of Avila communicated to her spiritual children via her advice as I cited above.

In this two-fold experience lies the fulfillment of the mystic namely; that She/he is able to be united with God, and that he/she is able to support other creatures as they move to the union of love with God. **The mystic way of life qualifies as one of the bases of this project on the following grounds: in its ability to engender living and enjoying the company of both God and creatures; in its capacity to dispose other creatures to enjoy God's company, as well as, in letting God and creatures enjoy the mystic's presence and company.**

Are there any questions as to why I proceeded from the level of psychological representation of God to the spiritual-theological level of the relationship between the Living God and Creatures? I expect there should be none. But should there be any, may I reiterate that it is only a thin line that separates the psychological level from the spiritual-theological level. That thin line is that the spiritual-theological level is more expansive than the psychological level. The spiritual-theological level includes within its ambience the psychological processes too. Is it not the same human person, the same embodied spirit whose life and manner of operations evoke spiritual, psychological, emotional, affective and intellectual scrutiny or assessment? The human nature has continued to revolt against and resist the odd attempts to truncate him into vestiges of unrelated compartmentalization and or departments. Try hard as we may, human nature has rejected the complete divorce between faith and reason, reason and sense – rationalism and empiricism/pragmatism, Church and State, Religion/spirituality and Science, natural and supernatural. These artificial separations do not work to the letter because when the rubber hits the road the Rationalist via experience looks for a working solution/seeks for meaning in the context of a connection with God, the ever present but ineffable mystery.

Is my working population not the Neophytes in the RCIA Program? Is the period I am locating them not in the time frame immediately after the seven-week mystagogy? Am I not building upon the foundation already laid from the period of evangelization up to the period of Mystagogy? Is the Holy Eucharist not at the center of this event? Is Jesus not really, truly and substantially present in the Eucharist? Is Jesus Christ – the Incarnate Word of God- not God? Did the God-Man not invite his followers to abide in him [Jon

15:5]? Did he not instruct them to receive his body and blood in order to have eternal life [Jon 6:1-71 esp. vs. 53-57]? The response to all the above questions is in the affirmative.

In the light of the questions I raised above and in the light of the affirmative response to all of them, our project would now enter a new section, which is the mystic exploration and presentation of the Eucharistic meal in the Roman Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. We are entering the section that explores the 'marriage' between Jesus Christ and the newly initiated Roman Catholics. This is the marriage made possible by the divine condescension in Christ Jesus – a condescension that brought about the ascension/ the elevation or the deification of man. This is what the Fathers of the Church of Greek origin call *Synkatabasis*, which is composed of *anabasis* and *katabasis* meaning respectively ascension or elevation [for humankind] and condescension [for Christ].

2:2:2:1.THE MYSTIC NATURE OF THE EUCHARISTIC MEAL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE RCIA PROGRAM.

The Church describes the Eucharist as “the source and summit of the whole Christian life” [LG 11; CCC 1324]. It contains the Church’s entire spiritual treasure, that is, Christ Himself – our Passover and Living Bread. And it is the efficacious sign and the sublime cause of the sharing in divine life and the unity of the people of God by which the Church exists. By it, we are already united to the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life when God will be all in all [CCC 1324, CCC 1325-1326]. Jesus Christ is truly, really, substantially and wholly present in the Eucharist. He is present in the person of the minister, in the proclamation of the word, in the assembly gathered in his name and he is present substantially, sacramentally, and permanently under the Eucharistic Elements or the Eucharistic species [CCC 1373-1374].

The mystic character of the Eucharist is pointedly captured in the above paragraph especially in the areas that I underlined. The Neophyte that receives Christ becomes one with Christ, shares in divine life and is united also with the entire people God [a people not limited to those members of the Catholic Church under the leadership of the Pope (LG 9)]. The Neophyte is expected to be in union of love with Jesus Christ and with the entire people of God among whom and with whom he lives out this union of love. This relationship of communion of love is expected of all who receive the body and blood of Christ. Unfortunately, this mystic union has to a great extent been relegated to the background in favor of the more social and surface-level aspects of the Eucharistic meal.

The mystic nature and character of the Eucharist is not an accidental aspect of the Eucharistic Meal. Rather, the mystic character or nature of the Eucharist is part of the

core of the Eucharist. My position is best appreciated when one considers the fruits of the Eucharistic meal, as we know them in the Catholic Church [Confer Articles 1391-1419 in the Catechism of the Catholic Church - CCC]. The first of these articles demonstrates very clearly that all that receive the body and blood of Christ are called to mystic – direct, personal and intimate - union with Him. The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist is an intimate union with Christ Jesus [CCC 1391]. The Church rests her conviction on the Scriptural texts from the Gospel of Saint John among other Scriptural texts and other sources from the Church's Tradition. Jesus our Lord said, **"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him"** [Jon 6:56]. According to Jesus too, **"As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me"** [Jon 6:57]. In the light of these words of Jesus Christ, the Eucharistic meal is a mystic meal. It is a meal in which the partakers become intimately united with Christ.

The Catholic Church draws an interesting analogy between the Eucharistic meal and the material food that we eat. What material food produces in our bodily life – bodily health-, the Eucharist wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life – realization of divine life. This analogy throws into relief also the indispensable need of disposing the Neophytes for the mystic experience of their Lord and God –Jesus Christ- via the Eucharistic meal. For by receiving the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, the recipient does not merely receive divine life as an aspect of what constitutes his life but he becomes one with the divine. This is a union that occurs at the deepest level of his being and pervades his whole being –spiritual and psychological, emotional and intellectual, cultural, social and so on. It is the heart of the Eucharistic spirituality because it is an encounter and

experience that leads to the communion of love between human beings and God. God becomes a true and real, ever-present and ever-caring God. Jesus Christ, our charity and gift par excellence unites with us and transforms us into charity and gifts par excellence for the rest of creatures He is a God of experience not a God of fairytales and intellectual speculations. [CCC 1392 – 1398; Pope John Paul II. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia (EE)*, Art.11-12, 15]. In the Eucharistic meal we become what we eat in a non-metaphorical sense. We truly and really become the Jesus that we eat. This is not merely a matter of faith or doctrine but it is a matter of faith that will translate into daily experiences in the Neophyte's concrete and historical existence.

In the history of the Catholic Church there have been abuses of the mystic experience of Christ Jesus in the Eucharist. There have been accounts of spurious visions and messages attributed to Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. There has also been exaggerated piety that turns the Eucharistic Jesus into a magician or a diviner. The mystic experience of Jesus via the Eucharistic meal, which this project proposes does not encourage such aberrations. The fear of abuses should not prevent us from disposing the Neophytes for mystic experience with Jesus Christ in the Eucharist because the abuse of the Eucharist is not limited to the area of the mystic experience of Jesus Christ. According to Pope John Paul II there are some *dark clouds* and *shadows* in the manner that some members of the people of God relate to and with Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. By 'dark clouds' and 'shadows', the Pontiff metaphorically referred to the whole complex of actions and omissions, ideologies and praxis that do not bring joy, self-realization and fulfillment to the individual Catholics and to society.

At times one encounters an extremely reductive understanding of the Eucharistic mystery. Stripped of its sacrificial meaning, it is celebrated

as if it were simply a fraternal banquet. Furthermore, the necessity of the ministerial priesthood, grounded in apostolic succession, is at times obscured and the sacramental nature of the Eucharist is reduced to its mere effectiveness as a form of proclamation. This has led here and there to ecumenical initiatives, which albeit well intentioned, indulge in Eucharistic practices contrary to the discipline by which the Church expresses her faith [EE. Art. 10].

My point is that the fear of abuses in the relationship between the Neophytes and the Eucharistic Jesus Christ should not become obstacles to their realization of mystic union with Jesus Christ. I propose that this kind of destructive fear should give way to the constructive fear or what has been described as 'the awe of the divine'.

Saint Gertrude was a renowned mystic. Her mystic experiences occurred in the context of the Eucharistic meal or in connection with the Eucharistic meal. We have no evidence from the account of the life of Saint Gertrude that the personal, direct and intimate union between her and the Eucharistic Jesus led to some bizarre events that were harmful and destructive to herself, to others or to both. Rather her mystic experiences made her relate to God with a sense of gratitude. Love is at the center of that relationship.

On the second Sunday, before Mass while the procession was beginning and the responsory *Vidi Dominum facie ad faciem* ... was being sung, my soul was illuminated by an incomprehensible splendor of divine light that manifested itself. And there appeared to me, as it were, a face which pressed itself to my face: 'not shaped, but shaping' as Bernard says, 'not dazzling the eyes of the body, but making joyful the countenance of the heart; pleasing, not by appearance, but by the gift of love' [Cyprian Vagaggini, Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy, p.780].

Speaking to God directly is normal for mystics. Saint Gertrude continues, "In this vision sweet as honey, while your eyes, like rays of the sun, seemed to press directly upon my eyes, in what way your gentle sweetness penetrated not only my soul but my heart as well and all my members, is known to you alone; and as long as I shall live, I will serve you with dedication, in gratitude for it..." [Vagaggini. P.780]. Gertrude's personal, direct

and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ was not based on appearance but it was anchored on love. The sublime sense of love and of gratitude 'shape' all facets of her life. It is thus obvious that the love and gratitude that shape the entirety of one's life are crucial factors in discerning genuine encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist. This puts to rest the inhibiting fear that the Neophytes could abuse the Blessed Sacrament by relating to the Blessed Sacrament in ways that amount to sacrilege.

The intimate relationship between Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and the Neophytes should not be misunderstood. The experience is not pain-free and it is not like a drug-induced surface-level happiness. It sometimes involves moments of pain, sorrow, confusion and dryness. Saint Gertrude narrated one of her experiences between 1287 and 1288, "And then You made Yourself present like the sudden impressing of a wound upon my heart with these words: 'Now let the welling up of all affections unite as one; that is, let all your pleasure, hope, joy, sorrow, fear, and all your other feelings settle in my heart'" [Vagaggini, p.782]. These Neophytes would therefore go through the various dimensions and grades of human conditions on earth ranging from joy and peace to pain and sorrow. The difference between those not exposed to the ever-unfolding God-Image and the members of my project group is that amidst the different conditions of human life the members of my project group would 'settle in the heart of Jesus' while the former oscillates from one form of depression and lack of fulfillment in life to another.

This section introduces us to the next chapter- chapter three of this project. In that chapter, we shall in concrete and practical ways be dealing with exposing the Neophytes to the ever-unfolding God-Image. We shall be dealing with disposing them for mystic experience of Jesus Christ.

The extent of our success and or failure, the expected and unexpected outcome of this project, the implications of the results of this project to my ministry and to ministry in general, the contributions of this project to my clinical-theological bases would all depend on what happens in the next chapter [chapter three] of this project.

Note that outside of the context of the Eucharistic meal the mystic experience could happen in any other situations or contexts of the human life.

CHAPTER THREE.

3:0. BUILDING UPON THE SEVEN WEEKS MYSTAGOGY: *THE PRACTICUM.*

In the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, MYSTAGOGY aims at leading the Neophytes to a profound sense of the mystery of salvation and to the deepening of their Christian Faith. It explores the meaning of the experiences they had of the Sacraments of Initiation, so as to have an understanding and a perspective about life, a way of living and relating in this world. It is a time they look back at their experiences of the Holy so as to integrate it into their personal lives. Thus, Mystagogy serves the foundation or the agenda for the Catechumenal formation in the Catholic Church [RCIA, n. 75.1].

The guideline for carrying out the mystagogy, while still leaving some rooms for healthy adaptations in that exercise stipulates the principal things that ought to be done during this section of the Neophyte year namely, "meditation on the gospel, sharing in the Eucharist and doing works of Charity" along with the Community of the Faithful [RCIA, n. 244]. The communal and the personal experiential elements in this mystagogical period are very vital in the execution of my project. God is not Isolation but God is a Community – a community of the Trinity. We encounter God both individually and as a community of human persons. Little wonder the experiences we have of God have the dual qualities of sameness and differences- all in one.

Experience has shown that living the life that radiates the Gospel values, reflects our sharing in the Eucharist and life that is remarkably charitable [n.244] sometimes becomes cold and stale. At this point one loses touch with the God-Image and the Living God that one encountered via the Rites, the Word of God, and via the Community of Christians. This situation leads to the loss of the psycho-spiritual equilibrium in the

relationship between God and the Christian, as well as, in the relationship between the Christian and other creatures. In this clinical-pastoral section of my project [Practicum], let us see how far my project goes in helping my project's population enlarge their God-Image, enter a mystic relationship with Jesus Christ and thus maintain their psycho-spiritual equilibrium.

3:1. ENGAGING MY PROJECT'S POPULATION – THE NEOPHYTES.

I have contacted five persons that are almost rounding off their Neophyte year in the RCIA Program for this project. They are between the ages of 11years and 14years. I am also in touch with their parents because they would assist me in observing the responses of those five persons to this project.

PLACE OF MEETING: THE PARISH HALL.

DAY: THURSDAYS

TIME: FROM 7:00PM TO 8:00PM [1hr but more sometimes].

MONTH EXPECTED TO START: FIRST WEEK OF OCTOBER 2005.

PROJECTED DURATION: THREE MONTHS.

ACTUAL DURATION: COULD BE A LITTLE LESS THAN THREE MONTHS.

PROCEDURE: We shall while living in the present be simultaneously looking back on their experiences in the RCIA Program and in life generally to gain meaning and understanding. We shall be looking forward in anticipation and hope for an enlarged God-Image, for the mystic consciousness of Jesus Christ and for the realization of psycho-spiritual equilibrium. We shall proceed in two ways. First, we shall look back at their experiences and interpret with them the God-Images their encountered. Second, I will present to them materials from Fr Carlos Valles' book – *Sketches of God*, from the

Christian Holy Scripture, and from Carl Jung's book, *Psychology and Religion*. I will require them to explore these materials, not as an academic assignment, but in the context of their experiences and to discover if it speaks to them and what it says to them.

The five of them are expected to share their experiences and new insights with their parents. Since our meeting will take the shape of shared experience, Encounter Group or the classical practicum, I will also receive feedback from the five of them on our meeting days. I will hold one session with their parents. I hope to receive some feedback from the parents of these five persons regarding their [parents] experiences of their children since those children became part of my project.

Every session starts with different forms of prayer and or song. Each new session is expected to begin with the summary of the previous session, questions, new insights and experiences from the previous sessions.

I wish to reiterate that the above program for the execution of this project is open to reasonable modifications and changes if such modifications and changes are in line with the standard laid down for carrying this form of project.

THE STEP-BY-STEP EXECUTION OF THE PROJECT: PROGRAM.

WEEK I:

THEME: WHO IS GOD?

- ❖ Opening prayers.
- ❖ General Introductions and the Delivery of the Project's Mission Statement.
- ❖ Sharing of the WORD [Who do you say that I am? Matthew 16:13-18].
- ❖ Recording of the proceedings of the session [Verbatim].

- ❖ Closing Prayers and Dismissal.

WEEK II:

THEME: OUR EVOLVING GOD-IMAGE.

- ❖ Opening Prayers
- ❖ Summary of the last week.
- ❖ Sharing the WORD [Hebrews 1:1-4; John 4:7-42].
- ❖ Closing Prayers.

WEEK III.

THEME: MEETING WITH PARENTS OF THE PROJECT GROUP MEMBERS.

- ❖ Opening prayers.
- ❖ Introduction.
- ❖ Discussion session with Parents.
- ❖ Summary And Remarks of my experience of this Meeting.

WEEK IV.

THEME: HOW DOES YOUR BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST AFFECT YOUR LIFE ON DAILY BASIS?

- ❖ Opening Prayers.
- ❖ Summary of the Previous session.
- ❖ Film/Video Show – **JESUS THE WORD BECAME FLESH.**
- ❖ Response of members to the Film show in the Light of the theme of this session.
- ❖ Closing Prayers and Dismissal

WEEK V:

THEME: JESUS CHRIST AND SOME MOST MEANINGFUL MOMENTS OF HIS LIFE AS YOU SEE IT THROUGH THE LENSE OF THE FILM – JESUS THE WORD BECAME FLESH.

- ❖ Opening Prayers.
- ❖ EXPLORATION OF JESUS-IMAGE IN THE VARIOUS SITUATIONS IN THE FILM. - JESUS THE WORD BECAME FLESH.

WEEK VI. THEME: ENCOUNTER WITH SOME SIGNIFICANT OTHERS.

- ❖ Opening Prayers.
- ❖ Summary of the previous session.
- ❖ CASE I: FATHER CARLOS VALLES [Extracts from the Book the Sketches of God].
- ❖ CASE II: Saints Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross.
- ❖ CASE III: Saint Peter in Acts 10:1-48].
- ❖ CASE IV: Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Augustine and Henri de Lubac.
- ❖ Shared Experiences: How do you relate to these cases?
- ❖ Closing Prayers and Dismissal.

VII. THEME: VISITATION OF THE SICK AND THE POOR.

- ❖ Opening Prayers.
- ❖ Summary of the Previous Session
- ❖ Questions relating to the two Visits:

1. How do you envision Jesus in the light of your visit to the needy?
 2. How do you feel Jesus relates to them?
 3. What is your current attitude towards the needy- the poor and the sick?
- ❖ Addressing the images of the Jesus Christ you encountered in CHART 1.
 1. Which of the images of Jesus Christ in the Chart makes some deep impression on you?
 2. Why do you feel such impression?
 3. Which of those images do you wish to emulate in your relationship to the needy – the Poor and the Sick?
 - ❖ Closing Prayers and Dismissal

WEEK VIII:

THEME: JESUS CHRIST IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY.

- ❖ Introductory remarks.
- ❖ Eucharistic celebration: Community at Worship.
 1. Exposing the images of Jesus via the liturgy of the Word.
 2. Exposing the images of Jesus via the liturgy of the Eucharist.
- ❖ Eating Together: Community in love.
- ❖ Cleaning Up after eating: Service and humility.

3:2. LOOKING BACK TO GAIN MEANING AND UNDERSTANDING, LIVING IN THE PRESENT AND LOOKING FORWARD IN ANTICIPATION AND HOPE.

Below are the sessions that I had with the members of this project group. They are arranged according to the weeks and the themes of each of the sessions. Let me however re-present in a nutshell my goal/objective, purpose and my methods and approaches in this project - an endeavor that I have given some elaborate attention in the preceding chapters.

1. What I intend to do in this project? I intend to expose Catholic Christians to the "ever unfolding God-Image".

2. What I intend to realize via this project [Purpose].

- ❖ To assist them as they enlarge their God-Image and to create within them an attitude of openness to an ever-unfolding God-Image.
- ❖ To assist them as they realize the God-Image that is fulfilling to them in the context of the Christian Faith – Faith in Jesus Christ.
- ❖ To achieve a psycho-spiritual equilibrium in life.
- ❖ To see them move from the God-Image that is fulfilling to them to "a mystic relationship", a direct, personal, intimate and experiential encounter and relationship with GOD [not mere image or representation].

2. My specific Population? The Neophytes in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults [as adapted to children's situation/circumstance] are my specific population.

3. The Methods and Approaches I will take in this project?

❖ They are already presented in Chapter three above as an integrative-systemic Method that involves the following approaches:

1. Facilitating series of group sessions in which members via their personal experiences share their personal God-Images;
2. Members are exposed to multiple, gradual, historical and developmental/progressive God-Image via Jesus Christ in the Christian Scripture.
3. They are exposed to other people's evolving God-Images as set down in Written Texts/Works.
4. They are guided through the film/video [Jesus the Word Became Flesh- The Foot Prints of God being the story of salvation from Abraham to Saint Augustine].
5. There are organized visits to the Needy – the Poor and the Sick.
6. The group explores their representation of Jesus Christ in the context of the Community life.

4. My theological/Religious Base?

❖ The theology of REVELATION and INCARNATION and of MYSTICISM.

5. My Psychological/clinical base?

❖ The psychodynamic theory and relying heavily on object-relations principle and developmental Psychology.

THE SESSIONS SHOWING THE ACTUAL EXECUTION OF THE PROJECT.

WEEK I – SESSION ONE.

1:0. THEME: WHO IS GOD?

1:1. OPENING PRAYERS:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. O Lord God through your presence in your creatures, you encourage us to seek you. Grant us the courage to be present to your ever-unfolding image in our midst so as to realize the best of our potentials in time and in eternity.

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN ...

HAIL MARY FULL OF GRACE ...

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

1:2. General Introductions and the Delivery of the Project's Mission Statement.

I acknowledge that since you were born, you have grown or developed physically, biologically and psychologically, academically, socially and so on. In this project group, we are exposing ourselves to the possibility of an integral growth in our relationship with God. It involves growth in the God-Image we have and growth in the relationship between God and us, and between us and other creatures. We are exploring our personal God-Image and our relationship with God with a view to realizing a sense of integration and equilibrium of the various aspects of our lives – physiologically, psychologically and socially, intellectually, emotionally and so on. This sense of equilibrium is essentially psycho-spiritual in nature. This is a sense of equilibrium, which I hope will act as an important catalyst in our realization of a certain degree of wholeness, fulfillment and stability in our Christian life.

The growth and changes we experience during the adolescent stage of our life are part of the unfolding of God's plan for our development as fully Christian persons. Meanwhile, our relishing a fulfilled and happy life, our development into fully Christian persons depends on how much we are in contact with the 'Ultimate Meaning'/God in our lives. It depends on how much we allow for growth in our relationship with God and for growth in our God-Image. As Adolescents, you are growing towards the realization of the best potentials in the various aspects of your life. In like manner, your God-Image, the representation you have of who/what God is for you based on your experiences ought also to be evolving and developing.

We are going to dig into the various aspects of our personal experiences to see our God-Images and to observe our relationship with God. As we do this, we also hope that this project will empower us to throw open the doors of our lives to the changes/growth in our God-Images, in our relationships with God and with creatures in the future.

The materials that I distributed to you last Sunday [10/9/05] namely, *The Holy Bible*, *Journal*, and photocopies from the books *Sketches of God* [Fr Carlos Valles] and *Psychology and Religion* [Carl Jung], and the chart about the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ are meant for your private reading and reflections. We shall discuss the key issues in them at the appropriate moments during our eight-week session.

The texts and the readings we have chosen and our prayer patterns are characteristically mystic. That is, they are notably direct, experiential and personal with respect to the Human-Divine relationships. Even as we discuss, we shall also pray and explore the contents, contexts, nature and messages of our prayer.

I request that we all relax and relate to this project with very minimal anxiety. Thank you for volunteering to participate in this project. Extend my heartfelt- gratitude to your parents and to all those that have encouraged you to be part of this project. During this project, feel free to call me either Father [FR] or Ken. I will be glad to know also if any of you would like to go by any special name apart from your real name [All accepted to go by their first names].

1:3. Sharing of the WORD [Who do you say that I am?] -Matthew 16:13-18.

M read out the above Scriptural text. At the end of the reading the interactive session began. The proceedings of that session are recorded as 'verbatim' below:

VERBATIM.

FR: Like the disciples and those that lived in their time, we have different representations, pictures and understanding of and relationship to God. We could each ask ourselves, 'who is God for me?'. 'What is God for me?'. ? Suppose someone asks you, who or what is God? What could possibly be your response? [*There was a great silence. No person talked. Members occasionally took some soft and sharp look at each other. Then the silence was broken with a spontaneous laughter*].

FR: We have just had some moments of rich and silent meditation. And I wonder what was going on within each of us. I guess also that what was going on within us could have possibly contributed to our laughter. I am not sure [*Another moment of silence*]. Fine. Let me share with you a part of what was going on within me during our moments of silence.

C: Yes. I was waiting for you to start.

[All burst into a kind of joyous laughter and then the response].

ALL: Me too, me too.

FR: Earlier on in life, God was for me a very mighty old man with sharp, big and piercing eyes that enabled him to see every person on earth. The sky was his home. The main relationship I had with him was only that of a provider and a dependent. I looked upon God as one that provided my material needs. Such needs included granting my mother safe trip home whenever she traveled and likewise my father. God was essentially one that defended me from Satan, Satan's agents and from all evils. Prayer simply meant a series of petition for my security addressed to God. My God representation or the God-Image that could be deduced from my story so far include the giant, all-seeing and all-knowing, old and stern man, provider and protector. This God-Image has kept on changing, evolving and re-evolving. New predominant image evolves and the old one dies off but I believe that God still remains the same God.

You may wish to share your own story. Remember that there is no pass or fail ranking in this group. So be free and share your genuine convictions and experience.

C: God for me is someone to turn to when you need help or when someone else is in need. God is like a giant voice above the clouds that is fair and strict at the same time, watching every person, rewarding the good person and punishing the evil persons.

G: I feel C is merely repeating what father said. I do not mean to hurt your feelings C but I feel that is what you did. And ...

K: G but father said we should feel free to say our genuine convictions and beliefs, what we know to be true from within our hearts. I feel that C said what he believes. Yet G, I did not hear your own views about who or what God is for you.

G: I had not ended my statement when you started talking.

K: I am sorry. I do not mean to either interrupt you or to hurt your feelings please.

[All began laughing again].

FR: I am lost here. Could somebody help me understand why we burst out laughing simultaneously and spontaneously?

M: I guess it is the similarity in the way G addressed C and the way K addressed G – 'I don't mean to hurt your feeling'. I guess no person wants a fight here.

FR: Hmm! Interesting.

G: Father could I complete my own sharing now?

FR: I guess so G.

G: God is my personal and intimate friend. I share my personal matters with him. The things that I could never share with the public I share with him because I trust him.

M: God is like a loving grandmother or grandfather or even parents. He is always caring. He will help you with your problems. He picks you up when you are down and directs you in the right path.

FR: M, please help me a little more. Do you mean that God picks C, K, S, G, and me up when we are down and he directs us to the right path or what?

M: Oh! I am talking about me. But ... yes! I believe also God does that for every person.

S: Jesus is God. He loves little children. He died for sinners. He loves me.

FR: S, I am wondering whether this is your personal experience of your God. I do not get you clearly here. Could you tell me more about your experience of that your God?

S: I receive communion. My receiving Communion makes me see God in a special way in Jesus Christ. In receiving Communion, I feel good especially because Jesus shares himself with me. He saves and cares for me.

FR: You seem to say that you encounter God in Jesus Christ especially when you receive Communion/Eucharist. Is this your personal experience or what you hear people say?

S: Yeah! It is my own experience. I feel good and joyful when I receive Jesus Christ at Mass.

K: In my own life, one event that made me see God in a special way was when I got mononucleosis. I could not even move or get up. I prayed every night asking God to help me get better. He answered my prayers and I was able to get up and go to school. God for me is a healer. He makes the impossible possible. He is a miracle worker.

G: God for me is a Savior. One day in India, when I was still younger, I went swimming with my dad and my elder sister. Unknown to my dad, I crossed into the deeper section of the sea. And I got into trouble. I was almost drowned when my sister gave me a helping hand out of that danger. I feel that God saved me.

M: I have a question for you G. Don't you suppose you are giving honor and recognition to some other person [your God] when according to your story it was your sister that saved you?

G: You see, my sister is a very stressful person and she would ordinarily panic in this kind of situation. I feel and I am convinced that God gave her courage to help me out. So it is God that saved me through her.

C: I agree with G. We meet God through other people especially when we are in need. Last summer, we took a bus trip to Philadelphia. We expected that trip to be a fun. But it turned out to be full of pain, tension and anxiety [*then looking around he said...*]. Did someone here go with us for that trip?

M: Yes. I was in the same bus as C. That trip was not fun at all. I don't even want to think about it because it was very terrible. Anyway, we came home safely.

C: M, I hope this does not spoil your sleep this night [*smiling*]. First, the bus driver lost his way. We were searching for a way to connect with the other buses on the same trip. Then suddenly, the engine died out. At this time we were hungry but we had no food in our own bus. The food was in another bus. I do not know how it happened but God sent us a tow van, which towed the bus while we sat inside that bus. The tow van driver also knew a restaurant around there. He took us to that restaurant and we ate. I do not know who paid for what we ate. After our meal, the tow van driver took us to where our bus was fixed. So for me God is both a Savior and a Provider.

G: I could relate on some level with S's description of who or what God is for him. I also receive Communion. But I am having some difficulties seeing God exactly as S sees God. I have lots of questions.

FR: How do you mean? I feel I need to understand you better.

G: Sean talked about God, about Jesus Christ and about Communion. We also talk about the Holy Spirit. Do we have three Gods or one and if three, are all of them in the Eucharist? Is this God or Gods a HE or a SHE or a THEY? If Jesus Christ is God's Son, who is God's wife? Is that Mary? Or does God have a Son without a wife? Is God like an imaginary friend? When sometime ago I said that God is my personal and intimate friend, I am thinking of God like an imaginary friend. I am thinking like those friends we imagine we would have at school at the time we have not started going to school. Father, I don't simply get it.

FR: G says she needs to know how we talk about God in terms of 'God' [I suppose she means what is referred to as God the Father], Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. What is their relationship in and to the Holy Eucharist? Is there one God or are there three Gods? Who is God's wife? Is God male or female? Is God like an imaginary friend? G wants to know more.

C: For me, all those divisions and questions would not give me headache because I believe there is someone or something somewhere that is responsible for making the whole universe. I believe someone made everything in the world including me. That God is good and that God speaks to my heart to be good and to avoid evil. That's all.

M: For me, God may not be a male or a female. God does not have a gender. This is difficult for me to explain but I believe that God has no gender.

S: I am surprised at what my statement of the way I image, think and feel God has generated. I don't know where we are heading. Who among us here has ever seen God? Are we not saying how we feel, think and understand God? I mean what I said. That's me.

FR: You have all shared beautiful experiences and views that you cherish about God and your God-Image. You have raised serious questions. Unfortunately, we are currently running out of time. We shall continue with our sharing next Thursday [10/20/05].

1:4. CLOSING PRAYERS AND DISMISSAL:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

HAIL MARY FULL OF GRACE ...

Our Lady Seat of Wisdom ... Pray for us.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

WEEK II – SESSION TWO.

THEME: OUR EVOLVING GOD-IMAGE

2:1. OPENING PRAYERS.

Fr and All: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

Fr: Come Holy Spirit and fill the hearts of the faithful.

All: And enkindle in them the fire of your love.

Fr: Send forth your Spirit and it shall be recreated.

All: And you would renew the face of the earth.

Fr: Let us pray.

Fr and All: O God who by the light of the Holy Spirit didst instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in his consolation through Christ our Lord: Amen.

Fr and All: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Amen

2:2. SUMMARY OF THE PREVIOUS SESSION.

Last week, we shared our experiences of God's presence in our lives. Through the stories of those experiences, we discovered that we imaged or represented God as an intimate friend, a healer, and a provider, a creator, someone like a grandfather, grandmother or even parents, and as the Savior, as someone that rewards for good deeds and punishes for evil deeds, as an imaginary friend and as Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist.

You also raised some important questions concerning the nature of God – Is God one or three, who is God's wife, Is God a male or a female and what is the relation of God to the Holy Eucharist? You all did very well by your presence and contributions. We

are all exploring the evolving God-images or God's representations in our lives, as well as, at the same time searching for this same God whose images we are exploring. Thank you for your openness to growth. I assure you that your contributions are highly important and specially appreciated.

2:3. SHARING THE WORD OF GOD [Hebrews 1:1-4; John 4:7-42].

G and K read the texts above, that is, the scripture texts from the Letter to the Hebrews and the Gospel according to Saint John.

FR: As G and K finished reading these Scriptural texts; I am wondering the kind of meaning the contents of those texts made for us, the impression they created on us, and what they have called to our attention.

K: It seems to me that I am in touch with the contents of the first reading [that is Hebrews 1:1-4]. For me it makes sense that God has shown himself in different ways to different people living in different places and at different times. And at some point in time, God showed himself to people through His Son Jesus Christ.

C: Yes. The reading from Hebrews makes sense to me too. And the reading from John for me seems to be the place where God's Son – Jesus Christ- is telling the woman that came to draw water about God.

G: So Jesus is not God then but the Son of God.

S: G, what do you want to know? You are asking too many questions.

G: Is Jesus Christ God?

S: What are you guys asking? The thing is damn simple. Jesus is not God. He is the Son of God.

G: If as you said, Jesus Christ is the Son of God then technically he is God. As a Son of God, He is somehow God.

[All kept silent for a while].

FR: M, I have not heard from you. How do you feel about this sharing that has been going on?

M: confused.

FR: I feel I will learn more from you when you talk about your confusion regarding what we are sharing.

M: I am just confused about this whole issue of God and Jesus. How can God be there and we say that Jesus is God and at the same time Jesus is the Son of God? I feel we are saying what we do not know, that S and G are not even sure of what they are saying.

C: I think I agree with M. I am also surprised as well as confused. We say there is God and we again say there is Jesus; and that Jesus is God.

G: Fr as when we were still younger, we were told what to believe about God and we believed those things and never asked questions. As soon as we start asking questions, all these troubles or difficulties of explanation start to come up. I am also somehow not sure of all the things I say about Jesus Christ as God.

FR: I could relate to the confusion, surprise and some sense of frustration, as well as, the genuine hunger to know more about your God. These are not bad signs at all. There are not things that should worry us. It is a part of life and it is normal that we could be confused at times.

We are not the only people ever to be confused about our God. As we read from the letter to the Hebrews God manifested Himself to many different persons in different

places and times. Some of them were confused and they asked questions. Let me share two examples with you. According to the story in Exodus chapter three, God manifested himself to Moses at Mount Horeb. God manifested himself to Moses as the Lord the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – the God of the fathers of Israel. Then Moses needed something clearer and he asked ‘the God of the fathers of Israel’ for his name. ‘The God of the fathers of Israel’ replied, “I AM WHO I AM” [Gen. 3:14]. Yet even the response ‘I am who I am’ does not make the matter as simple as we would expect. In another section of the Bible, Philip requested Jesus Christ to show the Apostles the Father so that they would be satisfied and Jesus informed them that to have seen him is to have seen the father. Our Church [the Roman Catholic Church] teaches that God is a Trinity of persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This Trinity of persons is still One and undivided God. Even the comprehensive understanding of the Dogma of the Trinity is still not possible. One of the reasons for this apparent confusion is the inability of the finite mind of human beings to understand the infinite mind of God completely.

Moreover, intellectual demonstration of who God is or whether Jesus is God may offer us some help in our quest but such help is still limited because we may need also some evidence from experience – direct and indirect experience. I wish to leave you to make the judgment as to whether Jesus Christ is God or not through your own personal experience – direct or indirect. This experience may come from our prayer, worship/liturgy, our situations in life, and our encounter with Jesus via the Holy Bible, through the Sacraments of the Church and through other human beings.

I suggest that at this point we talk to our God to clarify this situation for us. We are encouraged to relate to our God in prayer, worship and study and in other ways

possible so that we could have some light about this issue of whether to us Jesus Christ is God or not. We have to remain open to ways of relating to this issue in a manner that its resolution would be beneficial and fulfilling to us. I recommend that we read and pray with this Bible text: John 14:1-21. We hope to share the outcome of your reading, prayer and reflection in a forth night. If any person has some comments or questions for this group, which cannot be reserved until when next we meet here, let such person ask his/her questions or make his/her comments.

K: Excuse me father. I have been quiet for a long time because it seems to me that we have been discussing what is better imagined than arrived at in reality. Who among us has ever seen God or Jesus Christ? Suppose we even encounter God or call him Jesus Christ, how do we know we have encountered God?

FR: I guess we heard K'S question.

S: Fr, you requested me to remind you when it is time for dismissal. We are almost seven minutes past our time.

G: My mom is already waiting outside.

FR: K, your questions are in line with the theme of our sharing two weeks from today. I will meet with your parents next week. When next we gather, I hope all of us shall take care of your concerns. I also recommend that you read the text of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:1-12 for our next meeting.

2:4. CLOSING PRAYERS:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

OUR FATHER.....

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

WEEK III - THREE

THEME: MEETING WITH PARENTS OF THE PROJECT GROUP MEMBERS.

3:1. OPENING PRAYERS:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

OUR FATHER ...

HAIL MARY ...

O God, grant us the grace to grow in genuine knowledge of you and in the relationship with you and with the rest of your creatures: Amen.

3:2. INTRODUCTION: I introduced myself and invited all those present to do likewise.

FR: I am Fr Ken. I am facilitating the project group that focuses on exposing Christians to an ever-unfolding God-Image, a project group of which your children are members. Thank you for granting me the honor and privilege of having your children as members of this project group. Thank you too for being here this night for this dimension of our project that directly involves parents/guardians of the members of my project group.

Please let the parent-members of this group introduce themselves to members gathered in this room [*Then they introduced themselves one after another*].

GM: I am Teresa and I am G'S mother. Her father is out of town today and so I am here to represent him as well. I am truly glad to be in this group.

CM: I am Andrea and I am C'S mother. His father could not make it today. He is currently in a meeting with his boss. Be assured that I am here on his behalf too. Both of us looked forward to being here today but it turned out that only one of us made it.

MM: I am Jennifer. M is my child. Her father traveled out of this Country. He is in Japan on some business trip. He is aware of my being here today and he is in full support of

what we have come here to accomplish. Thanks father for selecting my child as one of the children to execute this important project. I am already seeing something happening in her. You would not believe the insightful sharing she brings into our home.

KM: I am Pasquale. I am K'S mother. Her father is not able to be here tonight. He is in full support of this project. Father, my husband sends his best regards to you. My husband and I thank you for creating this opportunity of growth for our daughter.

SM: I am Catherine. S is my son. I am glad to be present here tonight to see father and the other parents of the children that are involved in this project. My husband came back from work very late and he is completely exhausted. There is no point his coming here to sleep away and to distract other people. So we decided he remains at home. Apart from that both of us would have been here because we looked forward to being here today especially on account of the series of lectures and questions my son has been inundating us with since he got involved in father's project group.

3:3: DISCUSSION SESSION WITH FIVE PARENTS:

FR: I thank you for your generous introductions and the sharing part of your introductory remarks. From what I have gathered so far from your introductions, all of you are glad to be here and wish your husbands were here too. You seem to say also that you have observed some attitudes and actions in your children, which prior to their participation in our project group were either absent or latent. If I am correct, as I tend to believe that I am, could you please share one or more of your experiences with your children with us?

GM: We were at dinner in our house within the first week that this project group started meeting here in the parish. Then after we prayed together to start our meal, my daughter began asking, *'who is God'*? Then I told her to keep quiet and eat her food first. Then her

father told her that God is the creator of everything in the universe and informed her to listen to Mom. My husband promised her that we would talk more about it after eating. Then she said, *'O.K, probably then Mom would answers my question'*. I reminded her that she only asked one question. She said, *"more questions would be coming and by the way, who is God for you?"* With the second part of her question, I looked at my husband and he looked at me. Something within me informed me that those two questions should not be overlooked especially as my daughter is an adolescent. Moreover, those questions and particularly the second one made such a great impression on me that I told myself that I need to do some work about it. Our discussion could no longer wait till the end of our dinner. We began discussing. My husband and I informed all our children at table with us that those questions are very important that each one of us ought to ask himself/herself those questions in very personal and sincere way. We told them that the answers may not come at once and that prayers, reflection and life experiences are needed if we could properly respond to those questions. Moreover, each of us ought to answer them in our own ways, according to our age, and experiences in life. That evening our dinner was something more than dinner. It was a soul-searching dinner. My husband felt the same way. He told me that our daughter has, unknown to her, sent him on a search for meaning.

This is something more than an adolescent's rebellion. Mothers here know what we go through with our adolescent children. I am originally from India. From time to time, my husband and I take our children back to India for visits and vacations. Moreover she is an adolescent. These two factors put together could point to you what were going

on inside my husband and inside me too. It was like we woke up from sleep. I tell you something is happening but I am not able to give it a name right now. Thank you father.

FR: Interesting! That is a very rich and challenging experience. Thank you.

MM: The situation that GM narrated is similar to what is happening in my house. I observed that my daughter is becoming more reflective and I have seen her praying the way she never did before. She looks like someone searching for something. In that search, there is a sense of peace about her. I do not know what she is experiencing but my daughter that I have lived all these years with would have behaved differently when she returns from their project group meeting. She would have made noise and made joke from something she encountered in the class. She would have come to tell me some stories. This time she was quiet. I was disturbed. I was wondering whether something went wrong in their project group. I shared my experience with my husband. He said he had not noticed it but that we could ask Father if he could share with us some part of the activities of his project group when they gather on Thursday nights.

Then before meeting father for some discussion as my husband suggested, I decided to discuss with my daughter first. I called her and asked her to tell me if something was bothering her. I asked her if she was sick, if someone has offended her, if she was upset and so on. She told me she was fine. I reassured her of my love for her and pleaded with her to share with me what is going on within her.

Then she opened up and asked me question: *"who is God; who is Jesus Christ and who is Jesus Christ and God for you? What is your image of God and Jesus Christ? Is that image meaningful to you in your present situation"*? Do you feel the presence of Jesus Christ in your daily life? From where do you get your strength for life amidst the

differences, confusions and the various situations of things in this world? And she went on and on, raising the kind of questions I had not expected her to be concerned about.

Honestly, the first feelings that came upon me were confusion, surprise and a sense of my incapacity even before my own very daughter. I still remember exactly around the time I was carrying her in my womb. What exactly is happening? Could all these be crisis associated with the adolescence stage of human development? I had no direct and immediate answer. Later on, one night I woke my husband in the middle of the night to share my experience with him. I told him how disturbed I was about the issues my daughter has raised up during my discussion with her. I relayed my experiences to him. He kept quiet for a while. I felt embarrassed and was about getting upset with him for refusing to talk to me. Then at that moment he opened his mouth and said, "thank God". The whole situation became even stranger to me. I do not understand how 'thank God' fits into what I have told him. Then he said, 'I have been personally battling with all those questions and more'. Hopefully our daughter would be able to resolve hers quicker than me since she started raising her own important questions and unavoidable questions early in life'. He told me how everything seems meaningless to him until he discovers what he calls the answers to the ultimate questions that each human being must ask and answer. He wants to arrive at a point in his life where either Jesus makes ultimate meaning that gives meaning to all else or he arrives at such ultimate meaning other than Jesus Christ. This is something that must be done if one should be fulfilled in life.

At that point the message hit right home at me. I began asking myself the meaning of life, the source of life and the meaning of my own life in ways that I never did before. My husband and I agreed to call our daughter for discussion, to listen to her, as well as, to

share our own personal experiences about some of the questions she has asked. We are yet to carry out this very important assignment. It is not an easy thing to do because there are some of those things that must be discovered personally and such discovery happens with time and experience. Moreover, my husband and I admit that we have not even as yet resolved all the issues related to the questions my daughter has asked.

I also think that father has sent my whole family on a journey of the search for meaning. We are journeying on a path that seems to me does not have a scientifically tested, proved and approved map. This is an endeavor that involves more than that which one observes at first sight. Thank you friends for listening to me. Thank you father especially for making all the members of my family to belong in a sense to your project group, courtesy of my daughter and her generous thought provoking dispositions.

CM: My son is a little "black box". And am wondering if it is his usual self or is there something going on anew in him.

FR: Please could you help us understand more what you mean by the expression, 'my son is a little "black box"?'

CM: I am sorry that I did not explain what I mean. The expression, "my son is a little black box", means that he is difficult to unlock and understand. I 'day school' my girls and I am more in touch with their position on some issues important in life like our relationship to God and the whole issue of our spiritual life. But my son exhibits such air of independence that he misinterprets my attempts to guide and direct him as an imposition, or exploitation of his dependence on my husband and I. He wants things his own way and at his own time. With this kind of attitude at the background, the opportunity of observing some attitudinal differences in him eluded me. He asked such

questions as those that the children whose mothers spoke before me asked. He looked like someone searching for some deep understanding of issues that bothered him but his usual air of independence and self-will made me think he was merely displaying his usual attitude but only in diverse pattern.

SM: Father, I am grateful to you for this meeting. It is always important that parents and those that take care of their children meet to share issues about the children that they take care of. My experience of today's gathering has thrown this conviction into relief in an outstanding proportion. Outside of this gathering tonight, I honestly would not have read any meaning into the changes I notice in my son. In recent weeks he has developed some degree of attention to Jesus Christ. He asks questions about Jesus Christ, God, the Church and about human life and activities on earth. I remember feeling embarrassed and partly insulted last week when he asked me, *'mom, is Jesus Christ meaningful to you; do you find fulfillment when you receive Jesus Christ in the Eucharist?'* I said that I do. Though I responded in the affirmative, I did not explore with him why he asked me such questions and what was happening in his life. I rather told my husband how much my son embarrassed me with questions. My husband told me not to take it personally. He said it is the way kids of his age behave. For my husband, our son is undergoing some normal developmental changes and we need some patience and understanding to cope with his new attitudes.

KM: This is an interesting gathering. I am grateful to all of you for your candid sharing. My daughter has always exhibited some moderate and healthy sense of religion and faith. She has always believed in God and seems to take seriously the way of life of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. She has always looked forward to our family prayers especially

at night. In my family, my husband and I prayed together prior to our having any baby. When we had our babies, we have continued to pray together. My daughter looks forward with a sense of joy to the night when she would lead in our family prayer.

At school and among her friends, she is well known for her expression of her Christian Faith. She has done this even in situations where most adolescents of her age would not. She is not used to questioning her belief and Faith in Jesus Christ. However, my husband and I have noticed some remarkable changes in her. She has begun to ask soul-searching and deep questions about God and our relationship to God. Let me share with you one of her questions/remarks. *'Mom', she said, 'why does God have to wait until we are sick or in trouble before he visits us?'* I told her that Jesus is with us always until the end of time as he promised. He does not just come when we are sick. It seems to me that what happens is that we realize our need of Jesus Christ and of his presence when we are in trouble. It is that way with most human beings. Then she went on, *'Mom', 'don't you think that is cheating? Certainly we can't do that to our friends if we are sincere to them. And if we cheat that way, we may lose our friends'*. Then I told her that Jesus does not expect us to cheat on him in our relationship to him, and to creatures.

I have discussed this with my husband. We reasoned that she is an adolescent and that sometimes the attitude to know and to be certain sets in at this stage in life. However, we also figured out that there is something more than an adolescent's traits in her new way of life and reasoning. Behind her questions and actions is the search for identity and meaning. She is more personally involved in her relationship with Jesus. To my husband, to me and to the members of my family, she has become a challenge in a positive sense. She has awakened in me personally the search for my God, which during my University

years led me to experimenting with some group on different forms of meditations and incantations. Those practices never went far because they were merely group things. Once the group disbanded, I ended that former search for meaning in my life.

FR: Your candid sharing and your keen observations of what is happening in the life of your children impressed me. It is also interesting that the changes that most of you observed in your children have positively challenged you to look more closely at God and the place of God in your lives. To some of you, your children have called to your conscious minds your earlier experiences of the search for meaning and the search for the ultimate meaning or the ground of existence, which we call God. Could each of you share with us the image or representation you have of this God. Who is this God and how does this God play out in your life experiences?

MM: For me, Jesus Christ is my God. There are complications in the understanding of God according to my Church. There is this talk about the Trinity. For goodness sake, I do not understand it. I have tried to but I could not. My take on this is that God is THE MYSTERY. No person has ever seen God. We know God from the things God created. We are making approximations. But what convinces me most is that Jesus Christ said somewhere in the Scripture that to have seen him is to have seen God the father. I cannot remember that particular passage of the Bible but I know it is in the Bible.

So for me Jesus Christ is God. He is a loving, caring, forgiving, and merciful God. He suffered and died for us. But even when he loves, he does not permit of everything. He is also a God of order and holiness. There have been moments when I lack inner peace and courage to move on in life especially with so many to do in family life. There were times in the past that I seriously questioned why I would have to remain with one

man [*in marriage* – words in italic are mine] until death and why the burden of rearing children. Those were really difficult moments for me. I ran to Jesus for peace and courage to see things the way he would see them. I almost always had it my own way. I regained my peace and joy. I remember one of such moments vividly. After I had overcome that crisis within me, we were at table in our house. My husband prayed this way before we began eating: "thank you Jesus from saving me from the agony of being without my wife and the double agony of my children having a scattered family. Please I will offer you anything to make sure my wife remains with me and with our children. Bless us as we eat this food. Amen." Then I was full of shame of myself and I felt the pain of what my selfishness would have caused my family. I realized that my husband was also in pain and was really afraid that I could leave him. This happened in the context of eating a meal in the name of Jesus Christ. That experience has brought lots of healing in our married life and to the way we relate to our children and to other people. Because of this act of Jesus Christ, I see my husband also as my brother, my intimate friend and as an inseparable part of me. Who says Jesus Christ is not God? Jesus Christ is God for me. I don't know what others think but for me, that is a closed case. Jesus is God now and always.

KM: Thank you my friend for that wonderful sharing. What is your name again?

MM: I am Mrs. X and I am M'S mother.

FR: KM I am wondering what motivated you to ask MM for her name?

KM: I feel she is honest and generous in her sharing. I am a kind of person that would want to share my Faith and my deep convictions but I feel shy somehow. Unlike me but like my husband, MM speaks her mind and convictions without feeling shy. That is the

kind of thing my husband does. When I ask him why he does it, he would always tell me, 'darling, you know I am speaking for two of us' and we would start laughing.

FR: So she reminds you of your husband?

KM: Yes. And back to the central issue. I have always accepted that Jesus is God. I look up to him to save me in moments of trials and difficulties. I feel Jesus Christ is God and He is love. I am unfortunately one of those that become more Jesus-Conscious when they are in trouble. That is not a nice attitude towards God anyway. However, my experience with my daughter and our sharing this night is motivating me for some deeper search for a more meaningful and fulfilling relationship with Jesus Christ my God.

GM: Those of you that have spoken are not the only ones that have been really motivated and challenged in a very beautiful way. My daughter has turned our home into another of their project class. Father, you may have more of my children in that project if you need them. I mean it. I could bring all of them to join in whatever project you are doing now.

FR: Oh! How wonderful. That's nice of you. I will get to you on that issue later.

GM: For me, Jesus is God. That does not mean that I have no questions regarding such belief or regarding my faith that Jesus is God. As you may well know, I am from India. In India, there are many other beliefs in other gods different from my belief in Jesus Christ. You have also goddesses, that is, female gods. Animals like bull, snake and others represent some gods too. Some people believe in reincarnation – that we die, and come back to life, and some people believe also in the law of karma – whatever you do comes back to you. I don't know why God allowed such an enormous differences in humankind's beliefs or Faith in Him. That dilemma is there for God to resolve.

Jesus is God for me and my representation of this my God is best expressed in the idea of charity, justice and forgiveness. The aspects of the Bible that I relate to most in my life and on account of which I am convinced that Jesus is God are first, Jesus' injunction that the two main commandments of the Christian Faith are love of God and of neighbor. The second is his Sermon on the Mount. I think it is somewhere in Matthew's Gospel. You know that this is also what impressed Mahatma Gandhi the most about Jesus Christ. I have had so many experiences that have convinced me that when I forgive the wrongs done me out of love for Jesus Christ and for the human race, I have great inner peace and a feeling of fulfillment. I do not say by this that it is easy to forgive or to love sincerely. To love and to forgive is not easily come by. An example of such situation in my life is this: A white woman [Caucasian] once said that Indians are 'as dangerous as snakes'. She used other derogatory languages like, 'as ugly as the Indians'. Though I love her and I have forgiven her in accord with my faith in Jesus Christ my God, sometimes I still feel the pain of what that woman said about my people - the Indians.

CM: Sorry. Those were arrogant, ignorant and careless statements. If we even take such matter naturally and biologically she is wrong. From my knowledge of biology all snakes are not poisonous. There are some non-poisonous snakes. She does not know anything of nature and biology. Moreover, I work with some Indian women. They are one of the most beautiful creatures I have seen -- the shape of their face, nose and the color of their eyes, as well as, their dark and beautifully hanging long hairs drive me crazy. I wish I had such.

GM: Thank you my friend.

FR: GM is a beautiful lady. If I were to marry, wow! Her kind of person would have been my choice but I am already happily married to the Church and to Jesus Christ [*They*

all started laughing]. And of course, there are some wonderful qualities in each of you ladies that I would have needed in a woman I would have had for a wife if I were not already in an intimate relation with the Church and with Jesus Christ. Fine. Let us give CM more chance to speak more of her representation of God and how she relates to her faith convictions in her daily life.

CM: Jesus Christ is my God and my guiding life force. I look at what he did as recorded in the Bible as my guide in life. I am not a very patient person. I could easily be upset. My greatest medication to this dark side of me has been my reflection or meditation on the passion of Christ. No human person could have endured such cruelty and remain sane until death. That he forgave those that treated him so harshly is my medicine for meaningful living. Without this divine medicine, everything on earth, especially with such colossal injustice in our world today would have been meaningless to me.

SM: My Irish background presented me with the rich culture of belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ through the Roman Catholic lenses. I cannot remember any serious moment when I doubted the divinity of Jesus Christ. For me he is God of love and love made human. In Jesus I see the fullness of love, care, forgiveness and justice. That God became human in Jesus Christ is the best example of humility and love. What else can I say? I wish I could love Jesus better and by doing so, love my neighbors as Jesus loves them.

I feel a special sense of my inadequacy before Jesus. I feel I need more of him. I feel I need to express and share more of him with everyone I meet in my life. There is a feeling within me to be more like Jesus in the way I think and conduct my affairs in life. This feeling is often very difficult to explain clearly. I do find myself in some murky

waters when I try to grasp the length and breath of God and of everything about God. It creates within me a certain sense of pain, anxiety and failure.

FR: I thank you all. This has been a very wonderful night of sharing. I am in a better position now to work with the beautiful kids you have offered me to support me in this our project. I hope and pray that the rich experiences of this night will bring you daily to a fulfilling relationship with your God.

3:4. LET US PRAY:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Amen. Lord Jesus Christ, you are our God. May our relationship with you present us with more insights into you and enable us to realize in our lives the blessing of abiding in you forever: Amen.

HAIL MARY FULL OF GRACE ...

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

3:5. SUMMARY AND REMARKS OF MY EXPERIENCE OF THIS MEETING:

Parents were pleased that their children and they are involved in this project. Only the female parents of all the children attended this session. The male parents were all absent but their wives sent in their messages of support and solidarity to us.

Parents' and even families' issues of the search for meaning came up. The confusion, anxiety and peace, and joy often associated with digging into human-God relationship surfaced in this session.

I observed too that the children in my project group have inherited some of their views about God from their family and religious upbringing. There was also some cultural interplay in the parents' description of their God image as clearly shown by GM from India and SM from Ireland. Our cultures could influence the nature of our God-

Image. The cultural environment and patterns of life of a people has presented itself as one of the variables that should not be overlooked in this project. It is really essential.

I observed also that the children have been open and honest to me and to the members of the project group. C'S mother's sharing corroborated his wish and desire for independence. It seems also that their family tilts towards authoritarian-orientation.

From the contents of our sharing on the night of that meeting/session, it is possible to draw from within their 'life review, their life-shaping experiences and relationships, present values and commitments and from their religion' what their God-Image is, and how it has gradually developed in the course of time [James Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, 1995, pp310-312]. This gradual development is not even a closed issue for these parents. Those parents' experiences with their children have challenged them to enter new phases in their relationships with God.

The way in which these parents talked about their God and the length of time they took, as well as, the examples they gave showed some marked differences between them and their children. The parents took longer time, connected their experiences to issues discussed without much or any promptings to share those experiences. They were more reflective and personal than conventional in their sharing. Even when they looked conventional they still made it personal, especially when they shared their religious beliefs, Faith and orientations. For them, Jesus Christ is their God. They expressed that they have not had some complete grasp of Jesus in a personal, intimate and direct way, as they would wish they had. Some of them raised some internal issues that bothered them such as weaknesses, confusion, and hurts on account of insults. They supported each other.

WEEK IV – SESSION FOUR

THEME: HOW DOES YOUR BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST AFFECT YOUR LIFE ON DAILY BASIS?

4:1 OPENING PRAYERS:

Dear God, we come to you with all our questions, confusions and doubts. May our encounter with you today be meaningful to us and may our lives and relationships be positively enriched through today's encounter with you and with one another: Amen.

4:2. SUMMARY OF THE PREVIOUS SESSIONS.

FR: Last week, I held a session with your parents, specifically your mothers. They shared with me your new zeal in your search for meaning. They informed me that you asked lots of questions about God and about the universe. Some of them also said that you are becoming more reflective and that you take out some time for personal prayer. How do you relate to what they said? Are their observations accurate or were they saying things that you totally disagree with?

K: I feel that they are accurate in most of what they said.

G: I agree that I asked lots of questions. I needed to be clear about some matters. But I asked God more questions than I asked any other person. I also told God that I want to have first hand information about him.

M: I know my mother would tell you about me. She thought that something was wrong with me. She kept asking me to tell her what we discussed here. She also may be feeling that I am into something harmful or bad. She seemed worried about me.

C: My mother returned from that meeting with some new form of behavior. She looks gentler with me. She has begun to listen to me more. She told me that she was wrong in

telling me that I am too difficult to handle. I guess father told them to listen to their God more. Now she also seems to be listening to me also. Probably she now understands God better. Who knows?

S: My mom was happy when she returned. She told me that I am very lucky to be in this group. She now encourages me to ask questions. Before that meeting, she reluctantly listens to my questions but now she listens very well. She tells me though that I must remember that faith is very important. She said that without faith, one cannot know much about God.

4:3.THIS GROUP'S FURTHER RESPONSE TO AN ISSUE FROM WEEK II.

FR: During our last gathering before I met with your parents, K observed that none of us has seen Jesus Christ here on earth. She queried how we could be talking about the Jesus we have not seen, we have not known, and the Jesus we are not sure of. K, I am wondering if I re-presented your position well?

K: Yes.

S: No.

FR: S has a different position. Could we hear more from you S?

S: I don't mean that K did not say that. I mean that I don't agree with what she said.

FR: U-hu!

S: I mean ... we may not have seen Jesus physically but we have known him somehow. In our school, we learn about Washington, Einstein and other people. We say we know them because we have read something about them. Yet we have not met them physically.

G: Okay. But we never know everything about them. In the same way, I agree we know about Jesus from our parents, from the stories in the Bible and from the Church but I

mean... that's, it is still confusing. You know what I mean? You know new things about this Jesus every day.

M: I think we cannot know everything about Jesus Christ. I feel that the way I know him and who he is for me may be different from your own.

C: Yeah.

M: So every person is free to have the kind of Jesus he or she likes. Suppose I say that my own Jesus wants me to kill somebody with bomb like what some people did on 9/11, what happens?

G: No. There is something we must have in common. God is not evil ... Jesus is not evil. If your own Jesus wants you to kill or to cheat, then that is not Jesus Christ.

S: Did not the Bible tell us how good Jesus is? We hear that on Sundays too. Even our reasons will tell us when something is good or bad. For me Jesus is good and loving. How could he be wicked at the same time?

K: I agree that we learn about Jesus in the Church and in the Bible. But you know sometimes, I want to see him physically. I want to touch him and hear him speak. For me too, person that does something bad in the name of Jesus Christ is a liar. That person is doing evil on his own. Jesus did not send him to do it.

FR: I appreciate all your contributions. I hear you say that our Jesus-Image could be different but they are things that must be the same. You added a value judgment to our discussion. It seems to me that for you if our Jesus-Images is genuine, such images ought to be concerned about the welfare/the good of other creatures.

M: Y—eee-sssssss! [*Then we all started laughing*].

FR: Remember, we have a video/film to watch today. Are we still going to watch it?

K: Yes.

G: Yes but we may not finish it.

C: I agree with G.

M: I am comfortable with either watching part of it or watching all of it.

S: I will go with what M said.

FR: Let us then watch a part of that film.

4:4. FILM SHOW/VIDEO WATCH – JESUS THE WORD BECAME FLESH.

We watched some portions of the Film –JESUS: THE WORD BECAME FLESH.

Stephen Ray put the film together and Ignatius Press produced it. It is the story of salvation history from Abraham to Saint Augustine and beyond. This session drew to a close after we had watched a portion of this film.

4:5. CLOSING PRAYERS AND DISMISSAL:

FR: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit:

ALL: Amen.

FR: Give us the grace to learn more of you and to come closer to you in intimate relationship as we expose ourselves to your ever-unfolding image in our lives.

ALL: Amen.

WEEK V – SESSION FIVE.

THEME: JESUS CHRIST AND SOME MOST MEANINGFUL MOMENTS OF HIS LIFE AS YOU SEE IT THROUGH THE LENSE OF THE FILM – *JESUS THE WORD BECAME FLESH*.

5:1. OPENING PRAYERS. I requested that someone leads in prayer. Then Mary led us in opening prayers while all of us joined.

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

HAIL MARY **[ALL JOINED]**.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.

5:2. SUMMARY OF THE PREVIOUS SESSION. Last week we shared our experiences of your parents after they had held a meeting with me. We realized and shared among ourselves that our image of Jesus vary and change on account of various reasons. One permanent area we agreed on is the value judgment aspect of our God-Image or Jesus-Image. No image of God or Jesus Christ, which does not respect the dignity of persons and the other of God's creatures, is worthwhile. We also did not accept of exaggerated relativism in matters of ethics and morals.

5:3. EXPLORATION OF JESUS-IMAGE IN THE VARIOUS SITUATIONS IN THE FILM – *JESUS THE WORD BECAME FLESH*.

The remainder of the film lasted for 1hr 15minutes. All the members of this group paid keen attention to the film. As we watched this film, I observed that their reactions to the different events in the Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ varied.

My intention at this point is not to engage in discussion with the members of this group but to expose them to the various images of Jesus Christ as captured in that film. This, I hope shows them the various sides to the person of Christ their God – new vista.

5:4. TAKE HOME EXERCISE AS A FOLLOW-UP TO SESSION FIVE.

- ❖ What moments in the life of Jesus Christ are most important/meaningful to you?
- ❖ What are your impressions of Jesus Christ in those events?
- ❖ Mark or check out all the descriptions and all the aspects of Jesus' life that you love, that you appreciate and that support you in life.

5:5. PRAYER EXERCISE: We are going to adopt some other forms of prayer from hence. For our closing prayer we are going to do some breathing exercise. I encourage you at this point to picture the Blessed Trinity as Breath.

Now stay or stand in any posture most comfortable to you. Then gently breath in and out slowly. Feel the breath go through your nostrils. Be aware of the Blessed Trinity entering into you through this breath. Keep on feeling that awareness as long as you can without distractions...

FR: We pray through Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen.

5:6. ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. Please practice this exercise daily at your most convenient moments. Do not see it as an assignment because it is not one. See it as a way of life. See it as a means of relating with your source, your origin and your end..
2. Feel free to call me on my cell phone especially between 6:00 pm and 8:00pm from Monday to Saturday every week. I will be available for you.

WEEK VI – SESSION SIX.

THEME: GOD IN MY BREATH.

6:1.OPENING PRAYER:

FR: May we remain silent briefly in recognition of the presence of God in us and around us. Close your eyes gently. Breathe in and out slowly and gently. May we surrender to God in silent worship ... [*Silence*]. We pray through Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen.

6:2. SUMMARY OF THE PREVIOUS SESSION: In the previous session, we were exposed to the person, life and mission of Jesus Christ through the film/movie – JESUS: THE WORD BECAME FLESH. That film introduced us into the exploration into God via experience. Our emphasis was not on intellectual acquisition of knowledge or on accumulation of immense information about God. It opened the gate for a mystic dimension of our exploration into God. Our exercise is experience-based.

In our closing prayer during the last session, we began our exercise that centers on the mystic form of prayer [mystic path] as one of the means of the exploration into God. In this aspect of our exploration, we are not neglecting the wealth of information in our Tradition and other valuable traditions. The remarkable thing about our exercise is that we are directly involved in this voyage in the Divine – our source.

6:3. INTRODUCTION OF THIS SESSION: We are going to carry out some exercise today. I encourage you to continue with this exercise when you leave here. Do it at least once a day. As a prelude to this exercise, let me share with you the root and genesis of the exercise that we are about to embark on and which we would continue to carry out.

In Acts of the Apostles chapter 1:4, Jesus Christ assures His followers that they would be baptized in the Holy Spirit. In chapter 1:8, Jesus Christ informs them that the Holy Spirit would empower them to be His witnesses throughout the world. Earlier on in the Scripture, this time in Jon 3:1-15, Jesus discussed with Nicodemus – Jewish teacher of the Law reputed for his knowledge of the Law. Nicodemus had come to Jesus at night to show his appreciation to Jesus for the good work that the latter was doing. In their discussion about the Holy Spirit, Jesus used the analogy of the wind to speak of the Holy Spirit and the actions of the Holy Spirit [Jon 3:18].

Later on, on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon the followers of Jesus Christ as they gathered in the Upper Room for prayers. The Scriptural description of the part of what happened that day goes this way: *“When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit”* [Acts 2:1-4]. In these accounts, God the Holy Spirit is described via the image of WIND.

In the two exercises that follow, which are modified adaptations from Anthony de Mello [Sadhana, pp.32-33], we shall meet God via the wind/breath/air that we breathe. In the first exercise, we are drawing God in via each breath we take in while in the second exercise; we are purified of all negative aspects of our lives as we breathe out.

EXERCISE ONE.

Close your eyes and practice the awareness of your breathing as we do when we pray. Let us remain with this awareness of our breathing for some few minutes ...

I want you to reflect and feel now that this air you are breathing in is charged with the power and the presence of God ... Think of the air as of an immense ocean that surrounds you ... an ocean heavily saturated with God's presence and God's being ... while you draw the air into your lungs you are drawing God in ...

Be aware that you are drawing in the power and the presence of God each time you breathe in ... Stay in this awareness as long as you can ...

Notice what you feel when you become conscious that you are drawing God in with each breathe you take. Feel God's presence.... Enjoy the presence of God as long as you need it ... *[some long silence and the exercise ends]*.

FR: How do you feel?

C: I am very relaxed and I feel like remaining quiet.

G: I feel peace inside me and it seems God is very close to me.

K: I was distracted in the beginning especially when Sean was shaking his seat. Later on, I felt like something entered into me. It is awesome but it is very difficult to describe. I will rather prefer to experience it than talk about it.

S: In the beginning, it was like we were joking. I did not agree that God is in the air we are breathing. Later on, I looked at others. They closed their eyes. They were serious. So I decided to try doing what I heard from father. When I began doing some of those things father said, it was like I was half awake and half asleep but I was happy inside me.

M: Father, you remember you told us to practice it a lot at home. I have been doing it. Sometimes I enjoy it. Sometimes I am distracted. I enjoyed it today. I feel that God is kind of very close to me.

FR: Our experiences may differ one from the other. It is not a problem. We relate to God somehow differently. It is also necessary that you not expect the same kind of experience with God every time you practice this exercise of uniting with God and of remaining in God. Openness and expectant hope would be helpful to you in this exercise.

We shall now do our next exercise. It is going to serve also as our closing prayers for this day. Follow the instructions as much as you can but if at any time, you feel like remaining with any particular point in this exercise because it gives you meaning and appeals to your heart, then remain with the God you are experiencing in that moment.

6:5.

EXERCISE TWO.

Go back into your comfortable posture again. Begin your breathing exercise ...

While you breathe in, be conscious of God's Spirit coming into you ... Fill your lungs with the divine energy that the Holy Spirit brings ...

While you breathe out, imagine you are breathing out all your impurities ... your fears ... your negative feelings ...

Imagine you see your whole body becoming radiant and alive through this process of breathing in God's life-giving Spirit and breathing out all your impurities ...

Stay with this awareness as long as you can without distraction ... *[We observed some fairly long period of silence and then the exercise and the session ended].*

FR: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

ALL: Amen.

6:6. ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1. Please practice your breathing exercise everyday. As you do it, listen to God speak to your hearts during and outside of the time you are engaged in that exercise.
2. Next week, we will do some exercise on how to see God through our bodies.

WEEK VII – SESSION SEVEN.

THEME: SEEING GOD THROUGH OUR BODIES.

7:1. OPENING PRAYERS:

FR: May we remain silent briefly in recognition of the presence of God in us and around us. Close your eyes gently. Breathe in and out slowly and gently. May we surrender to God in silent worship ... [*Silence*]. Envision God the architect of your body. Imagine God loving all the parts of your body. Envision God saying that your body is good and then embracing you ... [*Silence*]. We pray through Christ our Lord.

ALL: Amen.

7:2. SUMMARY OF THE PREVIOUS SESSION. In the last session, we had two exercises. In the first one, we used the imagery of the air/breathe and the practice of breathing to get in contact with the God in us, as well as, to welcome God more fully within us. In the second exercise, we surrendered ourselves to God. We allowed God to purify us of negative feelings, emotions, fears, destructive ideas and so on.

We discovered that in these exercises our experiences are never the same each time we carry them out. Moreover, it became manifest that no two persons have identical experiences of God.

7:3. STORIES ABOUT OUR GOD-EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE BODY.

Reverend Father Carlos Valles told the first story in this section. It is a story of Reverend Father Rubio and latter about Father Valles himself. Father Rubio felt God very close to his body that he saw himself literally walking up to the train station with God. On reaching the train station, Fr Rubio requested two tickets from the ticket master – one for God and the other for Father Rubio. Here is that story in full:

Good Father Rubio ... was going to board a train or a bus, and when asking for the ticket said absent-mindedly, 'Two tickets for ... please'. Then suddenly he checked himself and said apologetically with a touch of pleasant embarrassment: 'Sorry, not two tickets, only one if you don't mind'. The presence by his side of the eternal Friend was so real for him that while taking a ticket for himself he spontaneously thought he had to take another ticket for Jesus. How could he allow him to pay for himself, or, worse, to travel without a ticket? His faith was so real that it almost made him pay double for his trip. That was ... at some privileged moments, the living experience of my own youth. Jesus, my friend, was always by my side [The word 'was' in bold print is mine] – Sketches of God, p.9.

Dr Carol Ochs told the second story [Our Lives as Torah, pp.125-126]. Carol observed the following of our experience of God through our body:

Even though we may find traces of the holy in and through the wonders of nature, we ourselves are wonders of nature. This wonder has aspects of both beauty and terror. That we are intricate and cannot fully fathom ourselves arouses our fear because we feel outside of our own control. But what we cannot control is still controlled; we live, and for that we are grateful. In our daily prayer service, we affirm the unity of mind and body and see both as being renewed daily when we awake from sleep. This process of noticing, or stopping in the regular round of life to appreciate our return from sleep to waking, or in the well-ordered functioning of our bodies, becomes one of the places we can encounter God. In this very personal experience of a greater control, we find a sense of God's presence and concern.

Carol also told the story of how Florence discovered her own sense of God's presence in and through her body.

Facing a life-threatening illness in her teens, Florence has made it a regular practice to survey her body and recognize its strengths, its weaknesses, and her own sense of God's presence in and through the intricate workings of her being. At the time of her recovery, she wanted to forget her body and make up for the time lost to her hospital stay and convalescence. She was tired of regular blood tests and weary of the concern she saw in her parents' eyes. She just wanted to get on with living. But without consciously intending to, she changed. Those long hours on the ward and later in bed at home made her less interested in the scores of the school team games or the position of a particular song on the music charts. Even though her strength returned, she found herself needing to withdraw for an hour or more each afternoon, just to have time alone. It was during this time that she began the practice of surveying her body.

'Surveying her body' as used in Carol's story does not mean mathematical calculation or intellectual surveillance. It means the experience of the body in the context of our relationship to God through the body as described by Father Anthony de Mello. We shall now turn to our body-exercise that we adapted from the work of Fr Anthony de Mello.

7:4. EXERCISES ON GOD-EXPERIENCE THROUGH OUR BODY.

Do the breathing awareness exercise. Keep on breathing in the presence and the energy of God – your source. Do this in a relaxed manner and as long as you can.

Now begin to experience and feel the various parts of your body as gifts from God. Feel them, they are good. Feel and experience God's presence in them all. Begin somewhere – your head, eyes, nose, mouth, breast, stomach, heart, intestine, liver, kidney, genitals, legs, fingers, toes, ears ... Any part. Begin somewhere, any part of your

body, which you feel you need to begin from. Your whole body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is good. Experience your God through any part or all parts of your body.

Feel and experience God's love for each of them. Feel God's presence in each of them. Keep on feeling and experiencing the presence of God in them. Do this as long as you can ... *[silence]*...**END OF EXERCISE.**

M: I have heard about people that meditate using natural things like sun, moon, flowing water of a River and so on. My mom told me about it. Is it what we are doing?

FR: We don't have detailed information about what the people you are referring to do. If what they do is meditation, we are not merely doing meditation here. What we are doing is closer to contemplation than mere meditation because meditation involves thinking; the person meditating is in-charge of his/her action but what we are doing involves some bits of all the aspects of us as human beings as we hope and expect God to be fully in-charge. You could call it the mystic enterprise or exercise. God is in-charge. But you are somehow right. We are still at the realm of meditation and hoping for contemplation.

G: Apart from our bodies and air or breath, could we encounter God through other creatures like snow, moon and waterfalls?

FR: I feel it is possible provided we recognize that those elements are not God.

S: Why not we finish with our bodies first before we talk of other things?

K: I feel they are the same. It is the same process.

FR: You are all doing very fine. We could encounter our God through ourselves and through other creatures. Time is not on our side now, so let us close this session with a brief silence; **[SILENCE]** ... we pray through Christ our Lord.

ALL: A—m—e—n.

WEEK VIII – SESSION EIGHT.

THEME: “GOD AS FOOD AND GOD FOR FOOD”.

8:1. OPENING PRAYERS:

Let us observe some moments of silence ...*[about 3minutes silence took place]*.

Imagine yourself sitting with Jesus Christ at the same table on the day of the Last Supper. Breathe in and out slowly... keep on focusing at Jesus Christ. Remember what he once told Philip, ‘to have seen me is to have seen the Father’. Remain with this statement for some moment ... *[Silence 2minutes]*.

Imagine him telling you, ‘take and eat; this is my body. Take and drink; this is the cup of my blood’. Imagine you are eating and drinking the body and blood of God. How does this make you feel? Begin to experience what you are feeling. Be conscious of what you are feeling. Remain with that feeling for some moment ... *[Silence and End of Prayers]*.

8:2. SUMMARY OF THE PREVIOUS SESSION: Last session we discovered and experienced the beauty of our bodies in our relationship to God. We discovered how our bodies could channel us to God and ... *[Mary cuts in]*.

8:3. SPONTANEOUS ENCOUNTERS.

M: Father we know it. We know what we did last week but don’t tell us we are not coming here next week.

G: You have started talking about last supper. I know where you are going. Don’t do that. This is just like I am enjoying my sleep and my Mum wakes me up.

S: This thing we are doing here is fun. But the time is too short Father. Fr Ken, think of our School. We entered our new school year before we began this exercise but we are

ending this exercise before even the school year closes. Don't you think we should have given more time to this study about God?

K: Me too, I think so. Is God not more important than school? Fr could you just think about it? We need more time with you so that we know better about God.

C: Fr, am very sure you know that God is more important than school. Just tell us that we shall continue what we are doing. We have not said that we are tired. Father, are you getting more tired than us?

G: Father is not answering our questions. Father, please respond to our question ...Please. O.K. Just promise us that we shall be here next week. Eh? You hear?

FR: I have the same difficulty as almost any of you. I do not feel happy because a part of me tells me that I am losing the presence of people that are very precious to me.

C: Father, don't do what is difficult for all of us then. I mean we should continue.

[This moment was really very difficult for all inside the room. All five members of this project group were shedding tears. They were visibly uncomfortable; they were constantly adjusting their sitting postures. Mary put her head on her seat. This moment was also very tormenting to me emotionally. Then I allowed for silence, a very long silence of nearly 20minutes].

FR: How do you feel now?

G: I am not very sure that I know how I feel. It's like I am blank and my head is empty.

C: It's like am dreaming.

K: Many things in this life are not permanent. Some things often change with the passage of time. Sometimes, we need to change if we are to be alive and happy.

S: K, are you preaching to us? Why were you crying?

K: S, did you not cry? What is wrong about crying?

FR: Thank you my friends. I am glad that you are able to express your feelings. Our crying, our asking questions, our observations and comments are all good signs. We are growing and we are doing really fine in our relationship to God. My experience this evening opened to me some windows into how the disciples of Jesus Christ could have felt and how Jesus Christ felt when they celebrated the last supper.

G: Whatever their feelings were, I am almost convinced that those were not fun. If they want to be frank, they would accept that they were confused.

FR: G, did you feel confused?

G: Oh! Sure. I am still not out of it *[laughing now. Then others joined her in laughing]*.

FR: There seems to be nothing wrong in our feeling the way we do. But could we feel God's presence in this situation?

M: *[Raising her hand]*.

FR: Yes M, we have not heard from you.

M: I was very devastated. I was initially upset with father. I felt like he betrayed me. But when we kept quiet for a long time, I felt like I was somehow asleep so I put down my head on my desk. I made up my mind to start sleeping whether father likes it or not. But I could not sleep. I felt like someone was telling me that Father Ken is not God. It was happening inside me. I felt the thing telling me to pay attention to God just as Father Ken suggested. Then I became very happy.

G: I felt like challenging Father too. Then I said, 'may be I will somehow discover more about God when I begin to search God by myself outside of our meeting here'.

S: For me, God has become real since I could relate to him in all situations. In the past, I accepted those things that my mum told me about God but they honestly did not make meanings to me. I felt it was something like Harry potter's stories about witches and wizards. Though I am not happy we are ending this gathering, I am happy that I will continue doing my exercises and I will keep on searching for and listening to God everywhere.

C: Everywhere?

K: Don't you know?

C: Like where?

K: We could meet God in everything and in everywhere and in every person; Like in those having difficult times as we are having today. We will support them. Like in our community, we could be source of peace and love.

C: That's cool.

FR: I thank you all for this wonderful meeting. Our experiences of God in life will continue. The God, which those experiences present to us will keep on unfolding to us as we go through life. We have God in us, around us, outside of us, above us, with us, for us and under us. We shall celebrate the Eucharistic meal wherein we eat and drink of Jesus Christ – the God-man that dwells among us.

8:4. CELEBRATING THE EUCHARISTIC MEAL: This is the meal wherein we partake of the body and blood of Jesus Christ to support us in our pilgrim journey on earth. It enables us to feel, think, work and relate to the Creator and to the creatures in the Spirit of Christ Jesus.

Below is the account of how we celebrated the Eucharistic Meal. It was a special event that brought to an end our common venture. Here in a sacramental way we come to embrace the fact that our God-Image ought to keep on unfolding if it would remain meaningful and healthy to us, as well as, remain beneficial to other creatures.

FUNCTIONS:

FR: PRESIDER OVER THE CELEBRATION.

M: READER/LECTOR

S: READER/LECTOR

C: ALTAR SERVER/ACOLYTE

K: ALTAR SERVER/ACOLYTE

G: ALTAR SERVER/ACOLYTE

8:5. THE STRUCTURE OF THE CELEBRATION: We followed the Latin Rite of the order of the Mass according to the Roman Catholic Tradition. The structure of the Mass and the significance of its parts are presented in Appendix 1 as found in the last section of this work. Below are the elements and actions peculiar to this project and in the part of the Mass in which they took place.

1. SACRED SPACE AND ACTIONS: All of us stood around the altar of sacrifice of the Mass in a semi-circle form. We all had the options of kneeling, standing or sitting at the different point in the celebration as it is proper in the celebration of the Roman Catholic Mass. I noticed that all the members of this group observed the normal recommendations of the rubrics in the Catholic Church regarding when in normal circumstance one ought to kneel, stand or sit during the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

2. ONE OF THE OPENING RITES [INTRODUCTION]: Dear friends we have come to celebrate the high point of God's redemptive acts for Creatures and the high point of adoration and praise to God. This is the Mass, the Eucharistic Sacrifice. We have come to partake of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the God-Man that takes us into God and enlarges our God-Image. We are here to apply, to re-enact and to re-present the salvation and redemption of all Creatures through Christ Jesus. We are here to apply the Mass to our particular need – that is, gaining awareness from the Mystery whose image for us is ever in the process of constant unfolding. I welcome all of you to this celebration.

3. THE LITURGY OF THE WORD: In the Roman Catholic Tradition [See Appendix 1], the liturgy of the Word comprises of First reading and responsorial psalm, Second reading (if on Sundays, Solemnities, special feasts and celebrations) and verse/alleluia, Gospel, Homily, Credo (for some Sundays and solemnities) and General Intercessions.

The adaptations we made in this section of the Mass and in the context of this project are as follow. First, we had three readings and the three readings are taken from one chapter and from one book of the Bible – the Gospel according to Saint John. In place of homily we explored the actions that took place in the Gospel according to Saint John Chapter six; while in place of General Intercession we observed some moments of silence.

3a. THE THREE READINGS:

FIRST READING: JOHN 6:1-24 – Done by Mary.

SECOND READING: JOHN 6:25-51 – Done by Sean.

THIRD READING: JOHN 6:52-71 – Done by Fr Ken.

3b.THE GOD-IMAGE IN THE READINGS AND PEOPLE'S ACTIONS: All the members of this group participated actively in exploring the God-Image they encountered in the three readings above.

FR: In these readings, I see God as GOD-MAN. God is the mystery and in Jesus Christ we meet Him as loving, caring, and humane. In Jesus Christ we see the God that is also firm about his position on issues about who he is and what he does [6:1-71].

G: God of Compassion and care. God works together with Creatures [6:5-7].

M: The God that has power over nature but does not frighten his Creatures [6:16-21].

K: God that performs miracles but the same God is not wasteful [6:10-12].

C: Bread of life and eternal life [6:35-39].

S: The teacher of all, the truth and benefactor of the hungry [6:25-34].

G: It is not easy to describe God in one particular way. Some people in those readings called him the prophet [6:14].

FR: I saw that verse too. They called him the prophet instead of calling Him a prophet. He is the prophet expected to come into the world [6:14].

K: God is awesome and mighty. We cannot know everything about God [6:61-63].

C: But at least we know something about God.

FR: Castilo, like what?

C: That God is very important for us and people seek God [[6:24-27].

FR: What other things in the readings touch us and are meaningful to us?

M: [*Raising her hand*]. Yes. Some people murmured at Jesus when he said that he is the bread of life from heaven. They had only known him as the son of Joseph and Mary [6:41-42]. I also complain and ask questions when I don't really understand God.

G: Hmm!

FR: Gina, it seems you have something to say?

G: Em...m. She is Mary [*Pointing at Mary a member of this group*] and she talked about Jesus being the Son of Mary. Meanwhile those people ran away because they did not really understand Jesus Christ well.

M: But I love that name- Mary. My name makes me come closer to my God, to Jesus Christ so that I do not run away from God as those people did.

K: I feel they ran away not only because they knew Jesus Christ as the Son of Mary and Joseph. But they could not stomach Jesus' claims that He would give them his body to eat and his blood to drink [6:52-60].

FR: What I am hearing from the statements from Gina, Kim and Mary are the following: First, in our relationship to God perseverance is very necessary. Second, we have also to confront God, stand before God, and ask God questions when we are confused instead of running away from God. Third, there are things about God that we cannot fully understand. We have to take matters one day at a time in our relationship to God. Fourth, every person, situation/event, time and every place count in our exploration of God.

We shall continue the celebration of the Mass. We are entering the phase known as the Liturgy of the Eucharist. After we receive the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ Jesus, we shall sit in silent awareness of the One we have received.

4. ONE OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST [THE ADMINISTRATION AND THE RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION].

All the members of this project group received the Jesus in the Eucharist under both species –Body and Blood [Included here is Soul and Divinity]. Then we all sat

down, took up the prayer posture convenient to us. We carried out the awareness exercise as we did in previous sessions, specifically the breathing and bodily awareness. The only little difference is that this time I did not talk much because we all knew what we were doing. We focused on the Christ we received in Communion.

EXERCISE FOCUSING ON THE CHRIST RECEIVED.

Relax... Breathe in and out gently and slowly... Begin to enjoy the Jesus Christ that you have received -body, blood, soul and Divinity... Start to communicate with Jesus in the interiority of your being... Do this freely and lovingly.... Go on and on and on as you wish... [*5 minutes silence and the exercise ends*].

5. CONCLUDING RITES: This includes Announcements, Final Blessing and Dismissal. We carried out the following concluding Rites bearing in mind that this whole session –the 8th session of all the sessions we had – is itself a closure too.

a. Announcements:

I thank all of you for volunteering to be part of this project. Thank you for your wonderful contributions. I also thank your parents and friends in absentia for whatever supports they gave you.

I wish to remind you that our project is an on-going one. Our exploration of God and into God has only begun. I encourage you to continue this project in your private lives. Feel free to call me via my phone if you need to share anything with me as it concerns our explorations in God. You already have my phone number so call me when you need me. Let me give you my phone again. It is *****.

Remember also that the exercises that form the part of our prayers should not be end in themselves. Meanwhile, let me clarify something about some difference between

meditation and contemplation as we use it in this project. I know that in some Eastern Religions, those words could mean the same thing. This is the sense in which we use those words here: In meditation as a form of prayer, we are actively involved in praying but in contemplation, we are passively involved in prayer. Contemplation is fundamentally a gift from God; it comes about to us gratuitously. We do not deserve it. It is meant also to support us as we journey to becoming God-like in all our active life engagements within the Society.

Thank you again my dear friends. Please we shall proceed to the Hall for some light refreshments [*Now their countenance changed again. They looked unhappy and I could read some feelings of lose on their faces*].

b. FINAL BLESSING AND DISMISSAL:

FR: May the Almighty God bless you Father, Son and the Holy Spirit: [*They ought to have responded, 'AMEN', but they kept quiet*]. Then I repeated that blessing]

ALL: [*And they sluggishly and coldly responded*]: 'AMEN'.

FR: This Mass is ended. Let us go in peace to love, to know and to serve the Lord better.

ALL: [*Still with some heavy mood*]: Thanks be to God.

8:6. AFTER MASS WE GATHERED IN THE PARISH HALL

I purchased some boxes/packets of pizza, Fruit Juice drinks, and some Fresh Fruits. I invited them to stretch out their hands over the food. They did so and we prayed over the food in the words below. All the members prayed with me looking at the prayer that I already prepared for this occasion.

a. PRAYER OVER THE MEAL AND FOR OURSELVES:

FR AND ALL: Thank you God for providing this food for us. Thank you for all these your wonderful and lovely children – the members of this project. Grant us your grace that as we partake of this food and as we partake in your generous gift of your presence to all Creatures, we may be disposed to embrace you as you unfold and manifest yourself to us in Christ Jesus our Lord: Amen.

b. DURING THE MEAL: We all ate gladly. Their mood was getting better though I have not seen the kind of joy and energy that I am used to seeing in them and among them since we began this project two months ago.

Three of their parents came in to pick them up and they met us eating and joined us. They are Gina's father, Mary's mother and Castilo's father. The Children complained to them that they would want to continue this exploration into God with me. Those three parents expressed their concern for the children and the way the children felt but advised them to keep to the instructions I have given to them. Those parents informed the children that it is possible that I could begin some other form of training with them sometime in future. It seems to me the children listened to and accepted what those three parents told them. Though the children still displayed some heavy and unhappy moods.

c. OTHER OBSERVATION: At the end of the meal, we cleaned up. Then we observed some moments of silent prayer and were ready to head home. The five children came together and embraced me. They held on to me. Then Mary started crying first. The rest joined her. This section was too difficult for me to handle. Tears started running down my cheeks. I saw the three parents come in at this point, probably to rescue the situation; they were also wiping tears from their eyes.

Then there was some silent moment again. I refused to interrupt it. Then after about a minute or so, Gina's father broke the silence.

GF: Thank you father. I have seen for myself that the kids had wonderful experiences. We pray that God will continue to bless them.

MM: Thanks Father. I will give you a call. I need to share something with you. I am not able to do it now. I am just ... I mean ... In fact, I will give you a call.

CF: I regret that I am not able to participate in everything that took place in this group. My experience today tells me that these kids have received some great gifts from father; oh from God; Well... from both of them. What can I say?

FR: I thank all of you. Please extend my deep appreciations to all the members of your families and to your friends and to all those that made it possible for me to have these nice children for the last two months. May God keep on manifesting himself to you and May God bless you now and always: Thank you.

3:3. METHODS FOR ASSESSMENT OF OUTCOMES.

I will use a **SYSTEMIC CUM INTEGRATIVE METHOD** of assessment. I adapted this method from my study of family systems therapy in marriage and family counseling and from the work of Irvin D Yalom during my group experience classes with Jean Aniebona of the Postgraduate Center for mental Health in New York. In adapting the gains in the study of Systems theory, I will direct my attention "on how interacting parts relate within a whole" because systems theory assumes that "every system seeks to preserve homeostasis – a sense of equilibrium or stable functioning" [David C Olsen, *Integrative Family Therapy*, 1993, p.16]. Some of the elements of my integrative method as adapted from the systems theory are interactional/relational element, cognitive/Belief factor, family and ecclesial element, and the structural or hierarchical element. In adapting my resources from the Group Experience class to this project, I utilized the "two symbiotic tiers" of the Here-And-Now Method we employed in our group experience. The first tier is the "experiencing one" and the second tier is the "illumination of process", where process "refers to the nature of the relationship between interacting individuals" [Irvin D Yalom, *The theory and practice of Group Psychotherapy*, p.130-131, 1995]. The observation of the members of this project-group as an element of this integrative method of assessment permeates all the other elements mentioned above. Observation as used and implied in this project does not involve calculations, measurements and laboratory test. It simply means looking at and discerning what is happening to the members of this project group [and to those they are in contact with]. How do they relate to God and to Creatures now?

The following are some of the things I will be looking for in this **Systemic cum integrative method** as seen via the lenses of its constituent elements.

- ❖ **Cognitive/Belief:** Is their God Loving and Caring, judgmental, legalistic and very demanding? Is this God exclusively identified with a particular gender, race, class and religion? Is this God involved in an on-going, developmental and progressive relationship with His subjects or not?
- ❖ **Structural or hierarchical:** According to the members of this group, is this God an awe and reverence evoking God? Is this God terror evoking, that is, is this a God whose fear paralyses and cripples its worshippers? Is this a God that maintains a very rigid boundary with its worshippers or a God that operates flexible rules and boundaries? Is there an openness and willingness on the part of all or some of the members of this project-group to allow for change in their views and beliefs of God and of the nature of their God-Image?
- ❖ **Interactional/Relational:** Is there an awakened sense of God's real and intimate presence in their lives? Are there signs of developing divine-consciousness or of Christ-Consciousness OR Not? Do they exhibit some sense of Love, joy and trust or not? Are there noticeable increases in their concern and care of other creatures or not? Do their God-Images and the relationship with their God create any sense of solitude and

anxiety, or not? Are their God-Images and their relationship with the living God dependent upon some sets of conditions/situations, or not?

- ❖ Observational and Illumined Process: What pictures or representations of God do they have? What noticeable signs of pain and confusion do they exhibit in their relationship with their God-Image, as well as, with the Living God? How do they relate to the Scripture? How do they relate to and with the Eucharistic Jesus Christ? Do their God-Images and their God give them meaning for living, or not? Does their God and the representations of their God avail them the psycho-spiritual equilibrium to handle life issues and the puzzles of life in a manner that satisfies them or give them joy and peace without obstructing other creatures well-being or fulfillment? .
- ❖ The family and the Ecclesial elements: Are their God-Images, their beliefs and their relationship with the Living God based only on and limited to those of some of the persons in their family and among their peers or not? Are these limited to the views of their particular Church and or their Parish Community, or not?

Apart from my personal observation of the members of this Project-Group in this Systemic-integrative method, their parents' observations also count.

CHAPTER FOUR.

4:0. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION: When I thought over the idea of enlarging my congregants' God-Image, that idea was very interesting, inviting and it looked very easy. My intellectual or cerebral romance with this idea was very easy. As I fantasized or fed my imagination on this project, I felt really good and comfortable. I envisaged it would be an easy project. Engaging the members of this project group for the first time brought me very close to the real situation about this project. It is not as easy as I had thought on two grounds. First dealing with living human beings in all their contingencies and free-will is not a recreation. Second, dealing with an issue as mysterious as God is an awe-evoking, important and very demanding enterprise. It dawned on me that this enterprise is a journey into the great unknown, into the great mystery; a great unknown which both the members of this project group and myself could not claim expertise about. This situation made me anxious for a while until I settled down and made up my mind to remain absolutely open to whatever I see and experience in the course of the execution of this project. This sense of openness became for me a priceless source of strength in carrying out this project. It was my source of inner peace and a tool that later on worked well for all the members of this project group as we stood face to face with this project.

When I requested the members of this group and their parents for permission that the former play the key roles of submitting themselves as the population for this project, I received an unreserved cooperation and support. Thus my boat sailed very easily until the first session of the execution of this project. I became nervous when the members of this project group were somewhat resistant to opening up for discussion. At this point, I began asking myself: 'what is happening; have I chosen a wrong project; what did I do wrong?

Amidst the challenges and doubts that besieged me at this point of my project, I gained some strength from the support of my Moderators and from my determination to carry on with this project irrespective of its outcome.

4:1. OUTCOME OF THE CLINICAL-PASTORAL SESSIONS.

The outcome of my sessions show 'how interacting parts relate within a whole' and affirm systems theory's claim that "every system seeks to preserve homeostasis – a sense of equilibrium or stable functioning" [Olsen p.16]. My Candidates' belief system regarding 'God-Image' was challenged and that challenge had some ripple effects on their entire person and on their relationships. Their first impulse was to form a wall of defense around their God-Image as they had it then. They remained close until I shared with them my own God-Image and how it has been growing. Castillo statement hit at the group's defensive attitude and other members validated his feeling and statement.

C: Yes. I was waiting for you to start.

[All burst into a kind of joyous laughter and then the response].

ALL: Me too, me too [First Session, p.100].

I expected this initial resistance and the protection of one's personal boundaries to take place and it happened within our first session. I feel it is a normal and useful occurrence.

The members' Images of God as I observed them in the earlier sessions include those of *Reciprocity* and *Security* [I behave well and God provides for my needs]. Yet they also differed from each other regarding their God-Image; Gina and Sean clearly demonstrate this difference:

G: I could relate on some level with S's description of who or what God is for him. I also receive Communion. But I am having some difficulties seeing God exactly as S sees God. I have lots of questions.

FR: How do you mean? I feel I need to understand you better.

G: Sean talked about God, about Jesus Christ and about Communion. We also talk about the Holy Spirit. Do we have three Gods or one and if three,

are all of them in the Eucharist? Is this God or Gods a HE or a SHE or a THEY? If Jesus Christ is God's Son, who is God's wife? Is that Mary? Or does God have a Son without a wife? Is God like an imaginary friend? When sometime ago I said that God is my personal and intimate friend, I am thinking of God like an imaginary friend. I am thinking like those friends we imagine we would have at school at the time we have not started going to school. Father, I don't simply get it.

The differences in their God-Images owe in part to the differences in their family, cultural, and Religious backgrounds. This agrees with Ana-Maria Rizzuto's position that complex factors are involved in the formation of one's God-Image.

Various questions came up and diverse forms of confusions were tabled [*observational and illumined process*]. Those questions and confusions centered on the *cognitive/belief* aspect of their relationship to God. For instance, Gina expressed her confusion and raised questions about the Trinity – the relationship between God the father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, about God's gender and about the presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. This cognitive/belief aspect was also the concern of all of the members even Sean. Sean's earlier claim that he had no questions and confusions about the issues that Gina and other members brought up turned out to mean that he never really felt challenged about the nature of his God-Image before. Two months after the clinical pastoral sessions, I have observed that the members of this group feel freer and are more open to asking questions and engaging their confusions about God, about their relationship to God and about their image of God. When I envisioned this project, I expected some openness and some degree of autonomy from the members of this project as they engage the issue of meaning, and specifically the God-Image, in their lives. Those expectations were realized.

They felt the need to address their questions about God and about their confusions. Such felt need opened the door for a more intimate relationship among the members of this group. It also opened a new vista of awareness and interaction/communication in their families regarding God and each individual's representations of God because the members took the questions, the confusions and the struggle they were going through to their various families.

The film show/movie and the awareness exercises added life and meaning to their hitherto dry, very hierarchical and structured God-Image. This is not to say that the hierarchical, transcendent, and 'the-other-nature' dimension of their God-Image are worthless. Rather it means that God is increasingly becoming for them a God-in-Relationship [with them and other creatures]. The personal and experiential dimensions that characterized our sessions met my expectation that my project would initiate a mystical relationship between God and the members of this project group. They still feel the need to explore God more through the lenses of their personal lives. Each of them on different occasions has informed me that they are continuing with the awareness exercise, which I introduced them to during some of our sessions. They tend to see God in all creatures and they now desire to dig into every situation of their lives for God. I observe in such attitude the image of God as 'an all present presence'. There is a heightened consciousness of God's presence in all creatures.

As of the time of my assessment of the members of this group, they seem to pay more attention to a relational God-Image – the Image of God as a being in relationship with Creatures. This is contrary to their former concerns such as the inner relationship between and within the three persons of the Blessed Trinity; how Jesus could be in the

Eucharist, God's gender and so on. After Sunday Mass on January 8, 2006, Gina, Kim and Castillo came to me with four of their friends. Gina, Kim and Castillo unbeknown to me had been sharing their experiences with their friends. An argument arose among them, so they came to me for solution. Below is the crux of my encounter with them:

G, K, &C: Fr these are our friends Christiana, Mike, Sandra and Bob. We told them that God is our friend and that we relate to God though we could not know everything about God. We told them about the 'awareness prayer that we pray through our body and the wind'. They disagreed with us. They said that if God were our friend, we should know everything about God. Father we want them to see you and to hear from you.

FR: Chris, Mike, Sandra and Bob how do you feel about what Gina and Castillo told me.

Bob: [*speaking on behalf of others*]; It is like it does not make sense. How can God be your friend? [*Christiana, Mike and Sandra supported Bob as they chorused 'Yes'.*].

FR: I am greatly impressed that all of you are exploring your God-Image. I would encourage you to keep on carrying out your search for what makes meaning in the daily relationship between you and God. Your experiences, I hope, would offer you some meaningful God-Image.

Christiana, Mike, Sandra and Bob felt disappointed. They had wanted a quick answer from me. Gina and Castillo did not feel disappointed. When I finished addressing them, Gina said, "another exercise for us?" and I replied, "that promises to be an interesting one". This experience makes me affirm that compared to Christiana, Mike, Sandra and Bob, the members of this project group as represented by Gina, Kim and Castillo have a more enlarged God-Image, "God is our friend and ... we relate to God though we could not know everything about God" [See G, K, &C above].

Moreover, the statement of G, K, &C above also validates one of the aims and objectives of this project, that is, to launch participants/the population for this project into the exploration of their own God-Image, to support them as their God-Image is enlarged and to open the door for them to enter into a mystic-relationship with the living God.

More questions, confusion and wonder accompany the exploration of our God-Image. To have found meaning and the grounds to be joyful and calm amidst those questions, confusions and wonder, as Gina, Kim and Castillo did, is for me one of the important results of this project.

Mary, Kim and Gina once shared their experiences of the 'awareness exercises' with me. In that sharing, I requested them to describe for me how they would name the God that they encountered in the 'awareness exercises' which they had been personally and individually experiencing. The following were their responses:

Mary: God is awesome. He is all over the place and I am like I am inside him. He is harmless and does not seem to support wrongdoing like doing drugs and killing people.

Kim: It is very amazing. I don't know how to describe that experience. When you experience Jesus, you cannot be heartless or wicked to people or pets or trees.

Gina: Jesus is very wonderful. Just wonderful; you know what I mean? Just wonderful!

I gathered from that brief and out of session discussion with them that the words that describe their current God-Image and the state of their relationship with God are "awesome", "amazing", indescribable and "wonderful". What is not yet clear is where those states and God-Images of 'awesomeness, amazement, indescribable and wonder' would be leading them. It would be inconsistent with the method of my project and research to project where this situation would be leading them. Some of the things, which are clear from the above, though are that their God-Image is undergoing some changes. What Mary, Kim and Gina shared with me resonates with Abraham Heschel's observation that "God is of no importance unless He is of supreme importance" [*I asked for Wonders*, p.1]. The search for the ultimate meaning in their life has become a very personal and important venture to the members of this project group.

The members of this project group seem not to be very much tied to some divisive doctrines and belief system but they still uphold a sense of moral value or judgment. Whether the name for this awesome, wonderful and amazing being is Jesus or God does not bother them as much as it had bothered them at the beginning of the clinical-pastoral session of this project. They seem to be more interested in the reality behind those names and images. The names for such awesome amazing and wonderful reality come from their experiences. The insistence of Mary, Kim and Gina on the good moral character or on the benevolent nature of God and of God-Image collaborates the position of Gina, Sean and Kim earlier in this project, that is, during the fourth session.

My experiences with the members of this group are in agreement with the position of my theological base that divine self-manifestation is an on-going process and that in order to avoid harboring constricted God-Image, we may wish to remain open to the ever-unfolding God-Image. My experiences with the members of this project group and their parents as evident in the clinical-pastoral sessions above [chapter three] show that my psychological/clinical principles are meaningful and useful to my project. There are complex psychodynamic forces – internal and external- which play some roles in the formation, deformation and re-formation, in the birth, development, death and rebirth of our God-Images.

4:2. UNEXPECTED DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EXECUTION AND THE RESULT OF THIS PROJECT

A). PROCEDURE OF EXECUTION: It became very clear during the clinical-Pastoral sessions that the procedures for the execution of this project, which I had drawn, could not be followed to the letter. The here-and-now experience of the sessions ruled out some of the items on my list. During the sixth session for instance, when the theme would have been ENCOUNTER WITH SOME SIGNIFICANT OTHERS, I had planned to explore with the members of this group how the following persons experienced and imaged God, Saints Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Thomas Aquinas, and Augustine, as well as, to dig into the extracts from Henri de Lubac and Carlos Valles. However, the theme of that session changed. It became 'GOD IN MY BREATH'. I utilized the resources of Anthony de Mello in his book SADHANA [A Way To God]. The session became more personal and more experiential. In session seven instead of focusing on the theme "VISITATION OF THE SICK AND THE POOR", we focused on "SEEING GOD THROUGH OUR BODIES". And in session eight instead of concentrating on the theme "JESUS CHRIST IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY", we conducted that session on the theme "GOD AS FOOD AND GOD FOR FOOD" – a theme that may seem heretical to the person imprisoned behind the walls of corrosive dogmatism and paralyzing indoctrination. Actually a very close look at these unexpected changes indicate that they are material changes that never overturned the purpose and the execution of this project

B). IMPACT ON FAMILY MEMBERS AND FAMILY LIFE: The results of sessions three [MEETING WITH PARENTS OF THE PROJECT GROUP MEMBERS] and four [HOW DOES YOUR BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST AFFECT YOUR LIFE ON DAILY BASIS?] were very therapeutic for both the parents and for their children. Some weaknesses, hurts, and unexpressed suspicions were expressed and addressed. I see this as a healing process. It opened the door for better communication and understanding among the members of the families under discussion. My project had expected such gracious and vivifying influence but the magnitude of that influence is astounding.

The members of the families of the participants were challenged and invited to explore their relationship to God and to explore their God-Images. They got involved in the renewed search for meaning and identity in their lives. What just began with one member of each of the five families has continued with more members of those families.

C). WHAT ABOUT OUR RITES AND RITUALS? : The Roman Catholic Church is very rich in rites, rituals, signs and symbols. We saw some of them when I explored the RCIA program. My surprise is why the members of this group and their parents could not relate personally and spontaneously to those rites, rituals, signs and symbols. Such massive absence of some personal and spontaneous reflection on their God-Image through the lenses those Rites and Rituals was very stultifying to me. I never expected such high degree of separation. Are all our rites and rituals meaningless? What is happening? Is the level of the superficial and ephemeral participation of most members of the Catholic Church in the rites and rituals of their Faith to such an extent that the rites and rituals are ceasing from being the vehicle to the divine for such members?

D). THE "I" IN THE PICTURE: My experiences in working through this project resonate with Father Carlos Valles experiences of going to India for missionary work. His attitude when going to India was not to 'receive' but to 'give', was not to 'learn' but to 'teach' the Indians about God. It however, turned out that he was the one that received and was taught the most. [C. G. Valles, pp.1-2]. When I planned and began this project, I was essentially going to support the members of this project group to expose themselves to the ever-unfolding God-Image. I was going to help them have their God-Imaged enlarged. I was there to facilitate their movement from the enlarged God-Image to the mystic experience of the living God behind the enlarged God-Image. They were to be the receivers not givers. However, the situation has changed. I am in a very special way benefiting from this project. God, my relationships to God, and my relationship to other creatures are more meaningful and fulfilling to me. At the same time, I must admit that I am overcome by a sense of WONDER in my experiences the ground of all that exist, which is GOD. Concerning God, I had thought that I know much but now I know that I do not know. I am only beginning my journey of experiencing God.

The way that I feel personally about this project notwithstanding, the members of this project group and their parents saw me as a role model. They come to me to share some other intimate matters in their life. Their experiences with me during the eight weeks of the execution of this project made them more open in relating to me. As a Pastor and a 'Pastoral Counselor', it would be helpful for me to note that such further relationship as the one that is developing between the members of this project group, their family members and I, could be helpful or destructive. It depends on how I handle

the situation. When I merge with them, I would loose the necessary pastoral boundary between them and me. Should I stay aloof and not appreciate the new form of relationship that they are offering me? I do not feel my being aloof is helpful for us. Since they found 'a good enough pastor' and 'a holding environment' with me, I believe I would do some damage to them in their search for meaning in life if I become aloof.

As the result of the impacts of this project on Mary [one of the members of the project group], her parents requested that I help them prepare a family-based program, which would be an adaptation of my project to the family setting. Though I am pleased to have such remarks made of my project within such a short space of time, I am also feeling some sense of inadequacy and fear on my part. Am I able really to provide what they are asking of me? How shall I go about this new challenge of developing a family-based project that has the same aim and goal as this particular project? It is challenging.

E). THE SEARCH FOR MEANING IS MORE THAN PAPER WORK: In session five of the execution of this project, I had given the members of this project group an extract about the life of Jesus Christ that I culled from the work on Bible Times. That extract has ninety-two items that are subdivided into eight sections. All the ninety-two items are thematic presentation of the person of Jesus Christ from his birth to his Resurrection and Ascension as recorded in the Holy Scripture. The eight sub-divisions of that extract are as follow, *Jesus' Birth and Youth, Jesus' Baptism and Early Ministry, and Ministry in Galilee; Withdrawal from Galilee, Ministry in Judea, Ministry in Perea, Final week in Jerusalem and Resurrection and Ascension.* [Bible Map – Then and Now.

Wisconsin: Rose Publishing, Inc., 2003, p.10; See Appendix III]. I requested all the members to highlight any or all the aspects of the life of Jesus that they found appealing.

My intention was to read their inner state, their Jesus-Image and how they found meaning and value in the person of Jesus Christ. All the members came back with that extract. They expressed that they had difficulty choosing some aspects of the life of Jesus Christ and leaving out others. Their resistance to choosing any aspect of the life of Jesus Christ in exclusion of other aspects is meaningful to me and to this project on at least four levels. First, there are more existential dimensions in their search for meaning and for "the union of love" than paper work could provide. Second, the person of God is more important to them than the individual acts of God via which we often glean our God-Image. Third, the search for meaningful and fulfilling God-Image is not dependent on one's level of academic growth, gender, and the circumstances of life. It is an on-going life process as validated by the fact that their parents are also still in quest for the meaningful God-Image in their lives. Fourth, they may have been concerned that there was a right and wrong answer.

CHAPTER FIVE.

5:0. INTRODUCTION: In this chapter, I will show the implications of the results of my project, the contributions of my project to its theological and psychological bases, the contribution of my project to ministry in a wider context and the implications of these to future ministry.

5:1. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE ANTICIPATED AND THE UNANTICIPATED RESULTS.

The implications of the anticipated and the unanticipated results are complex, many and far-reaching. The search for meaning and for the ultimate meaning of life/in life is an essential human need. Even when attempts are made through omission or commission to avoid that very important search, the need and the hunger to make such search for meaning keeps on welling up from within every human being in various forms. The search for the God-Image that makes meaning in our life is an example of the expression of humankind's hunger for the ultimate meaning in life and of life. I wish to remark that this search when not properly attended to could also emerge in various forms as atheism, agnosticism, secularism, skepticism and so on. Thus, the 'many issues we encounter with some adolescents center on the issues of meaning and value whether seen via the lens of Religion or that of Psychology [Arthur T. Jersild, p.386]. This is the case with the members of my project group; they are realizing that at the heart of the various quests they have in life is the search for meaning. That is where and why they need attention and support.

Indoctrination, dogmatism, authoritarianism and imposition are too weak to make meaning to people, especially adolescents, searching for meaning in life and for ultimate

meaning of life. During the adolescence stage of development (the stage of life in which all the five members of this project group are in), 'there is a sense of awakening when borrowed faith or religion or meaning either becomes personalized' and I add, or is abandoned [Jersild, p.374]. Geoffrey L. Ream et al, echoing G. Stanley Hall [1904] opined, " didactic and authoritarian religious training process is unhelpful and counterproductive' [Tim Urdan and Frank Pajares, P.264]. This is true of the members of this project. That the various rites, rituals and symbols of the Catholic Church did not make lasting meaning to them in their search for meaning is not to say that those rites, rituals and symbols are useless. Rather it demonstrates that the manner of supporting candidates in their search for meaning via the various sacraments of the Church needs to be reassessed in the light of the successful outcome of this project. In this context, what Viktor E. Frankl said of hope, faith and love is truer for GOD and for God-Image:

Obviously, there are certain activities that simply cannot be commanded, demanded, or ordered, and as it happens, the triad "faith, hope, and love" belongs to this class of activities that elude an approach with, so to speak, "command characteristics". Faith, hope, and love cannot be established by command simply because they cannot be established at will. I cannot "will" to believe, I cannot "will" to hope, I cannot "will" to love – and least of all can I "will" to will [Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning, p.17].

Thus in the Church, more effort could be put in the area of supporting and helping the members of the congregation discover the meaning of their lives and the ultimate meaning in their lives. For that to succeed, it has to be done in a pastoral spirit after the example of Christ the God shepherd. It has to be done without imposing, commanding and directing them along their way in the search for meaning. In the Gospel of John, we read about the experience of two of the followers of John the Baptist. Those two persons were searching for meaning and when they saw Jesus Christ, Jesus did not teach them

analytically, intellectually or in abstract terms. He gave them an invitation, "come and see". They went and saw where Jesus lived and stayed with him that day. They in a sense kept staying with him after that experience because they became some of Christ's first disciples [John 1:39]. In this project, God is becoming more meaningful and becoming the ground of meaning to the members of the project group via experience. This is an ongoing experiential process in their lives as indicated by the fact that three of the members of this group are introducing their friends to a God that is friendly. The non-authoritarian, and non-triumph oriented manner through which they are relating to their friends in their common search for meaning is worth recognizing.

The family occupies a very central place in the life of the Church and of Society. It is little wonder therefore that in the Catholic Church, the family is referred to and seen as '*micro ecclesia catholica*' [a micro Catholic Church]. The Church requests that more meaningful attention to be given to the welfare of the family. The importance of the family and of the early childhood experiences in the understanding of and in the relationship with God is thrown into a broad relief by this project. The family, I believe, ought to be given utmost care and respect.

This project has also demonstrated the need for us to respect and uphold the sanctity and dignity of marriage. The parent factor is one among the other complex factors that influenced the God-Images of the members of my project group. The holy Matrimony between a man and a woman serves as a good venue where the birth, death, and rebirth of God-Image take place.

Humankind is homesick. It is homesick about its origin and its source. In this homesick and in the search for meaning, mystical experiences are inevitable. One of the

implications of the results of this project is that Theology, Psychology and all other human endeavors cannot successfully avoid mystical enterprise. This is to say that all human beings are called to be mystics. It is only in doing so, will our changing images of reality and the unchangeable ground of existence be meaningful to us.

The Ministers or the Clergy would do themselves some good when they accept that in this search for meaning they are not 'the all-knowing and all-important Lord' of the Congregants. The Ministers or the members of the clergy are also in search of meaning. My experiences in this project validate this observation because this project exposed my personal needs and search for meaning in my life and ministry as a priest.

The Church has enormous responsibilities before her of helping the members of the Church find meaning via God representations. The Church has the responsibility also of pointing her members to a God that makes meaning. As Church leaders, we are worried that our churches are running empty of people, that parishes are becoming merged in some Dioceses, and that secular culture is ravaging the society. I observe that the Churches are losing membership because the Church is failing to help Christians discover meaning in their lives. This is not an exaggeration. We live where and when we find meaning. We die when and where such meaning lacks. The lack of meaning in life leads to meaninglessness and to death.

The temptation for the Church would be for her to try to attract more members by introducing materialistic and possessive ideologies into the ministry of the Church. Such attempts would fail because according to my experience with the members of this project group, the hunger for meaning in human souls is too deep and intense. Any mere surface-level panacea would not satisfy such deep-seated hunger.

5:2. MY CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CLINICAL-THEOLOGICAL BASES OF THIS PROJECT.

I admire the discoveries that the Psychodynamic theorists of different camps/affiliations have made in the study of the human person's conscious and unconscious life. However, I invite the psychodynamic theorists to emulate Viktor Frankl in his phenomenological study of the human person and in his psychotherapeutic approach to life issues. I invite them to explore with open minds the arena of the 'religious unconscious'. In the exploration of this religious unconscious, there is need for psychologists and psychiatrists to make room for the dimension of reality that lies beyond the phenomenon. I invite psychologists and psychiatrists to genuinely make room for religion, spirituality and theology to explore that which lies beyond the phenomenon. I also encourage them to be open to collaborate with other disciplines in the interdisciplinary quest to make life meaningful and worth living for creatures.

The human person is not a bundle of instincts and drives – mere biological and psychical reality. The human person is not also a mere object – the dumping ground of 'the-other' whether 'the-other' are human beings, the environment, systems or God. The human person is a free and responsible being. The human person is a being capable of searching for personal meaning and such personal meaning in turn makes for fulfillment and for equilibrium in the person's life. Our willingness to expose ourselves to the ever-unfolding God-Image in life is an important aspect of the search for the meaning of life. Each individual person's life is the context for the search for this meaning. The areas in which the person finds meaning in life could vary. Let me cite the avenue where

according to Viktor Frankl, the human person could discover meaning or where the search for meaning is fulfilled.

...There must be a meaning to life under any conditions, even the worst conceivable ones. ... if we investigate how the man in the street goes about finding meaning it turns out that there are three avenues that lead up to meaning fulfillment: First, doing a deed or creating a work; second, experiencing something or encountering someone; in other words, meaning can be found not only in work but also in love. Most important, however, ... facing a fate we cannot change, [where] we are called upon to make the best of it by rising above ourselves and growing beyond ourselves, in a word, by changing ourselves [Viktor Frankl, Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning, p.141-142].

The members of the project group indicated that they encountered 'the-other' [God] via the medium of God-Image. It is in this 'the-other' and in creatures that they find meaning and fulfillment. The danger however is that this medium of contact with 'the-other' could obstruct the encounter between the person and 'the-other'. This happens when there is lack of openness to the search for meaning, as is the case in the totalitarianism and reductionism of Freudian presentation of God-Image. It also happens when there are manipulations and dishonesty in the exploration of God-Image.

The following is my contribution to the theological base of this project. The theology of Revelation and of Incarnation as taught in the Roman Catholic Church could be more helpful to humankind when its meaning and messages are allowed to unconditionally flow into the Religious and spiritual formation of the members of this Church. This means, as I have shown in Chapter two article 2:2:2 of this work, that the mystical dimension of the religious and spiritual formation of the members of the Church is vital. Said in another way, to anchor the spiritual and religious life of the members of our Church on mystical training is the best way to translate the theology of Revelation and Incarnation into the daily life experiences of creatures.

5:3. MY CONTRIBUTION TO MINISTRY IN WIDER CONTEXT.

The person that has an enlarged God-Image is one that is able to answer life's two basic questions – what is the meaning of life and what is the ultimate meaning of life? The answers to those questions are to be seen written all over the various experiences in one's life. Those answers are one's response to real life demands. The meaning that one's God-Image casts on one's life and the God behind such God-Image deserves more personal and existential attention in ministry than they are currently given. This project has offered some examples of how to render such more personal and existential attention to the members of our Church.

Leaders in the Church would assist the members of our Church find meaning in life through being open to the ever-unfolding God-Image. The said leaders would be helpful to them if they acknowledge that there are actions and activities that cannot be commanded or enforced. Finding meaning in life, Loving and laughing are among such actions. In the same manner, finding God, loving God and Creatures cannot be enforced. We encourage people to laugh by making some funny jokes. Ministers of the Church would do well to encourage the members of their Church to find meaning in life by freely and playfully exploring their God-Images. Let me say this in another way: Dogmas and doctrines of the Church may be of immense value but God is not dogmas and doctrines or the combination of dogmas and doctrines. God is life and we discover God in the meaningful moments, persons and situations of our life.

Prayer is not all about rigid formulae and observances but it is the 'culmination of the I-Thou relationship' of Martin Buber. Yet Prayer transcends Buber's 'I-Thou relationship'. Prayer is dancing, eating and playing with God. It is laughing, suffering and

crying with God. Prayer is all about God being one of us in the sense of Emmanuel – God with us. It is the sacred embrace between Jesus Christ and us.

The awareness exercises that I carried out in this project and the response of the members of this project to it indicate that it is more beneficial to play and dance and cry with God than to freeze under the cold hands of dogmas. It is better to feel God than to become tensed up under the weight of dry doctrines. Does this project propose arbitrary and whimsical ways of life in the Church? No. In my project, we exposed ourselves to the BEYOND, which no eye could see. We talked, ate, laughed and cried- Leader and the Followers, Parents and Children. We came out of the practical sessions of this project more human. We came out of it closer to LOVE [God] and the Source of Love. We came out of it more ordered and more disposed to live by the Gospel values. There is nothing arbitrary or whimsical about the outcome of this project.

Finally, psychology and theology are not enemies but are collaborators in the search for meaning. In this project, I invited theology and Psychology to the altar of Jesus Christ and I wed them in an inseparable matrimony that would benefit all creatures.

5:4. THE IMPLICATIONS OF MY PROJECT FOR FUTURE MINISTRY.

Practical life experiences or day-to-day experiences are the best ground for religious formation of the members of our church. Taking our human and personal experiences more seriously would enable us to discover God in his temple when the veil of God-Image is raised. The future ministry would be fundamentally mystic in nature - It would involve a deep, personal, and direct encounter/relationship with God.

The rites, the signs and symbols, and the sacraments of the Church could only be meaningful to the members of our Church if we allow such treasures of grace to take flesh as Christ did in Incarnation. When we allow the members of the Church to responsibly personalize those treasures of grace in meaning-full ways in their lives, the Church would become a home to them.

This project invites the ministers of the Church to study further the many ways that the exploration of the ever-unfolding God-Image could be helpful to the members of the Church.

CONCLUSION

We cannot purchase and possess God the way we do objects of value in our consumerist, materialistic and secular society. We could only experience God. Our experiences of God also cannot be possessed as we do material things. When we try to possess our experiences of God, such experiences would go 'sour or stale'. As we pass through the slavery of meaninglessness in life to the freedom of meaningfulness via openness to the ever-unfolding God-Image, we are invited to gather only the manna

[bread] and the quail needed for a day's meal. The God beyond our experiences would provide the manna and quail of meaning through our daily life experiences [Ex 16:4-5].

Who has ever seen God? I have not met or known any human being that has seen the God behind and beyond the God-Image. It is important therefore that we expose ourselves to the ever-unfolding God-Image. It is a worthwhile exercise. We find God when we do so in the spirit of autonomy, community, and responsibility. We find meaning, fulfillment, and equilibrium in this exercise. The mystic path, which in itself is not anti-community, is a viable option for realizing the goals of this exercise.

I have introduced the members of my project group to the journey of gaining meaning, fulfillment and equilibrium. I hope and pray that what I have assisted them to start would continue and would remain worthwhile in their lives.

Let us start taking mystic way of life seriously in the spiritual and religious formation of the members of our Church. May theology, Psychology and all of human endeavor collaborate in assisting the human person be born, live and die meaningfully.

Finally, I wish to share a future project with you. I wish to share a dream with you. Mary's parents invited me to develop a family-based project, which has the same aim and goal as this project. Could you join me take up this challenge and invitation? It is a project that centers on supporting families in the search for meaning, for fulfillment and for God via the lenses of the exploration of the ever-unfolding God-Image. The family is the context of that new project. Welcome on board!

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APPENDIX.

1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE MASS AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ITS PARTS
CULLED FROM THE BOOK **THE EUCHARIST**
WRITTEN BY EMMINGHAUS.
2. EXTRACTS FROM THE **HOLY BIBLE**, REVISED STANDARD VERSION
ROMAN CATHOLIC EDITION.
3. EXTRACTS FROM THE DOCUMENT, **THEN AND NOW BIBLE MAPS**.

Extracted from
by Emminghaus.

"THE EUCHARIST"

Appendix I

Structure of the Mass and the Significance of Its Parts

Elements of the Mass		Meaning of the Action
<i>The Lord is present among those gathered in his name (Matt 18:20)</i>		
Opening Rites	Entrance and Entrance Song	Creation of community and preparation for celebration
	Kissing the altar	In kissing the altar, the priest kisses Christ as the true Lord and priest of this assembly, and with the greeting, strengthens the spirit of love and peace within the community.
	Sign of the cross, liturgical greeting, introduction	
	Penitential action, Kyrie	The community acknow- ledges that it is a com- munity of sinners, and asks God for pardon; it also knows itself to be a community of the redeemed, and praises the triune God.
	(Gloria)	
Collect of the day		The community reflects on the saving mystery of the day or the feast

The Lord is present to his Church in the word

Liturgy of the Word	First reading and responsorial psalm	The Lord comes and is present in the word; the community receives him willingly and in faith and reflects on what has been proclaimed.
	(Second reading and) verse/alleluia	
	Gospel	
	Homily	The preacher actuates the word that has been proclaimed for the concrete here and now.
	(Credo)	The community responds (in its confession of faith and) in priestly prayer for the well-being of the world.
	General Intercessions	

The Lord is sacramentally present to his Church in bread and wine

Eucharist (sacrificial real memorial)	Preparation of the gifts	
	Procession with the gifts	The gifts presented symbolize the willing surrender of the community, for the gifts are gifts of God and also the fruits of human labor.
	Presentation of the gifts	
	Private prayer of the priest/ washing of hands	Self-surrender can only occur in a spirit of humility and purity, in order that the gifts may become the body and blood of Christ.

*Eucharistic Prayer*Dialogue, with preface
and *Sanctus*

God is to be praised in the divine Son as creator of the world and as Lord of salvation history.

Consecration epiclesis
Institution narrative

In the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ's surrendered body and blood poured out are present as sacrifice in the bread and wine;

Anamnesis

Christ incorporates the sacrificial surrender of the Church in his unique sacrifice and wills to give himself to the Church, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the sacred meal.

Communion epiclesis

Intercessions

The Church prays, in this atoning sacrifice, for the salvation of all humankind and acknowledges its communion with the dead and those in heaven, culminating its thanksgiving in praise of the triune God.

Doxology

Communion

Our Father

In its table prayer, the community prays for the eucharistic bread and for freedom from sin, renewing in itself the spirit of love and peace,

Prayer for peace

Breaking of the bread
 breaking the one bread
 (1 Cor 10:17) as a
 participation in the
 body of Christ;
 it is fed by Christ's
 flesh and blood
 and prays to receive the
 fruits of this Holy Com-
 munion in daily life and
 for eternity.

Administration of
 Communion
 Concluding prayer

Concluding	Announcements	Concrete expression of community life.
Rites	Final blessing	The seal of fruitful par- ticipation in this celebration and sending of the com- munity anew to its service to the world in daily life.
	Dismissal	

sus therefore said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." "The official said to him, 'Sir, come down before my child dies.'" "Jesus said to him, 'Go; your son will live.'" The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went his way. "As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was living. "So he asked them the hour when he began to mend, and they said to him, 'Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.'" "The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, 'Your son will live'; and he himself believed, and all his household. "This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Jü-dé'a to Galilee.

5 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Hebrew called Bêth-zâ'thâ,¹ which has five porticoes. "In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed." "One man was there, who had been ill for thirty-eight years. "When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, 'Do you want to be healed?'" "The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me.'" "Jesus said to him, 'Rise, take up your pallet, and walk.'" "And at once the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked.

Now that day was the sabbath. "So the Jews said to the man who was cured, 'It is the sabbath, it is not lawful for you to carry your pallet.'" "But he answered them, 'The man who healed me said to me, 'Take up your pallet, and walk.'" "They asked him, 'Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your pallet, and walk?'" "Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. "Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, 'See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you.'" "The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. "And this was why the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did this on the sabbath. "But Jesus answered them, 'My

Father is working still, and I am working." "This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God.

19 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise. "For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel. "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

25 "Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. "For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.

30 "I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. "If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true; there is another who bears witness to me, and

¹Other ancient authorities read Bethesda, others Bethsaida.

²Other ancient authorities insert, wholly or in part, waiting for the moving of the water; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and troubled the water; whoever stepped in first after the troubling of the water was healed of whatever disease he had.

4.33; Acts 11.14. 4.50; Jn 2.11.
5.2; Neh 3.1; 12.39. 5.6; Mk 2.11; Mt 9.6; Lk 5.24.
5.10; Neh 13.19; Jer 17.21; Jn 7.23; 9.16; Mk 2.24.
5.14; Mk 2.5. 5.17; Gen 2.3. 5.18; Jn 7.1; 10.33.
5.19; Jn 5.30; 8.28; 14.10. 5.30; Jn 14.12.
5.21; Rom 4.17; 8.11; Jn 11.25. 5.23; Lk 10.16; 1 Jn 2.23.
5.24; Jn 3.16. 5.25; Jn 4.21; 16.2, 32.
5.29; Dan 12.2; Acts 24.15; Jn 11.24; Mt 25.46; 1 Cor 15.52.
5.30; Jn 5.19; 8.16; 6.38. 5.31-37; Jn 8.14-18.

I know that the testimony which he bears to me is true. "You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. "Not that the testimony which I receive is from man; but I say this that you may be saved. "He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. "But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me. "And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen; and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe him whom he has sent. "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. "I do not receive glory from men. "But I know that you have not the love of God within you. "I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. "How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? "Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; it is Moses who accuses you, on whom you set your hope. "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. "But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

6 After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tî-bê'ri-as. "And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased. "Jesus went up into the hills, and there sat down with his disciples. "Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. "Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, 'How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?'" "This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. "Philip answered him, 'Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.'" "One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him,

JOHN 6
"There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?" "Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.'" Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. "Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. "And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, 'Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost.'" "So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. "When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!'"

15 Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the hills by himself.

16 When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Ca-pêr-na-um. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. "The sea rose because a strong wind was blowing. "When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat. They were frightened, but he said to them, 'It is I; do not be afraid.'" "Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.

22 On the next day the people who remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. "However, boats from Tî-bê'ri-as came near the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. "So when the people saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Ca-pêr-na-um, seeking Jesus.

¹The denarius was a day's wage for a laborer.

²Greek, twenty-five or thirty stadia.

5.33; Jn 1.7, 18. 5.34; 1 Jn 5.8.

5.35; Jn 10.25; 14.11; 15.24; Mt 11.4.

5.39; Lk 24.27; Acts 13.27. 5.43; Mt 24.5.

5.45; Jn 9.28; Rom 2.17. 5.47; Lk 16.28, 31.

6.1-13; Mt 14.13-21; Mk 6.32-44; Lk 9.10-17.

6.5; Jn 1.43; 12.21. 6.5; Jn 1.40; 12.22. 6.9; Jn 21.9-13.

6.14; Mt 21.11. 6.18; Jn 6.3; 18.36.

6.16-21; Mt 14.22-27; Mk 6.45-51.

1st Reading: Jn 6:1-24

25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"
 "Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of man will give to you; for on him has God the Father set his seal." "Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" "Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." "So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform?" "Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" "Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven." "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world." "They said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always."

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst." "But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe." "All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out." "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day." "For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

41 The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." "They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'" "Jesus answered them, "Do not murmur among yourselves. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught

by God.' Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. "Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. "I am the bread of life. "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. "This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

52 The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" "So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. "For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. "This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever." "This he said in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum."

60 Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" "But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? "Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?" "It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. "But there are some of you that do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who those were that did not believe, and who it

427: Is 55:2.
 429: 1 Thess 1:3; 1 Jn 3:23. 430: Mt 12:38; Mk 8:11.
 431: Ex 16:4, 15; Num 11:8; Neh 9:15; Ps 78:24; 106:40.
 434: Jn 4:15; Mt 6:11. 435: Jn 6:48-50; 4:14.
 437: Jn 17:2. 438: Jn 4:34; 5:30. 439: Jn 17:12; 18:1.
 440: Jn 5:29; 11:24; 6:54. 442: Lk 4:22; Jn 7:27.
 444: Jer 31:3; Hos 11:4; Jn 12:32; 6:85.
 445: 1 Thess 4:8; 1 Jn 2:27; Is 54:13. 446: Jn 1:18.
 452: Jn 3:4; 4:9. 456: Jn 15:4; 1 Jn 3:24; 4:15.
 458: Jn 6:41, 51. 459: Jn 6:25. 461: Mt 11:6.
 462: Jn 3:13; 17:5.
 463: 2 Cor 3:6; Jn 6:68. 464: Jn 2:25.

was that should betray him. "And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."

66 After this many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him. "Jesus said to the twelve, "Will you also go away?" "Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God." "Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" "He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was to betray him."

7 After this Jesus went about in Galilee; he would not go about in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him. "Now the Jews' feast of Tabernacles was at hand. "So his brethren said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing. "For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." "For even his brethren did not believe in him. "Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil. "Go to the feast yourselves; I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." "So saying, he remained in Galilee."

10 But after his brethren had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but in private. "The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "Where is he?" "And there was much muttering about him among the people. While some said, "He is a good man," others said, "No, he is leading the people astray." "Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him."

14 About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. "The Jews marveled at it, saying, "How is it that this man has learning," when he has never studied?" "So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not mine, but his who sent me; if any man's will is to do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. "He who

speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. "Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?" "The people answered, "You have a demon! Who is seeking to kill you?" "Jesus answered them, "I did one deed, and you all marvel at it. "Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man upon the sabbath. "If on the sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because on the sabbath I made a man's whole body well? "Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment."

25 Some of the people of Jerusalem therefore said, "Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? "And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? "Yet we know where this man comes from; and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from." "So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I come from? But I have not come of my own accord; he who sent me is true, and him you do not know. "I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me." "So they sought to arrest him; but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. "Yet many of the people believed in him; they said, "When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?"

32 The Pharisees heard the crowd thus muttering about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. "Jesus then said, "I shall be with you a little longer, and then I go to him who sent me; you will seek me and you will not find me; where I am you cannot come." "The

"Or Judeans "Other ancient authorities add yet
 "Or this man knows his letters 643: Jn 6:44; 3:27.
 448-449: Mk 6:27-30. 470: Jn 15:16, 19.
 471: Jn 13:2, 27; 17:12. 721: Lev 23:34; Deut 16:18.
 722: Mk 3:21, 31; Mt 12:46. 723: Mt 26:18; Jn 2:4; 7:30.
 724: Jn 15:18-21. 725: Jn 7:40-43. 726: Jn 19:38; 20:19.
 727: Jn 1:17. 728: Jn 8:48; 10:20; Mt 11:18; Mk 3:22.
 729: Jn 5:29. 730: Lev 12:3; Gen 17:10; 21:4.
 731: Mk 3:5; Lk 13:12; 14:4.
 732: Jn 8:15; Is 11:3; Zach 7:9. 733: Jn 6:42; 7:41; 9:29.
 734: Jn 8:42. 735: Jn 8:55; 17:25; Mt 11:27.
 736: Jn 7:44; 10:39; Mk 12:12; Jn 8:20.
 737: Jn 8:30; 10:42; 11:45.
 738: Jn 8:21; 12:35; 13:33; 14:19; 16:16-19.
 739: Jas 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1; Jn 12:20; Acts 11:30.

2nd Reading: Jon 6:25-51

3rd Reading: Jon 6:52-71

Life of Jesus

APPENDIX III

Fascinating facts:

Jesus went to Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. He came within 20 miles (33 km) of Beirut, Lebanon.

He was born in the West Bank region (where Bethlehem is today).

Mary and Joseph took Baby Jesus to Egypt (probably less than 150 miles) to escape King Herod's killing of baby boys in Bethlehem.

When Jesus was 12, he walked 64 miles (103 km) from his home in Nazareth to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover (Luke 2:42). Then he walked home with his family, making a round trip of 128 miles (206 km).

Jesus' Birth and Youth

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| 1. Jesus born. Lk 2 | Bethlehem |
| 2. Jesus named, circumcised. Age 8 days. Lk 2:21 | Bethlehem |
| 3. Jesus presented in the Temple. Lk 2:22 | Jerusalem |
| 4. Wise men visit Jesus. Mt 2:1 | Bethlehem |
| 5. Joseph is warned of King Herod's plan. Takes Mary and Jesus to Egypt. Mt 2:13 | Egypt |
| 6. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus return. Jesus grows up in Nazareth. Mt 2:23 | Nazareth |
| 7. Jesus, age 12, goes to Temple for Passover. Lk 2:41 | Jerusalem |

Jesus' Baptism and Early Ministry

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| 8. Jesus baptized. Mk 1:9-11 | Jordan River |
| 9. The temptation of Jesus by Satan. Mt 4:1-11 | Wilderness |
| 10. First miracle: Wedding in Cana. Jn 2:1 | Cana |
| 11. Jesus stays in Capernaum. Jn 2:12 | Capernaum |
| 12. Passover: Cleansing the Temple. Jn 2:13 | Jerusalem |
| 13. Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night. Jn 3:1 | Jerusalem? |
| 14. Jesus and the woman at the well. Jn 4:4 | Samaria |
| 15. Jesus returns to Galilee. Jn 4:43 | Galilee |

Ministry in Galilee

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| 16. Jesus heals the nobleman's son. Jn 4:46 | Capernaum |
| 17. Jesus is rejected by the people. Lk 4:16-30 | Nazareth |
| 18. Jesus calls the fishermen. Mt 4:18 | Capernaum |
| 19. Beatitudes, preaches and heals in Galilee. Mt 4-9 | Galilee |
| 20. Jesus heals a leper. Mt 8:2 | Galilee |
| 21. Jesus heals paralytic. Mt 9:1-8 | Capernaum |
| 22. Jesus calls Matthew. Mt 9:9 | Sea of Galilee |
| 23. Parables about fasting. Mt 9:14 | Sea of Galilee |
| 24. Questions about the Sabbath. Jn 5:1 | Jerusalem |
| 25. Controversies in Galilee. Mt 12:1 | Galilee |
| 26. Jesus chooses the Twelve. Mk 3:13-21 | Capernaum |
| 27. Jesus heals the centurion's servant. Mt 8:5 | Capernaum |
| 28. Jesus raises the widow's son. Lk 7:11 | Nain |
| 29. Jesus forgives sins of woman. Lk 7:36 | Galilee |
| 30. Jesus stills the storm. Mk 4:35 | Sea of Galilee |
| 31. Jesus heals the demoniac. Mk 5:1 | Gadara |
| 32. Jesus heals Jairus's daughter. Mk 5:21 | Capernaum |
| 33. Jesus heals woman with issue of blood. Mk 5:25 | Capernaum |
| 34. Jesus heals the blind, demon-possessed. Mt 9:27 | Capernaum |
| 35. Jesus is rejected at Nazareth. Mt 13:54 | Nazareth |

Withdrawal from Galilee

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| 36. Jesus feeds 5000 people. Mt 14:13 | Bethsaida |
| 37. Jesus walks on water. Mt 14:22 | Gennesaret |
| 38. Jesus is rejected in the synagogue. Jn 6:22 | Capernaum |
| 39. Pharisees criticize disciples for eating with unclean hands. Mk 7:1 | Capernaum |
| 40. Jesus heals woman's daughter. Mt 15:21 | Tyre/Sidon |
| 41. Jesus feeds 4000 near Sea of Galilee. Mt 15:39 | Sea of Galilee |
| 42. Pharisees and Sadducees ask Jesus for a sign. Mt 15:39 | Magadan (Magdala?) |
| 43. Jesus goes to Bethsaida. Mt 16:5 | Bethsaida |
| 44. Peter's confession of Christ. Mt 16:13 | Caesarea-Philippi |
| 45. Jesus predicts His death and resurrection. Mt 16:21 | Galilee |

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| 46. The Transfiguration. Mt 17:1, Lk 9:28 | Mt. Tabor?
Mt. Harmon? |
| 47. Jesus refers to His death and resurrection. Mt 17:22 | Galilee |
| 48. Jesus pays tax. Money in fish. Mt 17:24 | Capernaum |
| 49. Jesus teaches about forgiveness. Mt 18:15 | Capernaum |
| 50. Jesus rebukes James and John. Lk 9:51 | Samaria |

Ministry in Judea

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| 51. Jesus celebrates the Feast of Tabernacles. Jn 7:11 | Jerusalem |
| 52. Jesus says He is God's son. Jn 8:31 | Jerusalem |
| 53. Jesus heals the man who was born blind. Jn 9:1 | Jerusalem |
| 54. Parable of the Good Shepherd. Jn 10:1 | Jerusalem |
| 55. Jesus sends out the Seventy. Lk 10:1 | |
| 56. Parable of the Good Samaritan. Lk 10:25 | Jerusalem |
| 57. Jesus visits Mary and Martha. Lk 10:38 | Bethany |
| 58. Lord's Prayer. Mt 6:9 | |
| 59. Jesus refers to His second coming. Parable of the fig tree. Lk 12:13 | |
| 60. Jesus heals sick woman on Sabbath. Lk 13:10 | |
| 61. Jesus at the Feast of Dedication. Jn 10:22 | Jerusalem |

Ministry in Perea

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| 62. Many believe in Jesus. Jn 10:40 | Bethany |
| 63. Jesus goes to Perea. Lk 13:22 | Perea |
| 64. Jesus teaches humility near Jerusalem. Lk 14:1 | Jerusalem |
| 65. Requirements of a disciple. Lk 14:25 | Jerusalem |
| 66. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Jn 11:1 | Bethany |
| 67. Jesus heals 10 lepers near Jerusalem. Lk 17:11 | Jerusalem |
| 68. Jesus welcomes little children. Mt 19:13 | Perea |
| 69. Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus. Mt 20:29 | Jericho |
| 70. Jesus meets Zaccheus. Lk 19:1 | Jericho |

Final Week in Jerusalem

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| 71. Jesus visits Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Jn 12:1 | Bethany |
| 72. Triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Mk 11:1 | Jerusalem |
| 73. Jesus clears Temple of money-changers. Mk 11:15 | Jerusalem |
| 74. Jesus answers scribes and lawyers. Mk 11-12 | Jerusalem |
| 75. Jesus anointed by Mary. Mk 14:3 | Bethany |
| 76. Jesus prepares for the Passover. Mt 26:17 | Jerusalem |
| 77. The Last Supper. Mt 26:31 | Jerusalem |
| 78. Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jn 17:1 | Gethsemane |
| 79. Betrayal, arrest, and trial of Jesus. Jn 26:47 | Jerusalem |
| 80. Pilate and Herod question Jesus. Mt 27, Lk 23 | Jerusalem |
| 81. Jesus crucified. Mt 27:27-56 | Golgotha |
| 82. Jesus buried in Joseph's tomb. Mt 27:57 | Tomb in Garden |

Resurrection and Ascension

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| 83. Resurrection. Empty tomb. Mt 28:1 | Tomb in Garden |
| 84. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene. Jn 20:11 | Tomb in Garden |
| 85. Jesus appears to the other women. Lk 24:10 | Tomb in Garden |
| 86. Jesus appears on the road to Emmaus. Lk 24:13 | Emmaus |
| 87. Jesus appears to Peter, other disciples. Lk 24 | Jerusalem |
| 88. Jesus appears to Thomas. Jn 20:24 | Jerusalem |
| 89. Jesus appears by the Sea of Galilee. Jn 21:1 | Sea of Galilee |
| 90. Jesus appears to more than 500 at one time. 1 Cor 15:6 | |
| 91. Jesus sends witnesses to ends of the earth. Acts 1:8 | Jerusalem |
| 92. Jesus ascends into Heaven. Acts 1:3-12 | Mt. of Olives |