

***Jesus the Liberator of Desire.* Sebastian Moore, O.S.B.. New York: Crossroad, 1989.**

Introduction

Desire as “the allure of God” is “the clean opposite of the itch to which a debased Freudianism has reduced it.” [ix]

“A primary theological need of our time is for the psychological to mediate the transcendent.” [x]

Otherwise:

- Psychological = subjective
- Transcendent = extrinsic

This mediation is *remembered* (Jesus).

“Catholic orthodoxy is a wildly beautiful thing... insisting as it does that God was crucified by our fear, to liberate our desire.” [xi]

PART ONE: JESUS AS LIBERATOR

ONE: Why Is There Why?

The answer to the question, ‘why is there the why of things?’, is “immediately known but not formulable.” [3-4]

Voegelin clarifies the realization of self as grounded in ultimate mystery: noetically (Greek) and pneumatically (Hebrew). [4]

Greek = God as ineffable / Hebrew = God as personal [5]

Held in tension by Catholic notion of God as Trinity.

The common (and dangerous) tendency is to make God comprehensible.

“... we pull the divinity down to our level so that we cannot be pulled up to its level.”

“... the lifelong process whereby our desire, at every crisis of growth, finds itself baffled by wanting something new that demands a change in ourselves, in who it is that wants.” [7]

“Surrender is the heart of our desirous relationship with the source of life” – and is, therefore, the meaning of the combination of new desire with breakdown in the one desiring.

TWO: The Theme

Self-awareness is a sense of being in a total reality – a sense of being-in and dependent-on the total mystery. [9]

Desire = "self-love trusting in the mystery that embraces me." [10]

Desire is relational (Marcel's "nuptial bond with life").

"Desire is love trying to happen." [10-11]

"Always the mystery is prior and embracing." [11]

Mystic = "someone for whom the logic of desire is explicit and a consuming passion."

Desire as invitation from the incomprehensible mystery.

"... vital desire increases with satisfaction." (C.S. Lewis: "the sweet desire")

Not a desire to have more satisfaction but to have more desire. [12]

Frye finds three absolutely universal proto-myths:

1. Meal as communion with divinity;
2. Sexual union as communion with divinity;
3. Life as journey.

Food/sex/death, where we are most obviously animal, are "sublated into consciousness as dialogue with ultimate mystery."

Moore is not talking about a certain kind of desire, but rather "about that of which all desires are kinds." [13]

THREE: The Structure of Growth

Two pulls of infancy:

1. Oceanic pull of the womb;
2. The growing sense of being separate. [15]

The ego forms out of this tension.

"The crises of life... all present the painful and bewildering demand that the person die to the existing ego form and into a new interaction of the two great constitutive forces, of oneness and separateness."

- Oneness = being one with the pervading mystery. [16]
- Separateness = being myself and no one else.

Desire is the mutual enhancing of oneness and separateness – "the allure of the whole felt as the life of the individual."

Personal growth is the progressive liberation of desire – when one falls in love, one not only fastens on a new object, but finds a new subject. [17]

Desire is "in search of a subject as well as drawn by an object."

The liberation of desire is not getting what I want, but "coming to want as ultimately I am." [18]

Desire is not an emptiness needing to be filled, but a fullness needing to be in relation.

“The desire whereby I am drawn to another is partly constitutive of who I am. To be drawn to another is to become more myself.”

We fear the unknown, fear those changes of ego that the progressive unfolding of desire brings about – “we fear becoming someone we do not as yet know.” [19]

Liberation of desire thus requires coming into the love that casts out fear.”

What changes is the way in which the tension between oneness and separateness is being lived.

Since desire is trust in life's mystery, events which threaten that trust threaten to constrict the desire we are. [20]

There are crises in which the oceanic threatens to swallow us up – ultimately, death. [21-22]

In such moments, death appears as *end* – in the context of progressive liberation of desire, death appears as *passage*. [23]

Moore posits the death/resurrection of Jesus as the manifestation of the abundant life that comes out of death. [23-24]

If the sense of death as passage is lost, the ultimate significance of the liberation of desire throughout life is threatened. [23]

FOUR: The Sin of the World

‘Original sin’ is the Christian name for our tendency not to grow – it is repression of the true self that does trust life, i.e., does desire to desire more. [25-26]

Alice Miller theorizes that a child is drawn into oneness with mother through seeing itself in mother – and this fascination is held in tension with growing sense of separateness, which allows the child to enjoy himself in the mother-mirror without getting lost in it. [26-28]

This is disrupted if the mother holds child to her as a mirror to herself, thus depriving him of the freedom to enjoy himself in her.

This is because the mother herself had only a partially satisfied mirror need in her childhood.

Because we do not fully enter into this first ego phase we are reluctant to go beyond it.

“We are locked into a permanence of early ego, using others as mirrors to ourselves, doing to others in the subtlest ways what was done to us in our beginning by parents who had it done to them.” -- a psychoanalytic parable of original sin. [28]

Christopher Lasch (*The Minimal Self*) offers a socio-cultural analysis of the systematic perpetuation of this infant mirror state, whereby we identify ourselves by the ‘right’ external ‘identity post.’

Ego as compulsively self-securing constricts the long journey of transformation. [29]

The effect of Jesus on his disciple reversed/reverses a millennially inherited resistance to transformation of our finitude by the infinite, as well as the transformation itself.

The tradition refers to this as the healing and transforming dimensions of salvation.

FIVE: Jesus and the Structure of Growth

“The heart of Christianity is Jesus dying to ego and revealing the fullness of life beyond death.” [31]

Dying to ego is dying to sin’s anchorage in present ego-consciousness. [32]

Sin systematically prevents the challenge to grow from presenting itself.

“Our fundamental attitude to the infinite is defined... by the chasm between finite and infinite, and by the awesomeness of the transformation involved in crossing it.” [34]

Creaturehood involves such fear; sin actually blunts the fear, by repressing any consideration of the realistic possibility of the transformation.

To the extent that the fear is recognized, change becomes possible.

Augustine’s *Confessions* is a celebration of healing shame. [35].

Isaian Servant Songs: “The love instilled by the infinite in the finite, and the transformation process into which that love invites, must entail much suffering.”

“Sin deadens the nerve of creaturehood.” Jesus suffers empathically with that in us which sin deadens. Being-suffered-with awakens that nerve to pain. [36]

Jesus suffers the pain that our ego-fixatedness prevents us from suffering. [37]

In Jesus, death-to ego is unimpeded by sin but not unattended with dread.

Embodying the demands of full humanity, living exposed as finite to the infinite, is “to court suffering at the hands of a society loathe to leave its defensive citadels” [38]

Haughton (*The Re-Creation of Eve*) notes the violence drawn from people by insisting on relating to them only as person to person.

Jesus’ crucifixion expressed and resulted from his solidarity with people.

SIX: Jesus and His Disciples – A Unique Intimacy

Being a consciousness between oneness and separateness renders human existence opaque, in that we tend to interpret our being-in-mystery in terms of our separateness. [41-42]

Jesus, being-at-one-with-mystery (as all humans are) did not translate this into being for himself (as all humans do); he took on our humanness in its true way of total self-dispossession, of freedom from ego. [42]

Jesus had an overwhelming effect on his disciples. [43]

In human existence, there is an incompleteness in my sense of the mystery as the ground of being that only a lifetime will heal. Sin exploits that incompleteness, and makes a short-circuiting bid for divinity.

In Jesus, this incompleteness is 'somehow' filled with the Spirit, so that it remains free for God's progressive self-revelation.

The meaning of Jesus lay in who he was, thus the emphasis on discipleship. [46]

Communication of that meaning was primarily through I-Thou relating, whereby person becomes known to person in the awakening of personhood.

It was Jesus' very self, the self of humankind grounded in God and seeking life in God alone, that Jesus presented. In doing so, he awakened in his intimates a self that they never knew they had, yet who they knew they were meant to be. [47]

The Gospels highlight the psychological crisis that the crucifixion was for the disciples.

God's seeming abandonment of Jesus, and so of the disciples, was remembered as an essential moment in the process whose outcome the Gospel's celebrate. [48]

The disciples both brought on and suffered the end of Jesus: they both let him down and were let down by him. [49]

The disciples' betrayal of Jesus highlights the whole human evasion of transforming union; they killed in themselves the true self that Jesus had awakened to life.

This pertains to the *healing* dimension.

But Jesus also 'let them down,' enabled them to experience with him the oneness we are thrown into with death – allowing them to know, in this life, that final growth crisis which, hidden from humanity on the other side of death, leaves us half-alive, half-committed to the liberating of desire.

This pertains to the *transforming* dimension.

SEVEN: The Transformative Liberation of Desire

The growth crisis consists in the breakdown of the existing-ego-form, i.e., of the person's present way of finding his/her sense of oneness within the sense of separateness. [51]

The New Testament presents us with the growth crisis that precipitates the radical transformation which is union with God, or deification (as the Greek Fathers call it).

Two main elements are clearly discernible in the Resurrection stories/sayings:

1. Discovery of the tomb empty;
2. The appearances of Jesus.

The essential question concerns how the first century connected these two elements.

Discovery of the empty tomb occasions consternation/fear. The encounters with Jesus have a transforming effect, bringing the devastation caused by the crucifixion into a new sense of security, peace, and joy. [53]

This is the peace and joy of a death of ego brought to its transformative conclusion. The emotional chaos into which the disciples have been thrown finds its meaning, and they are alive as never before.

Discovery of the empty tomb takes even further the confusion caused by the crucifixion (cf. Lk 24.21). [55]

The empty tomb, when its meaning is unveiled in the appearances, makes visible the *discontinuity* between our world in which Jesus is crucified and the world to come in which he is the center and the life. [56]

The death of Jesus was homogeneous with the death he died every day. In being made to suffer his death and coming to know its consummation, the disciples were able to embrace, in the daily death of ego, the death that lies ahead of us. "Life is no longer lived under the shadow of death, it is in the light of death behind us." [57]

'Dying with Christ' refers to undergoing with Christ that liberation of desire which death expedites.

Chiasm: [58]

a¹ The disciples' sharing of life with Jesus.

b¹ The shocking event of the crucifixion

b² The shocking discovery of the empty tomb.

a² The perfection of life beyond this world, with the risen one in the Spirit.

Christian faith affirms the deification of man by God, in the person of a man who is God.

PART TWO: IMPLICATIONS

EIGHT: For a Proper Resurrection Realism

The way to proceed in trying to understand the Resurrection of Jesus is to concentrate on the way it became known – i.e., on the way it was originally presented to bewildered understanding. [64]

The Resurrection became known through a conjunction of "seeing him" (and being totally transformed) and the tomb being empty. [65]

In the Resurrection, God says: (1) "Jesus is not among the dead" (empty tomb), and (2) "Jesus is eternal life, one with me" (appearances and coming of the Spirit). [66]

Thomas argues that the Resurrection was not witnessable.

Every possible alternative to the wildly improbable story of the Resurrection is manifestly implausible. [67]

Moore distinguishes between the mystery itself and its "historical deposit." [68-69]

The 'disappearance' of the body could have been seen, but not the Resurrection itself. [69]

For those who had seen Jesus and been transformed, lifted to a new age, the empty tomb overturns possible doubts as to the 'reality' of the experience.

Not the same people 'saw him' and 'found the tomb empty.' Thus, each of the experiences existed in its own right. The connection was not of their making: it was utterly mysterious. [70]

The empty tomb precluded retreat from the new age with its absolute demand.

The empty tomb said to the most earthy part of the psyche awaking to faith, "He is not dead." It could not say, "He is alive," as Christian faith knows him to be alive. [73]

Thus, the emptiness of the tomb confirmed the faith born of seeing Jesus.

"The empty tomb is a concession of the eternal to the primeval in us." [73]

"The two poles of the Easter experience are... the empty tomb and an enveloping re-creative experience, which are not in the same order but, complementing each other and bringing the two orders together, burn the impression of the risen one into the faithful soul." [75]

NINE: The Apostolic Witness

Moore posits this order of development in the Synoptics: Mt—►Lk—►Mk -- and argues that this progression reveals three stages of birth in Christ.

- o Mt: consciousness of new identity (vis-à-vis Israel).
- o Lk: independence.
- o Mk: reconciliation of 'the newborn' with 'the mother.'

Enlightenment "obfuscation of Christian origins" still affects the climate of NT study. [85]

Moore posits the Gospels as more personal records of the original apostolic experience than is generally held in biblical scholarship today.

He argues that we have been deprived of the "apostolic mind" (and we must recover it):

Its Jewishness:

- o Transformed in Matthew.
- o Transcended in Luke.
- o Transcendentally recovered in Mark.

TEN: The Crisis of an Ethic without Desire – Human Sexuality

Moore recalls his distinction between (a) the suffering we bring on ourselves by our refusal to grow (sin), and (b) the suffering that growth entails. [89]

Spiritual progress is the slow prevailing of transformation over ego-centered pain.

Jesus suffers for following his liberated desire in an unliberated world. [90]

The cross teaches us not to deny our desires, but to attend to them, to distinguish our addictions from authentic desire. [91]

Two notions of asceticism:

1. Liberation *from* desire (i.e., from the insatiable self-promoting ego);

2. Liberation of desire from the chains of my customary way of being myself.

“Risk is the refusal to forget desire.” [92]

“The moralistic cross is the cross without transformation, without grace, without resurrection.” [93]

“Real desire is what the cross empowers, bringing us to the death that its liberation entails.”

“Desire... is the love that permeates the universe trying to happen in me.”

The biggest ethical gap in the Christian tradition is the failure to say much about how sexual passion is taken up into authentic desire.

In this, the Christian tradition “merely reflects an erotic incoherence deeply embedded in the culture.” [94]

Stoicism profoundly affected Catholic ethical reflection on sexuality. [95]

Our doctrine on sexuality is crying out for its true basis, the mystery of Christ crucified and risen.

John Paul II’s reflections on sexuality posit an ‘original’ expression of sexual union – an expression of intimacy with God. This is rendered difficult in the experience of ‘fallen humanity’ because of lost harmony between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ nature. [96-97]

Moore notes that John Paul II sees only one aspect of this loss of harmony, i.e., the failure of the ‘lower’ to obey the ‘higher.’ He notes another aspect of that lost harmony, namely, the failure of the ‘higher’ to *befriend* the ‘lower.’ [98]

In the nakedness/shame context of Genesis, Moore finds a hubris-inspired embarrassment at being sexual as the experience of the fallen condition. The ‘lower’ nature, thus outlawed, takes its revenge in “lust.”

But it is shame that causes lust in Moore’s reading, whereas John Paul II has it the other way around.

‘Shame’ is how sexuality looks to the human pretending to be God; it is the looking down on sexuality that is the immediate effect of claiming divinity as one’s own.

This is a story of shame coming to be where it should not be. [99]

“What the story is saying is that man is ashamed of his body because it remains faithful to God in being what it is while man tries to be God.”

John Paul II “sees the downgrading of sexual experience as *justified* by the fact of the Fall, whereas this downgrading *is* the Fall in its immediate effect. In short, he reads the text as justifying the attitude which the text is telling us we must deplore.” [101]

“Trent fought to maintain the goodness of nature despite the Fall, against the tragic Christianity of the reformers.”

“This needs to be recovered today in the context of a much more subjective understanding of the human condition.” [102]

Only when sexual desire is understood in the light of Christianity's and humanity's central mystery will the church be empowered to critique the appalling sexual derailment of our time. [103]

Sexual desire must be seen no longer in a primitive and undifferentiated way as a powerful force that has to be curbed, but as a value that needs to be fostered. [103-104]

"We all desire to be desired by one we desire, the fulfillment of this longing involves much dying to ego. It is nothing less than the transition from the way the ego wants to be desired – the ego still pursuing its childhood agenda – to the realization of my desirableness as a person, as a creature, as a body, as a disclosure of God. It means coming to that desire which flows out of the fullness of my being in the mystery that grounds all that is." [104]

"The task before us is not to subject sexual passion to the will, but to restore it to desire, whose origin and end is God, whose liberation is of God's grace made manifest in the life, teaching, crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ." [106]

This is but part of a wider strategy of recovery and discovery. [107]

ELEVEN: Liberating the Modern Mind

Aquinas held that everything in the world is intelligible, but he could not 'taste' what he believed in the way this has become possible with the origin of modern science. [109]

Einstein: "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is that it is comprehensible."
[110]

Eckhart: Mind can see the world as God sees it.

Such scientific insight is a new realization of the Godlike nature of the human being.

Without recognizing this, one can fall into hubris. But such hubris is a distortion of science, not its essence. [111]

"The scientific banishing of the gods was.. a deepening of the Judeo-Christian insight into the one God, whose image is not the sacred grove but the human being from whose mind nothing in the cosmos is withheld." [113]

It is in becoming dumbfounded by our position as the mind of the universe that the beyond we call 'God' gets its real meaning – as the really beyond, reached for by the self-questioning of this world-knowing being.

Beyond one to whom everything is intelligible, there is only the infinite.

Lonergan: "God is not the explanation of anything. God is the explanation of explanation."

The real meaning of desire is going beyond what is to what could-be. We know the meaning of this reaching beyond when we know ourselves as having the beyond that is infinity itself. [114]

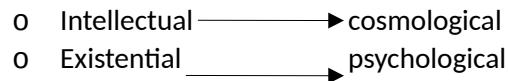
In the emergence of depth psychology, myth no longer expresses a law by which our lives are bound, but a challenge to become ourselves.

In both cosmology and psychology, there is a new coming-to-itself of the human being. In both, the human comes to him-/herself *as* somehow above the world of nature and the world of the psyche, to both of which a less self-aware humanity felt itself to be subject.

There is in both a dramatic opening up of the beyond. [115]

Needed for our healing is a reclaiming of that new sense of self opened beyond itself that lies unacknowledged at the source of the cosmological and psychological revolutions.

We can have an experiential knowledge of our orientation toward the infinite:



We can get a sense of the central thrust of desire which is a once the desire to know and the desire to be in love.

Our world is dying of the dichotomization between knowing and loving, and the Holy Spirit is the healing of that dichotomy.

The two primary needs of our time are the recovery of mythic awareness and the recovery of the power to transcend myth.

Desire is one in its emotional and its intellectual thrust.

TWELVE: A Paradigm Shift in Contemporary Psychology

Modernity has envisioned the human person as an isolated monad simply trying to survive in this harsh world, while looking back to preconscious envelopment in the comfort of the womb. [117-118]

In fact, the infant is being drawn into even fuller life in the world. The desire that impels us is not the need to be comfortable and to survive, but rather the desire to be knowingly in this infinitely exciting world that reveals itself progressively and that, with language, provokes an infinity of questions which are the carriers of desire. [118]

Thus, a baby will even interrupt feeding to explore something new in the world about him/her.

“I am a relatedness all around, seeking to actualize more and more this relatedness.”

I need to connect more and more, to go out more and more.

The fundamental nature of desire is the effort of my relatedness to become actual. [119]

“Reality draws me into itself... My pleasure principle is an infinite curiosity responding to the allure of the real.”

The modern mind is shaped by the assumption that we are *confronted* by the real.

Lonergan insists that initially we are one with the real, and that knowing is a coming to differentiate within that oneness, and, most importantly, that the process of knowing is started by becoming interested in images that are born out of our oneness with the world.

Images are the crystallizing of desires.

"I am a total relatedness waiting and wanting to be realized." [120]

I desire to be knowingly in the total relatedness of which I am constituted. [121]

We are known, and our desire is to know as we are known.