

THE ENOCH FACTOR
Sacred Art of Knowing God

Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge Enoch
whose spirit has guided this work.
Enoch was the son of Jared and father of Methuselah,
the two oldest persons on record within the human race.

Although the length of Enoch's life was shorter
than that of either his father or son,
the breadth of his life reached a dimension unknown to them
and only ever known by enlightened sentient beings.

“The measure of a life, after all, is not its duration, but its donation.”
--Corrie ten Boom, Holocaust survivor (1892 – 1983)

Enoch's donation
to the world is that he
“WALKED WITH GOD.”
If he did, so may we.

-- Dr. Steve McSwain

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Introduction:

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you.”
--Maya Angelou (1928 -)

“The most important matter in life is your relationship to the Infinite.”
-- Author Unknown

You were born to walk with God; so why would you walk alone?

This book is about knowing God. It is not a defense for the existence of God, however. If that's the type of book you're looking for, then you'll need to go somewhere else. There are plenty of them around. Frankly, I find such books amusing. What's the point of arguing for God's existence when it is as impossible to prove he does as it is to prove he doesn't? It's like debating about whether there's intelligent life on other planets. Either there is or there isn't. But, until there's an indisputable encounter it's one person's word against another and, too often, that just turns into needless debate.

One thing is for certain, an encounter with a UFO will have to be more believable than some of the preposterous stories reported so far. I recently saw a video somewhere—maybe it was YouTube, I don't remember—a video someone had taken of a UFO as it streaked like lightning across the Mojave sky. Have you ever noticed that none of these pictures are ever clear enough to be incontestable? An imaginary tale of temporary alien abduction that accompanied this video was equally indistinguishable and unbelievable.

As for the existence of God, my own suspicion is that the real reason why people write books that try to prove God exists is because they are secretly afraid she doesn't.

I have written this book presuming God is but, more important, that God can be known, not in the sense of knowledge or information but in the sense of intimacy and inspiration. You can know about God, but not know God. That would describe most people today.

“God does not die the day we cease to believe...but we die when our lives cease to be illumined by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason.”
-- Dag Hammarskjöld
(1905 – 1961)

I used to think that I, and other Christians like me, had a monopoly on God. We held, as it were, a kind of title deed to ultimate Reality. What we knew about God was not only right, but what others knew was wrong or, at best, inferior to our knowledge of him.

While I no longer feel this way, I realize there are many Christians who still do, just as there are people in other religions who believe their knowledge of God is superior to that of Christians. I have therefore come to the conclusion there may be a lot of knowledge about God in all religions. But, there may be only a few people in any religion who ever actually know God.

As far as my life is concerned, I cannot remember a time when I have not had an interest in knowing God. Unfortunately, however, apart from the knowledge of the Divine I had accumulated over the years, I cannot say with any certainty that I knew God—that is, not in any personal way. To be sure, there were passing occasions when I felt his nearness. But, the feelings never lasted. Most of the time, I did not feel close to God at all. In fact, I felt distant, as if he was disinterested in me and maybe the rest of the world, too. The few times I did feel connected to him were usually short-lived. Of course, whenever I did, the feeling was good. But, the feelings were always temporary and soon replaced with the feeling God may be displeased with how things were going with me and perhaps the rest of the world, too. Consequently, most of the

time, my spiritual life was one big frustration, even a disappointment. I have the feeling it must be the same for many people.

Then, one day, something happened to me and everything changed. I instantly became aware of a transcendent and ineffable Presence. Was it God I suddenly became aware of? How would I know? In fact, since that experience, there are few things that I can say I'm sure about. And, the strange thing is, I'm OK with that. This is not something I would have been

comfortable admitting a few years ago, however. In fact, ambiguity, paradox, contradiction—such things used to annoy me.

Not anymore. Ever since this transformative encounter—whatever it was that happened to me—I enjoy the paradoxical. It was Eric Fromm who said, “Creativity requires the courage to let go of certainties.” I've let

go of many certainties in the last few years. Now, I enjoy instead the freedom of not feeling as if I have to explain everything. Life's mysteries are meaningful when not menaced by the mind.

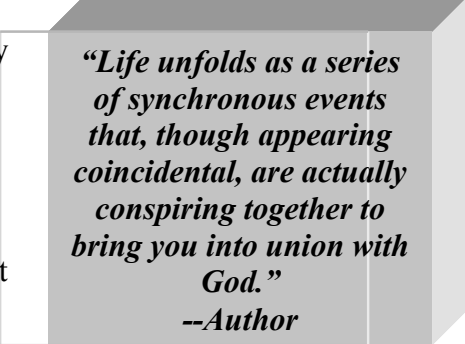
If it was not God I experienced but, instead, a dream or something equally as strange, then I hope I never wake up because, ever since that day, I have been aware of a Sacred Presence almost continually. Virtually everything about the way I think, what I believe, as well as the way I live my life has shifted—and, for the better. The changes happen almost daily, too—or, so it seems.

I'll note many of these changes throughout the book. But, the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs I used to have about my life, this world, even death itself have morphed into something infinitely more meaningful to me than at any other time in my life. As a result, I've moved beyond the narrow, often negative, rigid, and rule-oriented life that was a distinction of my early adult life and the Christian tradition in which I was raised.

“Even belief in God is only a poor substitute for the living reality of God manifesting every moment of your life.”
-- Eckhart Tolle (1948 -)

Make no mistake, however. I have not written this book to bash my religious heritage. As it is among all religions, the Christian religion is desperately ill. But, with all of its faults, it has helped shape who I am and provided me, as it has millions of others, a path to follow in the human quest to know God. I'll have much more to say about all of this, as well as other religions of the world, in the first portion of the book.

I have written the book in three sections. The first chronicles my history, the things I grew up believing, and the strange day when everything changed in my life and brought me into intimacy with God. In this section of the book, I will describe the human condition, one that interferes with intimacy between God and humans and makes life problematic for almost everyone.



“Life unfolds as a series of synchronous events that, though appearing coincidental, are actually conspiring together to bring you into union with God.”
--Author

I'll also detail the story of the day when my father suffered a brain attack, a stroke that ended his life ten days later. It was truly the most traumatic life event I have ever experienced. Yet, what is amazing to me is how this life event conspired with other life events to create a portal through which the encounter with God materialized. I found the truth in what the American author, Louis L'Amour said: “There will come a time when you believe everything is finished; that will be the beginning.”

In the second part, I'll introduce you to Enoch, pronounced É-nik. He is the human archetype of the sacred art of knowing God. History records the myths and legends of those persons who lived at a level of God-consciousness never realized by the majority of their contemporaries. A few of those persons whose names may be more familiar to you are Buddha, Abraham, Lao Tzu, Moses, Confucius, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, Saint Paul, Muhammad, St. Francis of Assisi, and, more recently, Mohandas Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and the Dalai Lama.

There are many, many others, of course. Jesus lived at this level, too. In fact, most Christians believe Jesus embodied the Divine presence in his earthly life more completely than any other person who has ever lived.

Throughout history, the people who seemed to have arrived at an advanced level of spiritual awareness were known by specific names. To Jews they were called tzadikim, avatars to those who practiced Hinduism, and, of course, as saints to Christians.

Labels are unimportant, however. What is more important is that they were rare souls indeed. Enoch was one of these rare souls, too, although not as widely known. Of him, it was said, “Enoch walked with God.”¹ Only one other person in the sacred record of Jewish history was said to have reached this level of Divine consciousness. That was Noah.² The words, “walk with God” are an anthropomorphic way of describing closeness, awareness, knowing-ness, and intimacy. In this book, I will use the words “walking with God” and “knowing God” interchangeably.

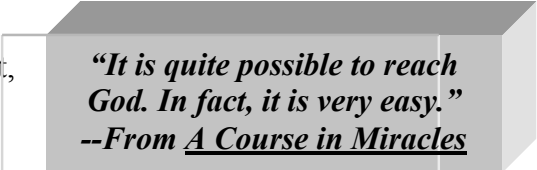
From the first day I met Enoch, and that was some thirty years ago now, I have felt drawn to him, fascinated by the mysterious life he lived. A few times, I’ve actually sensed his spirit with me. That will explain my acknowledgement at the front of this book. Although it may seem strange to some readers, a psychic would understand what I’m saying. Do not get me wrong, however. It’s not like I’ve had conversations with Enoch or witnessed an apparition of him. Instead, I have just been aware of his presence, much like being aware of another’s presence in the same room with you. You might not be in conversation with the person, but you know he or she is there. Perhaps it’s a vibrational sensation you feel—their energy field, I suppose.

¹ Genesis 5:22

² Genesis 6:9

Maybe you've had an experience like this yourself—the kind of experience the psychologist Abraham Maslow called a “peak experience.” Whenever I do, the sensations may not last very long but, in the instant they occur, it's as if time momentarily freezes. If you know what I'm talking about, or have had such an experience yourself, my guess is you've said little about it to anyone else. Well, I understand and, no, you haven't lost your mind. The experience is real. I know for things like this have happened to me on more than one occasion.

In the months that followed my father's death, for example, I had a couple of encounters like this. While a psychologist might be inclined to suggest that what I experienced was a natural consequence of a grieving heart, I don't buy it. It is true I grieved my father's passing. But, I cannot dismiss what happened to me as a mere trick of a mourning mind. I will always believe my father's spirit was present with me.



“It is quite possible to reach God. In fact, it is very easy.”
--From A Course in Miracles

On one of those occasions, I was driving down a busy street in the middle of a torrential downpour. It had been but a few months since we said our last good-byes to Dad and buried his body at Cave Hill Cemetery. As I drove, I strained to see the road, in spite of the fact that the windshield wipers were working overtime. All of a sudden, I had this sensation that my Dad was occupying the passenger seat beside me. The aura of his presence was so pervasive, I was overcome with emotion. I had no choice but to steer the car to the shoulder of the road. When it came to a stop, I turned and looked, certain that I would see Dad sitting right beside me. But, of course, he was not. Almost as quickly as the sensation surfaced, it subsided.

Enoch has never spoken to me, although I would not be alarmed if he did. Mystical, inexplicable things like this no longer frighten me. Nor do they seem odd or all that out-of-the-ordinary. The unseen, spiritual world may be more real than the material world we see.

Over the years, I've come to regard Enoch like some people do guardian angels. I know he's there, not necessarily to provide guardianship, although he may be doing that, too, but a companion who has guided me in writing of this book. Since it was his purpose in life to walk with God, and leave a legacy for others to follow, I suspect he has been with me to provide inspiration and to make sure I map out a path that will be an honest and helpful guide to others.

It is in this middle section of the book you'll also discover the unusual manner in which Enoch died. As with any folk hero, myths about his life have grown up around him. Perhaps none is more mythic, however, than the one people have believed for centuries—that is, that

Enoch lived, but never actually died. Virtually everyone who has ever heard of Enoch, although I suspect most people have not, believes that Enoch somehow escaped death.

This isn't true, of course, but a misreading of scripture. Just as everyone dies, you can be certain Enoch died, too. What is true is that Enoch experienced death in a qualitatively different fashion than did his contemporaries and, I might add, virtually everyone since him.

What we have in Enoch's life and death is a prototype for living and

dying today. It is the remarkable way he lived, and the equally remarkable way in which he died, that explains why his legacy has been preserved for thousands of years. It also explains why I've chosen to call the book, *The Enoch Factor*. The *Factor* is that, which, if followed, will change how you both live your life and face death. Furthermore, you'll no longer simply know *about* God, but you will actually know God. There's an abundance of people in the former group;

“As soon as a man is fully disposed to be alone with God, he is alone with God no matter where he may be; in the country, the monastery, the woods, or the city...At that moment he sees that though he seems to be in the middle of his journey, he has already arrived at the end.”

***-- Thomas Merton
(1915 – 1968)***

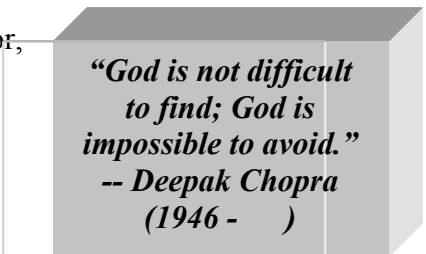
there may be just a few in the latter. One of the most remarkable, yet disturbing, things Jesus ever said is that most people would live and die and never find Life—Life itself.³

In Part Three, you'll find the tools that will guide you on this journey.

To know God is to walk with God. It is to live your life in the awareness of an ineffable and eternal presence that is within you and all around you; beneath you, but also beyond you. It is personal, and yet, mysterious; real, but also surreal. You can know this presence but not know it either. You can experience God, but you will never explain God. When you live your life in union with God, you are at peace—with yourself and with the world. You know joy, too, as well as security and a kind of fearlessness. There's an inner sense that everything is just as it's supposed to be. So, anxiety, stress, discontent, even boredom all but disappears from your life.

To know this kind of extraordinary life of intimacy with God will not happen by accident. It takes practice to live a God-realized life. I have written this book to help you. If you are ready to take your next step into intimacy with your Creator, this book will show you how. If you're not ready, you will quickly lose interest. Only those who are ready will make the effort to put into practice what is necessary to know God and to walk with him. The seventeenth century Carmelite Monk, Brother Lawrence, called it “practicing the presence of God.”

There's a chasm of difference between intimacy and interaction. With the widespread phenomenon associated with text-messaging, e-mail, and cell phones, a visitor from another planet might get the idea that, since humans are always connecting and interacting with each other, they must be friendly toward one another, even intimate and caring. It would not take him long however, to detect his first impression was an illusion.



***“God is not difficult
to find; God is
impossible to avoid.”***
***-- Deepak Chopra
(1946 -)***

³ Matthew 7:14

Although virtually everyone is endlessly talking and texting, the irony is, we may be the most disconnected, as well as the most discontented and dysfunctional generation on record. There is division in almost every family—yours, mine, the families we know, as well as conflict in relationships both at school and at work. Furthermore, there is division between races, even religions, cultures, and nations. People are more divided than perhaps any other time in the history of the human race.

Conversation is no more communication than sex is intimacy. Communication and intimacy take presence and practice. They are learned skills. And, what is true of the horizontal relationships of life—humans toward other humans, is also true of the vertical relationship—the Divine/human connection. Those who know a God-realized life are those who practice the skills necessary for genuine communication and intimacy.

I love the way Rumi, the Persian Poet of Love, put it. He said, “You will know God the way you make love.” Just as love-making is for many people a connection that has little more than a surface depth to it, so the world is full of people, many of whom are very religious, but whose intimacy with God is little more than skin deep.

I realize much of this may make little sense to you now. But, as you read, it will—that is, if you have eyes that see and ears that hear. Jesus said that only those who are ready will see and know. This is how he put it:

“You've been given insight into God's kingdom. Not everybody has this gift...Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears...they can stare till doomsday and not see it, listen till they're blue in the face and not get it.”

-- Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 13:15)

Part One
The Sacred Art of Knowing God

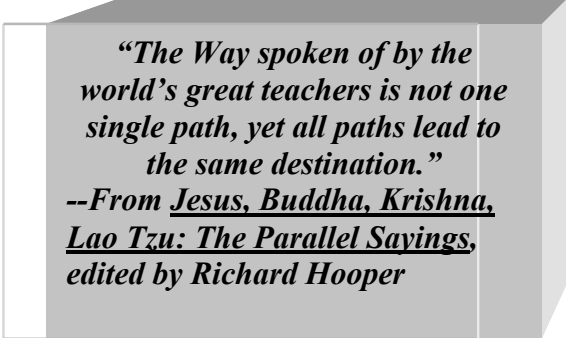
“Everyone has a suitable path to follow... You are here to realize your inner divinity and manifest your innate enlightenment.”

-- Founder of the Japanese Marital Art of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba (1883 -1969)

I am writing this book because I must. I am compelled to share what I am learning about the God who is both pervasive and present in everything seen and unseen. I am not writing, however, to promote any religious viewpoint or to debate the superiority of one religious belief over another, including my own.

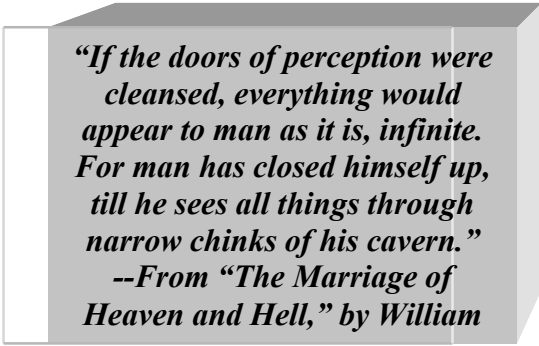
It is true I am a Christian. I will refer to my faith, my perceptions about Jesus and I will frequently quote the words ascribed to him throughout the Gospels of the New Testament. But, I will also quote The Buddha, Lao Tzu, and others, and refer to the religions of the world like Islam, Hinduism, and so forth. Even though I am a Christian or, as I prefer to put it, a follower of the Christ-way to know God, I will not try to convert you to Christianity. So, if you've had any suspicions about my purpose in this regard, you can relax.

Make no mistake, however. The Christ-way is a pathway to God, an enlightened spiritual path indeed. So, of course, I would be pleased to hear that you had chosen the Christ-path after reading this book. The path has guided me to a place of self-discovery and God-realization that has been extraordinary indeed.



“The Way spoken of by the world’s great teachers is not one single path, yet all paths lead to the same destination.”
--From Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Lao Tzu: The Parallel Sayings, edited by Richard Hooper

Yet, it may not be the only way to God. It is the only path I have known. But, that is the most I can say. It is also the only pathway most of the people I've grown up with have ever known. And, that's about all they can say, if they're honest. But, unfortunately, honesty has not always been the most prized virtue among religious people. So, it would not surprise me to learn that this book has shocked the "you-know-what" out of them, but especially when they read my acknowledgement that there may be other ways to know God. But, this is one of those things I can no longer pretend to know with any certainty. And, I'm pretty sure nobody else knows, either. Oh, they may pretend they do, but that's all it is—pretense. For all anybody really knows is that there may be just as many ways to know God as there are stars in our galaxy. The last time I looked, one of the rare nights when you could actually glimpse the galaxy through the human garbage we've uploaded into the atmosphere, there seemed to be as many stars in the heavens as there is sand on the shores of San Juan. The one thing I do know is that, the more I learn about the spiritual path others have followed, or are following, the more I see the timeless, spiritual truth in all of them.

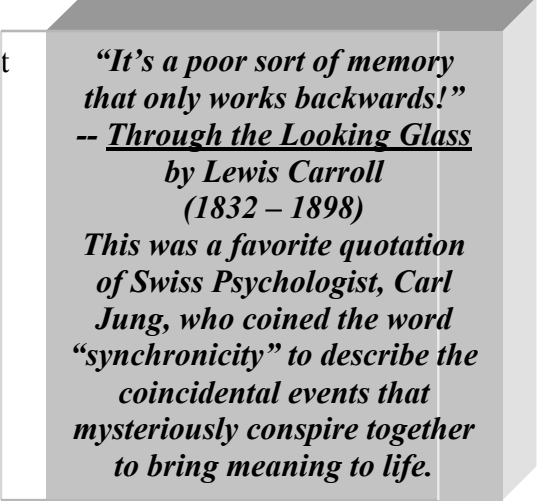


***“If the doors of perception were
cleansed, everything would
appear to man as it is, infinite.
For man has closed himself up,
till he sees all things through
narrow chinks of his cavern.”
--From “The Marriage of
Heaven and Hell,” by William***

When I was very young, my parents used to take my two brothers and me on the world tours they led every year or so for members of the Christian community. My Dad was a Baptist minister, Mom a tour leader. Damn good combination, if you ask me. They made a good team of tour leaders, too. Since we didn't have much money, my industrious mother discovered an inexpensive way to take family vacations and enable her family to see the world at the same time. She organized her own touring agency and, for every three or four persons she enlisted to go with her to some exotic far-off place, one would go free. Naturally, the first two recipients of

the free trip were always Mom and Dad. But, Mom got good enough at this gig, she had earned the reputation of being a fine tour planner and leader. The tour groups soon became large enough that the whole family would get to go.

These trips to other worlds were more than enviable vacations. They were that, of course. But, they were also eye-opening, life-enlarging events that have shaped my view of the world and the universal human quest to know this Intelligence I call God. Others call it Source, Being Itself, Higher Power, Consciousness. Frankly, I'm not too concerned what people call it. I doubt it matters too much to God either.



***“It’s a poor sort of memory
that only works backwards!”
-- Through the Looking Glass
by Lewis Carroll
(1832 – 1898)
This was a favorite quotation
of Swiss Psychologist, Carl
Jung, who coined the word
“synchronicity” to describe the
coincidental events that
mysteriously conspire together
to bring meaning to life.***

Chapter One: Conspiracy of Coincidence: The Day I Met the Pope Himself

“There are no mistakes...all events are blessings given to us to learn from.”
-- Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1926 – 2004)

The first trip I remember taking was at age twelve. We traveled all over Europe and the Middle East. Almost every year after that, we visited some other place. By my sixteenth birthday, I had been to the Scandinavian countries, the Middle East three times, and the Far East twice, including Russia and China. The Far East trips always ended with a couple of days in Hawaii. Pretty awesome!

As you might imagine, I saw many things. It was a kind of education all its own. I also encountered many different religions on some of these trips. One of my first recollections, for example, was the time my Dad had successfully arranged an audience with the leader of the Roman Catholic Church—Pope Paul VI—while our tour group visited the Vatican in Rome. To a naive Southern Baptist boy from Kentucky, Roman Catholic was not only another religion, but it was just as misunderstood and as strange to me as Islam is to virtually every Christian I know.

On this three-week sweep of Europe and the Middle East, Dad thought it would be a good experience if we got up-close-and-personal with the gentleman with the big tall hat, the head of the Catholic Church. Only my Roman Catholic friends, and I've made many of them over the years, can really appreciate the ludicrousness of my Dad's idea. But, as it is in most things, it's all in who you know. You'll see.

I was thirteen at the time. We were living in Western Kentucky. As a member of the Kiwanis Club, Dad had become good friends with the Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Western Kentucky. As these things go, the Bishop shared a room while in seminary with another priest-in-training who was later appointed to handle the appointment schedule for Pope Paul himself.

That's what I'd call a "conspiracy of coincidence!"

One day, Dad shared his hopes for our tour group with the Bishop, who was more than happy to help us. He contacted the Vatican and his former roommate and, in a matter of days, Dad received a letter in the mail—an invitation, signed by the Pope himself and embossed with the Papal insignia, to enjoy a brief and private audience with the Pope. I have never told this story to a Catholic but what they suspect I'm stretching the truth. But, this is exactly what transpired.

That is, until the day we arrived. It was mid-July, 1968, when we arrived in Rome. That also happened to be the day that Pope Paul VI released his famous *Humanae Vitae*, Latin for “Of Human Life.” It was a Papal Encyclical on social issues related to traditional marriage, abortion, contraception, and so forth. Though it mainly reaffirmed the Church’s previous teaching on these matters, it sent shockwaves around the world, nonetheless. These were hot topic social and ethical issues in the sixties. Some of them still are. The media converged on Rome like a pack of hungry wolves. To a young Baptist boy like myself, I could’ve cared less what the Pope’s views were on anything. I was just disappointed, as was everyone else in our group, our chances of having an audience with the Pope looked bleak.

You just had to know my Dad, however. Whenever he set his mind to doing something, I’m not sure God could’ve stopped him. As far as he was concerned, we had not come that far to let a little thing like a Papal Encyclical stop us. So he immediately instructed us to board the bus. He ordered the driver to make the 24km drive to Castel Gondolfo, the *Residenza Papale*, or the Pope’s summer residence, south of Rome. And, off we went. Earlier that day, the news had reported the Pope was going to make a public appearance at his 17th century residence—some kind of formal defense of the Church’s views on human life.

Normally, the drive is no more than thirty minutes. It took us two hours. Thousands of Catholic devotees must have had the same idea—a chance to see the Pope. Add the Press Corp and it would have been easier to get through airport security during a bomb threat than to get anywhere near Castel Gondolfo. Our dream diminished more and more with each kilometer.

Eventually, however, our driver made a cautious approach to a heavily guarded entrance. Standing out front were several uniformed men. They wore bright, colorful clothing, as I recall,

thick, bold stripes of orange, or maybe it was red, blue, and yellow. Later, I learned they were members of the elite Swiss Guard, the Pope's personal bodyguards.

When we slowed to a stop, a guard stepped aboard. Though I could not understand what he was saying, I could tell by his tone he was ordering our driver to turn back. No vehicles would be permitted beyond the blockade. I watched as a flurry of people hurried around both sides of our tour bus towards the entrance. It looked like a mob rushing for the front row seats at a Jackson Browne concert.

Before he could finish barking out his orders, however, Dad presented the Swiss Guard with the official Papal letter. He did so with such confidence I pictured Agent 86, Maxwell Smart, flashing his credentials to gain entrance to CONTROL. The guard's countenance changed almost immediately. He instructed us to disregard his previous directions and, instead, disembark and follow him. What happened next causes my priest friends to shake their heads in sheer disbelief.

Our little band of Baptist believers was escorted through the crowd of thousands, past the Press Corp and Paparazzi, down the center aisle to the most popular seats in the assembly hall. We had front row seats just behind the College of Cardinals who were wearing the traditional and elaborate vestments, crowned with *mitra simplex*, hats made of white linen damask. To me, they looked liked a gathering of Dan Ackroyd's friends at a Conehead's convention. Still, we were just a few feet from the ambo itself, the large pulpit area, behind which the Pope himself would stand.

As far back as I can remember, this was my first exposure of any kind to the traditions of Catholics. But, I will never forget the sense of awe I felt, even as a teenager. Though I understood very little of what transpired, I knew this was a solemn moment of sacredness. It left

me speechless, even as those around us were noisy with anticipation, especially when the Pope appeared.

He was carried into the hall on what is known as a *sedia gestatoria*, a kind of portable throne. He entered smiling, waving as the crowd shouted in unison, “*Viva la Pape*,” “Long Live the Pope.” Devotees held their babies toward him in hopes of receiving a blessing. For those fortunate to be close enough, the blessing was accompanied by the touch of his hand. A few he even managed to kiss.

Before long, the Pope began his sermon, speech, and defense—maybe it was all three. As a teenager, I had little interest in most of what he said but, because he delivered the homily in as many as eight different languages, I do remember being duly impressed. When he concluded, the applause went on for an eternity it seemed, even long after he was escorted from the stage. We applauded, too, shouted, but mostly, we exchanged “high-fives” for the caper we had just pulled off. Little did we realize, but our doggedness would yield a greater return than even this.

We gathered ourselves to make the push through the crowd and return to the bus. But, before we could turn to leave, one of the Cardinals with the cone-shaped headgear approached our tour group.

“Is there a Thaburn Lawson McSwain in the group?” he asked in awkward English.

“I’m he,” said my father.

“Would you be so kind as to follow me, sir?” he continued. “His Holiness will see you now.”

Dad turned in our direction with a look on his face that complimented the astonishment on our own. He had no idea that an audience with the Pope meant “an audience with the Pope,” an actual face to face conversation.

Later, as we made the return trip to Rome, Dad told us that the Cardinal led him down a narrow hallway to a small room with two oversized baroque chairs. In one sat Pope Paul VI. His chair was slightly larger, as you'd expect. The other chair was for Dad. With a degree of humility surprising only to those who did not know him, the Pope stood up as my Dad entered the room. Pretty amazing. A small-time, small-town Baptist minister from Western Kentucky having a personal and intimate conversation with the Pope himself.

For a half hour, they talked about many things but, mostly, the Pope wanted to know about Dad, about our Kentucky Bluegrass—whether it's really blue, our race horses, the Kentucky Derby, and our world-renowned bourbon. They even exchanged a few jokes. As Dad shared their conversation, I could see the experience affected him in ways too personal for anyone else to know.

I'm pretty sure the experience impacted me, too.

That was my first experience of a “different religion,” as we thought of them, even those denominational groups within Christianity. All of them were strange and suspicious, but especially those that had icons all over the sanctuary and who, obviously prayed to many idols. It would be much later before I learned Catholics were around long before the Baptists, or any other Protestant or Evangelical group for that matter. It would also be much later before I realized that religions like Hinduism, which is actually the world's oldest organized religion, were around hundreds, perhaps more than a thousand years, before Christianity. Nevertheless, what I experienced that summer day in an Italian village outside Rome amplified my consciousness of the universal human quest for spiritual knowledge—the quest to know God.

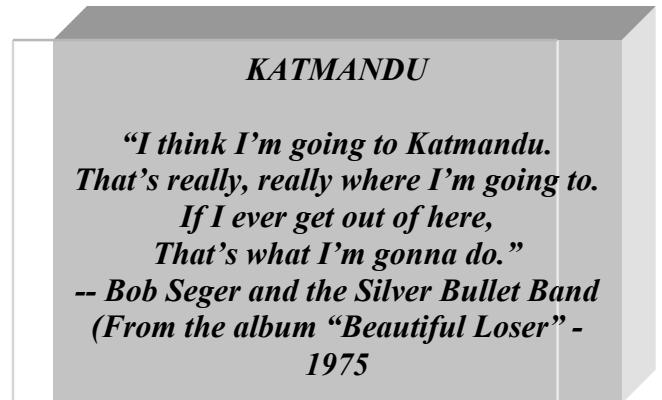
It would be neither the first experience of consciousness nor the last, I would ever have.

Chapter Two: Silence, Solitude, and the Tibetan Monks of Kathmandu

“Silence is as deep as eternity; speech as shallow as time.”
-- Thomas Carlyle (1795 – 1881)

On one trip, we toured the world.

We visited the Far East and one of the most spectacular and beautiful places on earth—Kathmandu, the largest city in Nepal, nestled in a valley by the same name and surrounded by the stunning, snow-covered Himalayans.



One morning, we toured the *Swayambhunath Stupa*, also known as the Monkey Temple. This ancient religious site lies just west of the city. In some parts of the structure, monkeys actually live—sacred monkeys, as they are. As a teenager, I couldn’t imagine anything stranger.

Stupa is a Sanskrit word meaning “heap,” It refers to a holy site that somewhat resembles a mound of dirt like you might see at a construction site. It’s a monument made of stone and these monuments are as abundant in Nepal as drugstores are in the U.S. All pun in the association intended. These monuments are places where Buddhist relics are said to reside and, in some of them, we were told the remains of a Buddha or a saint were supposed to be buried.

As we strolled through the Temple area, I watched as Tibetan monks sat just like The Buddha himself is always pictured sitting—legs crossed, spine perpendicular, palms touching