

# William Wordsworth: Religion and Spirituality

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*William Wordsworth:  
Religion and Spirituality*

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A & S Honors Program Thesis

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Thank you to Professor Mahoney for our Wednesday meetings, your dedication and hard work, and for inspiring me with your passion for teaching, your students, and Wordsworth.

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## INTRODUCTION

“The ideas of Christian theology are too simple for eloquence, too sacred for fiction” – Dr. Samuel Johnson

“I should say that spirituality resides, decisively, in the individual person, where it forms an inner and consensual relationship with Ultimate Truth or Absolute Reality or God or whatever metaphor one uses to name that Mystery that lies at the foundation of all that is” (Countryman 18). Spirituality differs from official religion in this individualism. Spirituality needs no association with formal religion, although religious doctrine and language can help develop it. The spirituality in William Wordsworth’s poetry is individualistic and can relate to all readers. He does not disregard the beliefs of the Christian Church, but uses his own experiences to further develop these beliefs. His sporadic association with the Anglican Church of England is representative of his always developing, but never non-existent spirituality. William Ulmer says, “We have no incentive, in short, for thinking that Wordsworth ever lost faith in God” (Ulmer 17).

A difference between spirituality and religion is that religion depends upon spirituality, while spirituality does not depend on religion. The ideal focus of religious traditions is the development of one’s spirituality. One can be very spiritual, however, without knowledge of any religious tradition. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth says,

A gracious spirit o’er this earth presides,  
And o’er the heart of man; invisibly  
It comes, to works of unreproved delight,  
And tendency benign, directing those  
Who care not, know not, think not, what they do” (Prelude 5: 491-495).

This spirit lives in everybody and everything, even those who never look for truth beyond themselves. Spirituality, so basic a necessity for the developed mind, is present in every person, whether they know it or not. Even the hermit who spends his life removed from society and

organized religion is possessed by the Mystery that underscores every aspect of life. It is this aspect of life that people can avoid or deny, but which is inescapably present.

I believe Wordsworth is a writer trying to understand and develop his own spirituality, which is in some ways consistent with Christian spirituality. He does not need to use religious language to portray his spirituality, for it is not dependent on, only strengthened by, Christian theology. The rituals, symbols, doctrine, restrictions, and structure of religious sects are all designed to work together to enable each person to grow in his or her relationship to the Mystery. If one can find spirituality outside these defined elements of religion, then one should pursue them emphatically. In *The Excursion*, the speaker explains rudiments of the Wanderer's life by saying:

A Herdsman on the lonely mountain tops,  
Such intercourse was his, and in this sort  
Was his existence oftentimes *possessed*.  
O then how beautiful, how bright, appeared  
The written promise! Early had he learned  
To reverence the volume that displays  
The mystery, the life which cannot die;  
But in the mountains did he *feel* his faith.  
All things, responsive to the writing, there  
Breathed immortality, revolving life,  
And greatness still revolving; infinite:  
There littleness was not; the least of things  
Seemed infinite; and there his spirit shaped  
Her prospects, not did he believe, -- he *saw* (Excursion 219-232).

The experience of the Wanderer in Nature is not different from his previous reverence of the Bible. Rather, it fulfills the faith he had based only on written words. The Wanderer has had religious experiences, but it is not as fulfilling to him as the spiritual experience he has while in the midst of Nature. Everything he experiences is "responsive to the writing," and is a fulfillment of what the Bible preaches. Christianity may give explicit doctrine about what it believes about God, but a strong individualistic appreciation of who God is in one's life is a more important aspect of one's faith. To the Wanderer in this poem, and to Wordsworth, spiritual

experiences come most often in the immaculate beauty of Nature. His faith in God is so strong in these moments with Nature, that a presence in the official Church, although possibly beneficial, is not needed for his spirituality.

It is important to note how Wordsworth says, “All things responsive to the writing.” He does not say that his experiences with Nature are at odds with the teachings of the Bible, but are responsive to them. The Wanderer had this religious background from his childhood, so his spirituality is not completely individualistic. He understands the basic teachings of the Church, but is able to most fully develop these teachings in the presence of Nature. The spirituality he feels in these mountains is much more significant than the religious practices he learned at home and in school.

One could argue against the presence of spirituality in Wordsworth’s major poetry by noticing the infrequent use of Christian language. To create a perfect image of what God is or looks like is impossible. Throughout history, people have been defining God analogously, creating symbols to help understand Him. Wordsworth chooses his own words and images when writing about his spirituality. He rarely mentions “God,” but more often uses terms such as “Presence,” or “Mystery.” The word “God” has many connotations that are associated with it based on almost five thousand years of religious language. Wordsworth wishes to develop his own interpretation of the Ultimate Mystery that grounds everything. In his *The Sacred Paths*, Theodore Ludwig states, “Words can attempt to describe the sacred, but it is understood that words can only point to the mystery in a symbolic way” (Ludwig 5). Wordsworth does not wish to define the Mystery that he is seeking, nor does he wish to rely on strict Christian definitions of God. He seeks to discern how the Presence affects him and changes the way he views the world and acts in it.

This individualistic approach to faith is not something to be condemned, but is a way to improve one's relationship with God. "Anglicanism provided that spiritual individualism a welcome foundation in tradition" (Ulmer 23). Wordsworth does not need to use official Church language to express his spirituality. Ulmer says, "Most Wordsworth scholars appear to agree that the poems can avoid 'explicitness of doctrine,' in Trilling's words, and at moments still seem decidedly Christian in moral ambience and spiritual perspective" (Ulmer 31).

Wordsworth himself accounts for this lack of Christian language in the *Essay Supplementary to the Preface of 1815*. He says:

Religious faith is to him who holds it so momentous a thing, and error appears to be attended with such tremendous consequences, that, if opinions touching upon religion occur which the Reader condemns, he not only cannot sympathise with them, however animated the expression, but there is, for the most part, an end put to all satisfaction and enjoyment (Perkins 439-440).

Wordsworth understands the risks associated with being overtly religious in his poetry. People have preconceived ideas of religion from the Church. If Wordsworth uses religious language, he might not please everybody from different religions. If he is inaccurate about church doctrine, the reader might not appreciate his poetry. Wordsworth understands his own limitations in writing about religion. He says, "For my own part, I have been averse to frequent mention of the mysteries of Christian faith, not from a want of a due sense of their momentous nature; but the contrary. I felt it far too deeply to venture on handling the subject as familiarly as many scruple not to do" (Ulmer 28-29). Religious issues are so "momentous" that he does not attempt to write about them. This does not mean he does not express spirituality within his poetry. He understands the importance of poetry to religion, and the significant relationship between them. "The concerns of religion refer to indefinite objects, and are too weighty for the mind to support them without relieving itself by resting a great part of the burthen upon words and symbols"

(Perkins 440). Poetry is needed to provide words and symbols that can help people understand their spirituality. He does not specify that these words and symbols must be those that are traditionally used by a specific religion. Rather, he uses words and symbols that to him represent the best way of understanding his faith.

Answers to life's questions can never be known, but Wordsworth devotes his life to the quest of these answers. He may not speak of "God" in a doctrinal sense, but he never loses touch with his innermost spirituality, which is the foundation of all religion. For Wordsworth, spirituality is not just an impractical contemplative state, but a mode of being that, once possessed, changes the way one lives his or her life. Wordsworth's spirituality is most clearly noted in certain moments, "spots of time" as he calls them, where he is overwhelmed by an awareness of a presence that transcends himself. It is these moments, often felt amidst the beauty of Nature, that do more than give Wordsworth a happy feeling, but provide glimpses of truth, and nourish and strengthen his mind. His spiritual quest does not merely allow him to be amazed at the beauty of Nature and feel good about life, but is a quest for truth. His poetry is what allows him to remember those fleeting moments of loving awareness and to keep his heart open to experience them again. His poetry can also allow readers to explore their own hearts and search for those moments that inspire, awe, and shock; moments where people cannot help but wonder and be disturbed at a "presence" they sense or feel. It is Wordsworth's poetry that can assure readers that these moments are not vain feelings or merely emotional highs, but poignant indicators of truth.

In this thesis I will not use all the works of Wordsworth, but will focus on *Tintern Abbey* and other *Lyrical Ballads*, *The Intimations Ode*, selections from *The Prelude*, and a variety of other works. I do not intend to prove that Wordsworth should be officially classified as a

Christian poet, but will occasionally display ways Christianity influenced his spirituality. Seeing the spirituality present in Wordsworth's poetry has practical value for readers. Not only was his poetry a way he could explore his own spirituality, but it is the way he influences and inspires his readers.

## CHAPTER 1 - God as Mystery

“The dimension of Mystery, in Gilkey’s phrase, ‘is not so much seen but the basis of seeing; not what is known as an object so much as the basis of knowing; not an object of value but the ground of valuing; not the thing before us but the source of things; not the particular meanings that generate our life in the world but the ultimate context within which these meanings necessarily subsist.’” John Shea

There have been numerous objections to Wordsworth’s spirituality by critics such as Douglas Bush. Many of these objections are associated with Wordsworth’s belief in the innate goodness of humanity and his unyielding hope for redemption. That Wordsworth is optimistic and hopeful is true; that this should be a reason to disparage his spirituality is not true. The basis for Wordsworth’s spirituality is found in the latter part of “Tintern Abbey” when he addresses his sister:

This prayer I make  
Knowing that Nature never did betray  
The heart that loved her; ‘tis her privilege,  
Through all the years of this our life, to lead  
From joy to joy: for she can so inform  
The mind that is within us, so impress  
With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
Shall e’er prevail against us, or disturb  
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold  
Is full of blessings (Tintern Abbey lines 121-134).

There are two main points from this passage I would like to discuss. The first deals with claims that Wordsworth’s belief in Nature is pantheistic. Robert Kiely, when comparing Wordsworth and Francis of Assisi, says, “Both Wordsworth and Francis have been called pantheists and both were deeply conscious of the suspicions of orthodox Christians of their times” (Barth 23).

Pantheism, a belief that God is all things, is often associated with atheism. Coleridge explains this in a letter about Dr. Priestley: “How is it that Dr. Priestley is not an atheist?-He asserts in three different Places, that God not only *does*, but *is*, everything. – But if God *be* every Thing, every Thing is God-: which is all the Atheists assert” (Ulmer 11). This pantheistic idea may have been what led Coleridge to call Wordsworth a “Semi-Atheist” (Ulmer 9). I will argue that

for Wordsworth, Nature is not God; it is not “all in all” (Tintern Abbey 75). Nature is the image he uses to appreciate his faith. He does not worship Nature as God, but as a concrete way for him to experience God. L. William Countryman says, “The Romantics took the natural order with great seriousness as one of the points in human experience where we are open to the Holy” (Countryman 53). For Wordsworth, Nature is a way of finding the spirituality that links Nature, humanity, and the world. Nature allows him, despite the troubles of everyday life, to keep the faith he has in God.

“The great authors of spirituality do not speak primarily about spirituality itself, but about the Holy, the True, the Ultimate Real that we encounter in and through spirituality and that transforms us and our lives through our encountering it” (Countryman 13). Although Wordsworth never uses the word “God” in “Tintern Abbey,” his experiences with Nature strengthen his spirituality. He does not have to speak specifically about God, but looks for Truth and the Holy in Nature. In “Tintern Abbey,” he speaks of the divine way he experiences Nature by saying,

I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And tolls through all things (Tintern Abbey 93-102).

Wordsworth does not understand what this “something” is, but realizes the profound impact it has on his view of the world. He feels joy from “elevated thoughts,” but is disturbed (in a positive sense) by the “presence” that accompanies these thoughts. This “presence” is concretely apparent in those aspects of Nature he mentions, but the presence itself is not Nature.

Countryman says, “The ‘world’ manifests itself in a variety of ways in the tradition of Anglican

poetry, but a particularly important mode is that of *nature*” (Countryman 49). Wordsworth coincides with the Anglican tradition by writing about his wonder of Nature. His attraction to the “natural world” is a “fascination that inspires not merely use of natural imagery but delight in the natural world as a way toward God” (Countryman 49). Wordsworth presents this idea of Nature as a means toward God in his *Essay Supplementary to the Preface of 1815*. He says, “The religious man values what he sees chiefly as an ‘imperfect shadowing forth’ of what he is incapable of seeing” (Perkins 440). Nature is what Wordsworth is capable of seeing, and it is through Nature that he finds truth in a transcendent experience he cannot see.

Theologian Karl Rahner, in his *Foundations of Christian Faith*, describes transcendentalism in this way: “We shall call transcendental experience the subjective, unthematic, necessary and unfailing consciousness of the knowing subject that is co-present in every spiritual act of knowledge, and the subject’s openness to the unlimited expanse of all possible reality” (Rahner 20). Not only does a transcendental experience require ideas of reality beyond the limitlessness of the individual, but it requires an acceptance of this reality within each individual. Poets can gaze with awe at the beauty of Nature, but never care about what this beauty means to them. Similarly, they can look at Nature, feel immense awe at its splendor, and assume these feelings contain ultimate reality in themselves. The true transcendental experience, however, comes when one can look with wonder at the world, discern what this beauty means to him, and realize that there is an infinite reality beyond the limits of his own mind. This beauty of nature can be one of the vessels through which one glimpses truth, but it is not ultimate truth. William Wordsworth does not write poetry to merely describe the beauty of Nature, but to represent how he feels in the presence of this beauty. These feelings allow him to accept the existence of a “presence” that “disturbs” him, even in the midst of “elevated thoughts,” and so

they become more than just feelings, but instances of truth. Nature is not the ultimate mystery for Wordsworth, but what best allows him to transcend himself and accept the existence of an ultimate mystery.

This transcendent reality does not mean one should abandon all trust in the senses. Sensory perception has an important role in recognizing the presence of God in all aspects of life. Christians believe that God, although a reality beyond the grasp of human understanding, became completely human. This incarnation of Jesus Christ gives sufficient proof to the believing Christian that life on Earth has significant meaning. Jesus was given the same limitations to his physical senses as all people, but He still used these senses in meaningful ways to fulfill the Kingdom of God here on Earth. The senses and everything about this world are not to be distrusted as misrepresentations of the truth, but can provide the basis for meaningful spiritual experiences. The sound of music can stir one's soul and move the imagination. The smell of roses can enliven the spirits of even the most depressed vagrant. The touch of a loved one can inspire a person to believe in a loving God. And the sight of beauty in a majestic lake or from a superb mountain top can impress one with such wonder that he can feel the truth as presented in the Holy Bible. The sensory images are not gods themselves, but concrete depictions of the loving God. Wordsworth does not believe Nature is the ultimate end of reality, but the best teacher of what the ultimate reality really is.

Just because the senses can help inspire spiritual experiences does not mean they should be trusted to be the ultimate end to all their religious questions. They should not be relied upon as the sole means of understanding truth. 15<sup>th</sup> Century Christian Mystic, Saint John of the Cross, says:

I say this in order to make it clear that the one who would go to God relying on natural ability and reasoning will not be very spiritual. There are some who think that by pure

force and the activity of the senses, which of itself is lowly and no more than natural, they can reach the strength and height of the supernatural spirit. One does not attain to this peak without surpassing and leaving aside the activity of the senses (John of the Cross 663).

John of the Cross is expressing his idea that the senses, or reason, or any natural inclination is not enough to reach the “strength and height of the supernatural spirit.” He does not call for an abandonment of reason, but demands an understanding that the rational alone cannot bring one to the full understanding of God. This idea runs throughout Christian literature. In Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, reason is only able to lead Dante to the gates of Heaven. Once there, he needs something more, namely faith and love, to enter Heaven. In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, he says, “However, as it is written: ‘No eye has seen,/no ear has heard,/no mind has conceived/what God has prepared for those who love him’ but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit” (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). Paul admits that one cannot understand God by means of the senses or the intellect. It is only through the Spirit of God that ultimate Truth can truly be known. Wordsworth, despite his immense respect for the power of Nature, agrees with these beliefs. Although by no means against science, he does understand the importance of allowing oneself to appreciate experiences that cannot be explained by science or reason. He devotes his life to trying to gain unobtainable truth, but realizes that at times one must give into a truth that exists beyond the limits of one’s reason. In *The Tables Turned*, he says,

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;  
Our meddling intellect  
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:-  
We murder to dissect.  
Enough of Science and Art;  
Close up those barren leaves;  
Come forth, and bring with you a heart  
That watches and receives (Tables Turned 25-32)

Intellect can interfere with a person's ability to fully appreciate the beauty of Nature and love in life. Reason and intellect are necessary tools on one's spiritual path, but a full understanding of God cannot be grasped by dissecting what is perceived by the senses.

Douglas Bush feels Wordsworth is too optimistic about the innate goodness of human beings. He says "That Wordsworth's optimistic and humanitarian faith in man has a foundation of doubtful solidity and breadth I think is true" (Bush 694). Bush is correct when he describes Wordsworth as being optimistic about humanity. Ulmer, when talking about the Immortality Ode says, "The poem's representation of childhood's celestial 'glory' nonetheless reflects a deeply felt denial of innate human corruption" (Ulmer 21). Bush is incorrect, however, when he says there is no foundation for this optimism. Christian tradition and the Bible are based on the idea that all people are born inherently good, with the potential to become completely human in the image of Jesus Christ. The book of Genesis says, "God created man in his own image;/in the divine image he created him/male and female he created them....God looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good" (Gen 1:27-31). Although people are born with original sin, they are born inherently good. Adam and Eve sin because they do not accept the beauty of their humanity and instead wish to be equal to God. Wordsworth does not try to escape humanity but embraces every aspect of his humanity.

Wordsworth's focus on the "clouds of glory" (Ode 64) from which people are born, and not on original sin, is a reason people believe, as Coleridge says, that Wordsworth is a "semi-atheist." Although Christianity can be interpreted as a celebration of the goodness of people, many Christians feel there should be a focus on original sin and Hell. Wordsworth has a personal view of Heaven and Hell and does not direct his attention to man's sin, for he does not feel God focuses on man's sin. There is no mention of Hell within Wordsworth's poetry, for he

chooses to focus on the Incarnation as the path of Atonement, and not the Crucifixion. William Ulmer says, “His attitude toward human sinfulness draws on ‘the central Anglican tradition [which] emphasizes the Incarnation,’ and ‘which sees in the Incarnation rather than the Crucifixion the essence of Atonement’” (Ulmer 23). This again has to do with his “cheerful faith.” He does not write about the evil of humans, because the Incarnation of Jesus is more important than the sins, temptations, and suffering of the world.

Wordsworth’s idea of Nature is not atheistic or contrary to what many Christians believe. Father Michael Himes, while discussing the beliefs of St. Augustine, reconciles how one can find God in all things and not be pantheistic. He says, “God is the absolute mystery which grounds and surrounds all that exists, so everything is loved absolutely or it would not be” (Himes 103). One can find God’s love in all things without believing God is all things. Himes makes this distinction when he describes what he feels the purpose of prayer is: “We pray that God be the fullness of God, and that we may be what it is to be creatures, i.e. fully dependent on God” (Himes 24). Everything is dependent on God, but everything is not God. The beauty of human beings is that they were created in the image of God, but are not God. Similarly, Wordsworth can see the grace of God in Nature without believing Nature is God. Father Himes defines a sacrament as anything that allows one to more fully realize the love of God that is within all things (Himes video). Nature is a sacrament for Wordsworth, as it allows him to see how God is universally present in this world. It is a concrete way he can be filled with “quietness and beauty,” and maintain his faith in the midst of “rash judgments” and “sneers of selfish men.”

Many people feel Wordsworth flees to Nature to escape life. I believe, however, that he turns to Nature to renew his faith and not be discouraged when he returns to the rest of the world. He does not go to Nature because he is a “man/Flying from something that he dreads,” but does

so because he seeks what he loves (Tintern Abbey 70-72). It is through Nature that Wordsworth can have a “cheerful faith” that “all which we behold is full of blessing” (Tintern Abbey 133-134). Wordsworth admits his faith is cheerful, which is the aspect of his spirituality for which he is often criticized. This cheerful faith allows him to believe that *all* he beholds is full of blessing. He does not state that only the beauties of Nature are blessed, but that “all” is blessed: the suffering of the world, as well as the beauty. This cheerful faith does not make him atheistic, but is consistent with Christian beliefs.

Douglas Bush disparages Wordsworth’s spirituality by saying, “Though he gave it his own elevated complications and refinements, there was not much room in that doctrine for the sobering conception of man as fallen” (Bush 695). He cannot find a realistic portrayal of original sin in Wordsworth’s poetry. He says, “I am only asking if we, who are more concerned with his poetry than his biography, can find there, not merely solace, but a realistic and sustaining consciousness of what we may call the human predicament, or, if you like, original sin” (Bush 694). It is easy to read Wordsworth’s poetry, become enthralled with his humanistic optimism, and not notice any intimation of original sin. However, Wordsworth’s poetry does address “the fall,” as shown in his portrayal of the passage from the innocence of youth.

Adam and Eve could have lived forever in the Garden of Eden without experiencing pain or confusion. They were born into a world without suffering or knowledge. Similarly, Wordsworth believes men are born:

Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God, who is our home:  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy! (Ode: Intimations of Immortality 62-66)

Children experience the innocent joys of faith, just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. In Wordsworth’s childhood, “The earth, and every common sight,/To me did seem/Appareled in

celestial light” (Ode 2-4). He speaks in the past tense to show that he can no longer view the “earth, and every common sight” in the same way. In his youth he was able to experience in Nature a “feeling and a love/That had no need of a remoter charm,/By thought supplied” (Tintern Abbey 80-82). His personal relationship with Nature and God was similar to Adam’s and Eve’s: one of innocent and ignorant bliss. The joy he experienced was in no need of explanation, and the importance of what he felt was unknown. This naïve ecstasy was lost because of the suffering that comes with knowledge.

Although the Garden of Eden seems perfect, to dwell in it means to live in ignorance. Adam and Eve choose to eat from the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil” because they desire to know as God knows. Once they acquire knowledge, they are expelled from the Garden of Eden and experience the suffering of the world. Similarly, Wordsworth believes people gain knowledge of the world when they leave childhood. With this knowledge, people suffer from “the heavy and weary weight/Of all the intelligible world” (Tintern Abbey 39-40). The mundane duties of the world make a man “Forget the glories he hath known,/And that imperial palace whence he came” (Ode 83-84). Wordsworth writes about his personal fall from the glories of youth when he says, “The things which I have seen I now can see no more” (Ode 9). After eating from the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve become aware of their nakedness and are ashamed; they fall from the innocence of God. This fall is indeed present within Wordsworth’s poetry. Man falls from a childlike state where he experiences the innocent delights of the world to a state where he can no longer view the world in the same way.

Douglas Bush believes Wordsworth focuses too much on the redemptive powers of the Fall. He says, “One of the chief penalties that attend Wordsworth’s kind of thought and feeling – as we see also in Emerson and others – is the loss or attenuation of the sense of evil, the tragic

sense” (Bush 694). Wordsworth believes man’s fall from the innocence of childhood will lead him to a greater appreciation of the world. To write about “The Fall” of humanity does not mean one has to focus on the negative aspects of the descent. Christian theology believes the opposite: the Fall of Adam and Eve was a necessary prerequisite for humanity to reach the Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ. This “cheerful faith” that Jesus’ resurrection will lead to a paradise superior to Eden is shared by Christian theology and Wordsworth’s poetry.

Christians believe that from this suffering associated with the Fall they will be raised to a place that is superior to the Garden of Eden. St. Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3: 8-11). In partaking of the suffering of Jesus, Paul believes that “somehow” he will participate in the Resurrection. The fall from Eden, along with the suffering it entails, is not something to be deplored. It should be embraced as the means to reach Paradise. Even Jesus had to endure temptation and suffering. Matthew’s Gospel says: “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil” (Matthew 4:1). Not only does Jesus spend forty days being tempted by the Devil, but He is led there by the Spirit. The most important aspect of the Passion of Jesus Christ is not the crucifixion and the torturing, but the resurrection. Fr. Himes says, “The church seems to celebrate the fall of humanity into sin. But it does so because the meaning of that fall has been forever changed by that action of God in Christ’s life, death and destiny” (Himes 32). William Wordsworth similarly celebrates humanity’s fall from the innocence of youth for the benefits it brings. He does not ignore the painful aspects of the Fall, but focuses on the redemptive.

Wordsworth writes about the need to embrace the fall from innocence to experience:

Not for these I raise

The song of thanks and praise;  
But for those obstinate questionings  
Of sense and outward things,  
Fallings from us, vanishings;  
Blank misgivings of a Creature  
Moving about in worlds not realised (Ode: Intimations of Immortality 139-145).

Wordsworth is most thankful for the “obstinate questionings” and “vanishings” that come with “the Fall.” The “fretful stir/Unprofitable, and the fever of the world” (Tintern Abbey 52-53) are necessary elements of life beyond childhood. Although it is beneficial to experience innocent faith in childhood, this is not what leads to a full appreciation of one’s faith. The “unintelligible world” provides enough rewards to compensate for the suffering it creates. Although knowledge produces suffering, “other gifts/Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,/Abundant recompense” (Tintern Abbey 86-88). Wordsworth elegantly portrays his sense of joy that comes from experiencing the dreariness of the world:

Though nothing can bring back the hour  
Of splendor in the grass, of glory in the flower;  
We will grieve not, rather find  
Strength in what remains behind;  
In the primal sympathy  
Which having been must ever be;  
In the soothing thoughts that spring  
Out of human suffering;  
In the faith that looks through death,  
In years that bring the philosophic mind. (Ode 177-186)

Those “years that bring the philosophic mind” are the years after man’s fall from innocence. Although “soothing thoughts” come from suffering, it does not mean that man does not suffer. Similarly, although Wordsworth focuses on the redemptive powers of the Fall, it does not mean he does not account for the Fall, as Douglas Bush suggests. Wordsworth believes that *all* he beholds is full of blessings. Those aspects of human suffering and the weary weight of the world are encompassed in this “all.”

This difference in Wordsworth’s maturity is shown in his progression through *The Prelude*. In Book 2, he describes an experience with Nature:

Already I began  
To love the sun; a boy I loved the sun,  
Not as I since have loved him, as a pledge  
And surety of our earthly life, a light  
Which we behold and feel we are alive;  
Nor for his bounty to so many worlds-  
But for this cause, that I had seen him lay  
His beauty on the morning hills, and seen  
The western mountain touch his setting orb,  
In many a thoughtless hour, when, from excess  
Of happiness, my blood appeared to flow  
For its own pleasure, and I breathed with joy (Prelude 2: 178-188).

In his youth Wordsworth appreciated the beauty of Nature in an innocent way. A child can look at the setting sun and see immense beauty, but not be able to discern the significance of the beauty. The young Wordsworth has immense joy when he views this sunset. He is not burdened by any thoughts, but simply appreciates the beauty. This youthful appreciation is an advantage of being young. The older Wordsworth can no longer innocently appreciate beauty, but in his maturity he understands what beauty means to him.

In Book 14, after witnessing a breathtaking scene of Nature atop a mountain, Wordsworth says,

When into air had partially dissolved  
That vision, given to spirits of the night  
And three chance human wanderers, in calm thought  
Reflected, it appeared to me the type  
Of a majestic intellect, its acts  
And its possessions, what it had and craves,  
What in itself it is, and would become.  
There I beheld the emblem of a mind  
That feeds upon infinity, that broods  
Over the dark abyss, intent to hear  
Its voices issuing forth to silent light  
In one continuous stream; a mind sustained  
By recognitions of transcendent power (Prelude 14: 63-75).

In this late scene of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth has a different appreciation of his experience with Nature. He does not completely lose the innocence of childhood, nor does he lose appreciation of the beauty of Nature. The difference in this passage is that he realizes his encounter with beauty has significance beyond the momentary awe he feels. In his maturity he is able to

understand the way his mind is profoundly influenced by this external beauty. In these moments of awe in the midst of Nature, he is also able to gain an awareness of transcendent truth. Nature is no longer the source of innocent joy as it once was. It is now a much more profound experience that, although oftentimes disturbing, leads Wordsworth to a greater understanding of himself and the world around him. It is these fleeting moments and the memory of them that provide Wordsworth with the faith he needs to believe that truth exists in all moments of life.

## CHAPTER 2 - Memory and Imagination

“Memory is more than a looking back to a time that is no longer; it is a looking out into another kind of time altogether where everything that ever was continues not just to be, but to grow and change with the life that is in it still.” – Frederick Buechner

C.S. Lewis, in his autobiographical novel, *Surprised By Joy*, a title adapted from the Wordsworth sonnet, describes his encounters with moments of joy:

It was a sensation of course, of desire; but desire for what?...before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased. It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison (Lewis 16).

It is important to note that the joy he feels is not a superficial feeling of delight that means nothing more than a second of immense pleasure. Lewis distinguishes between joy and pleasure in this way,

It is that of an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction. I call it Joy, which here is a technical term and must be sharply distinguished both from Happiness and from Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and only one, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again. Apart from that, and considered only in its quality, it might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief. But then it is a kind we want. I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures in the world. But then Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is (Lewis 18).

It is these fleeting moments that Lewis and Wordsworth recognize as being glimpses of a reality beyond themselves. These moments, which Lewis calls moments of Joy, can semantically be described in numerous ways. They can be moments of truth: not ultimate in their finitude, but foretastes of an Ultimate Truth, or God. They can be moments of awareness, awareness of the presence of some force or mystery that is far beyond the limits of human understanding, but shows itself in “spots of time,” as Wordsworth calls them. Whatever one wishes to call these

moments, even if one does not call them anything, Wordsworth understands that their significance cannot be underestimated. Recognizing these moments as vital glimpses of reality can have the utmost significance for one's spirituality.

Religious traditions ideally enliven spirituality by focusing on one's experience. For an individual to enhance his own spirituality, an understanding of Scripture and tradition, as well as a participation in ritual, can help, but they would be fruitless without the personal experience, and are not necessary for that experience to take place. It is these experiences that Wordsworth repeatedly mentions in his poetry. *The Prelude* is an extended account of numerous such experiences in an attempt to discern their significance. It is not possible for people to create moments like these on their own, but it is possible to have an attentive awareness, so that when they do happen, one can recognize them.

An important aspect of spirituality is being able to recognize the significance of the present moment. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis says, "The present is the point at which time touches eternity (Lewis 75). Jesuit spirituality encourages people to pay attention to the smallest details of the world, for they are good indicators of the presence of a transcendent world. Buddhist traditions recognize the importance of keeping an open mind to every action one does. Various meditation practices seek to discern meaning in the smallest actions one takes throughout the day. Wordsworth has an uncanny ability to keep his mind and heart open to the experiences of everyday life and the significance of the mundane; to see "the life/In common things" (*Prelude* I: 108-109). He concludes his *Immortality Ode* by praising these commonplace aspects of life:

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,  
To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts to do often lie too deep for tears (*Ode* 201-204).

It is this attitude that enables him to pay attention to aspects of life that others could just pass by without taking any notice.

It is impossible to always be in states of spiritual ecstasy; in fact, it is not desirable. John Keats, in his *Ode to a Nightingale*, experiences pain and heartache when he shares in the happiness of the bird. His imaginative life with the nightingale is too much for his human heart to handle, and so he must return to the reality of his own world. The moments of joy are not to be sought as a means of escaping the trials and ordinariness of everyday life, but to enhance them. One does not seek truth in a transcendent being to escape the reality of being human, but to more fully recognize the beauty of being human with all the flaws that go with it.

Thomas Merton says:

The fruit of education, whether in the university (as for Eckhart) or in the monastery (as for Ruysbroeck) was the activation of that inmost center, that *scintilla animae*, that 'apex' or 'spark' which is a freedom beyond a freedom, and identity beyond essence, a self beyond all ego, a being beyond the created realm, and a consciousness that transcends all division, all separation (Merton 363).

This “spark” of transcendence and self-awareness is very similar to the spiritual moments Wordsworth writes of. Merton may be seen as an escapist. Out of protest at the American society that made it so difficult for people to be real, he joined a monastery and lived in a cloistered community in Kentucky. This physical detachment from the world is not necessary. Merton says, “The whole of life is learning to ignite without dependence on any specific external means, whether cloistered, Zenist Tantric, psychedelic, or what have you” (Merton 364). Wordsworth, to use Merton’s terms, has the ability to ignite in all aspects of his life because he uses his memory of previous moments of awareness to always keep his faith, and always be ready for another “spark.”

It is because of spiritual moments that Wordsworth is able to live in his oftentimes depressing society. He does not escape the world, but uses experiences from solitude and from Nature to strengthen his mind, heart, and soul, even in the midst of evil gestures of humanity and society. In *The Prelude*, he says,

There are in our existence spots of time,  
That with distinct pre-eminence retain  
A renovating virtue, whence--depressed  
By false opinion and contentious thought,  
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight,  
In trivial occupations, and the round  
Of ordinary intercourse--our minds  
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;  
A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,  
That penetrates, enables us to mount,  
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.  
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks  
Among those passages of life that give  
Profoundest knowledge to what point, and how,  
The mind is lord and master--outward sense  
The obedient servant of her will. Such moments  
Are scattered everywhere, taking their date  
From our first childhood (Prelude 12: 208-225).

These “spots of time” nourish the mind through every action of every day. It is not necessary to live secluded in the woods to be aware of the presence of truth. Excursions to the woods and to solitary life are necessary to momentarily center oneself in the chaos of ordinary life. However, the true spiritual act is to be able to remember those moments of self awareness and transcendence when living in the world that so often demands an escape.

It is imperative that people do not become too accustomed to society. Solitude can be helpful in discerning who one really is and the significance of spiritual experiences. Buddhists practice right mindfulness in all actions of their day, and often spend time in solitary contemplation. Although Christians gather in a church for community support, it is beneficial to be alone to recognize the presence of God or Mystery in the silence of one’s heart. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth says:

When from our better selves we have too long  
Been parted by the hurrying world, and droop,  
Sick of its business, of its pleasures tired,  
How gracious, how benign, is Solitude;  
How potent a mere image of her sway;  
Most potent when impressed upon the mind  
With an appropriate human centre – hermit,  
Deep in the bosom of the wilderness;  
Votary (in vast cathedral, where no foot  
Is treading, where no other face is seen)  
Kneeling at prayers; or watchman on the top  
Of lighthouse, beaten by Atlantic waves;  
Or as the soul of that great Power is met  
Sometimes embodied on a public road,  
When, for the night deserted, it assumes  
A character of quiet more profound  
Than pathless wastes (Prelude 4:354-369)

Physically isolating oneself for a time is not a selfish means of escape from the troubles of the world. Nor is it merely an opportunity to enjoy the happiness that comes with peace. It is a poignant opportunity for people to toss aside the veils and masks created by themselves and by society and experience who they really are. It is not always pleasurable, for it is a painful and exerting task to accept the reality of the true self, which includes sin, suffering, sadness, depression, and loneliness. Yet, it create a greater sense of joy, for being close to who we really are is being close to who God intends us to be.

To search for the reality of ourselves, to reach the point of nothingness that is God, to find the inner Buddha, or just to be real with ourselves, is immensely difficult, but critically important. Wordsworth recognizes that in the midst of the “hurrying world,” people are separated from their “better selves.” He stresses the importance of solitude, where there is no need for people to impress others, but only the need to be real with themselves and so become close to the “great Power.” These solitary moments can come in the presence of the ocean, in quiet prayer before bed, while deep in the wilderness, or simply in the late hours on a public road. One does not have to escape society to find solitude, but should have the awareness to search for peaceful moments in the midst of chaos. It is this awareness that will enable one to be

more placidly aware of spiritual moments, and it is possibly in solitude that one can best recognize that mysterious presence which allows people to “see into the life of things” (Tintern Abbey 49).

This does not mean Wordsworth believes true spiritual moments only happen when one is alone. On the contrary, the mysterious presence is often best noticed through the love of others. A strong community is necessary for sustaining faith. A truly loving community will allow a person to be genuine in his thoughts and actions, and so approach that emptiness that is truth within him. At the end of *Tintern Abbey*, after experiencing intense spiritual awareness, he addresses his sister:

Nor wilt thou then forget,  
That after many wanderings, many years  
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,  
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me  
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake! (Tintern Abbey 155-159)

Not only is he happy that he can introduce his sister to such beauty and truth in Nature, but the experience is more fulfilling for him because he shares it with her. The presence of God, made manifest through the beauty of Nature, is enhanced through his love for his sister. It is this type of community that strengthens Wordsworth’s spirituality and allows him to be who he is. Solitude can help one achieve an inner peace and recognize God’s presence in their lives, but other people can do this in similar, if not stronger, ways.

Community also allows Wordsworth to develop his memory. Although it is possible to remember and keep alive spiritual moments experienced in solitude, they are often more poignantly remembered when shared with someone. He asks her sister:

If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,  
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts  
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,  
And these my exhortations! (Tintern Abbey 143-146)

The presence of another human being can remind one of the experiences of God he felt with that person. In seeing this person again, the spiritual ecstasy can be brought to mind, and hope can be restored even in the midst of a harsh society.

This apparent need to escape or to become aware of past and present spiritual moments should not be limited to times of doubt, darkness, and suffering. Again, spiritual moments are not self-help therapies that merely allow people to overcome the obstacles of their lives. It is a life-long struggle for a truth that is ultimately unobtainable but which should be unconditionally sought nonetheless. Contentment in one's spiritual journey should be avoided at all costs, for to be content implies that the pinnacle of one's spirituality has been reached. This is impossible, for it requires a complete awareness and understanding of a mystery that is not understandable. In being content, one is saying that he has obtained a truth that is higher than himself and so has nowhere else to go in his spirituality. Thomas Merton says, "For conversion to Christ is not merely the conversion from bad to good habits, but *nova creatura*, becoming a totally new man in Christ and in the Spirit" (Merton 155). Wordsworth accounts for this struggle by saying that not only do these "spots of time" lift people up when they have fallen, but they "enable us to mount, / When high, more high." Spiritual moments and memory of these moments can break people away from their states of contentment and make them realize they can always go higher. Religious traditions are designed to bring light to the blind, and all people are blind. Even the most spiritual being, whether the pope, the Dalai Lama, or a hermit, needs to be aware that there is always room for growth in their spiritual journeys.

An awareness of this power of memory enables one look to the past for strength, but it also gives one hope for the future. It would be fruitless to be attentive to spiritual moments if they were nothing more than fleeting incidents. If they were not eternal, they would not be

sought for their own sake, but for the purpose of fulfilling a momentary desire. Spiritual moments, then, would be reduced to nothing more than tools for the increase of pleasure, not indications of truth and love. Since Wordsworth knows he has the capability to remember any one moment for the rest of his life, he can look at the present moment with a greater sense of joy that although moments are always fleeting, they are never terminable. In *Tintern Abbey*, while admiring again the wondrous landscape, he says:

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,  
With many recognitions dim and faint,  
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,  
The picture of the mind revives again:  
While here I stand, not only with the sense  
Of pleasant pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts  
That in this moment there is life and food  
For future years (*Tintern Abbey* 58-65).

The combination of past thoughts remembered and the knowledge that the current moment will create a new memory enables Wordsworth to appreciate fully the truth he sees in this fleeting instant. He enjoys being at the River Wye because “In this moment there is life and food/For future years” (*Tintern Abbey* 64-65). In one moment of awareness of love, or truth, or God, there is enough “life and food” for years to come. This is a powerful statement about the power and rarity of these fleeting moments. To dispose the mind to be ready for these experiences as they happen is of the utmost importance for a healthy spiritual life.

The power of memory does not have to be a conscious remembering of times past. Moments may never be intentionally brought to mind, but they will inevitably repair our minds. Wordsworth says that these moments “retain/A renovating virtue, whence...our minds/Are nourished and invisibly repaired.” A conscious stirring of the memory can help this reparation, but it will effortlessly occur regardless of any conscious awareness of it. Karl Rahner describes transcendental experiences thus: “If it is clear that this transcendental experience is not constituted by the fact that one speaks of it; if it is clear that one must speak of it because it is

already there, but for this reason it can also be constantly overlooked...” (Rahner 21). God’s grace and love are always available for any person to grasp. They are often hidden by many factors in the world. Since Ultimate Truth exists outside the realm of rational thought, the missing ingredient for transcendental experiences is the person’s awareness of its presence, or his or her willingness to grasp it. Wordsworth’s eyes are often opened to the existence of these transcendental truths through moments of awareness in Nature. It is the memory of these experiences that enables him to be ready for a spark to occur in any circumstance.

Wordsworth describes how “spots of time” exist in even in the innocence of childhood when he says, “Such moments/Are scattered everywhere, taking their date/From our first childhood.” Even at a very young age Wordsworth has sparks of joy. Early in *The Prelude* he says:

Thus oft amid those fits of vulgar joy  
Which, through all seasons, on a child’s pursuits  
Are prompt attendants, ‘mid that giddy bliss  
Which, like a tempest, works along the blood  
And is forgotten; even then I felt  
Gleams like the flashing of a shield;-the earth  
And common face of Nature spake to me  
Rememberable things; sometimes, ‘tis true.  
By chance collisions and quaint accidents  
(Like those ill-sorted unions, work supposed  
Of evil-minded fairies), yet not vain  
Nor profitless, if haply they impressed  
Collateral objects and appearances,  
Albeit lifeless then, and doomed to sleep  
Until maturer seasons called them forth  
To impregnate and elevate the mind (Prelude 1: 581-596).

These gleams appear to him in the midst of childhood innocence. They may last only a second each, but the memory is eternal. When much older, Wordsworth is able to remember a gleam of truth he experienced as a child. It is this ability of memory that makes man’s descent from innocence not as hopeless as it may initially seem.

Memory is not only helpful for being cognizant of moments of awareness. As already discussed, throughout life man falls from the innocence of childhood. Wordsworth does not deplore this fall, but praises it for the knowledge that comes with maturity. Although it is impossible to avoid the suffering that accompanies this knowledge, innocence is never lost. Even in the midst of extreme agony, hate, and animosity, every person has the power to relive the innocence they thought they lost forever. That power is memory. After briefly lamenting the loss of innocence in the *Immortality Ode*, Wordsworth quickly regains joy for he acknowledges the power of memory:

O joy! that in our embers  
Is something that doth live,  
That nature yet remembers  
What was so fugitive! (Ode 130-133).

This something is not a dead feeling of a previous moment, but something that lives. Moments are eternal in their ability to live beyond the temporariness of the moment. A moment today can live forever. The blissful feelings are not merely brought to mind, but because the moments are remembered, the innocence still lives today. He says,

Hence in a season of calm weather  
Though inland far we be,  
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea  
Which brought us hither,  
Can in a moment travel thither,  
And see the Children sport upon the shore,  
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore (Ode 162-168).

In the midst of ordinariness, when life seems to be calmed to the point of despair, the “mighty waters” of childhood can live again. They are not just remembered in a bittersweet longing for the past; but they have never died. They only need to be thought of again, and for this the power of memory is of extreme importance.

Memory plays an important role because it allows one to fully appreciate an experience when it is “recollected in tranquility.” Although moments of awareness are the most important

aspects of spirituality, it is crucial that one does not stay lost in the ecstasy of the moment. They should be sought as often as possible, but in states of emotional excitement the truth in these moments can be lost. It is necessary to remember these experiences in times of tranquility. In

*The Excursion*, Wordsworth says,

Oft as he called these ecstasies to mind,  
And whence they flowed; and from them he acquired  
Wisdom, which works through patience; thence he learned  
In oft-recurring hours of sober thought  
To look on Nature with a humble heart (Excursion 237-241).

Patience is essential in attaining the Wisdom that is needed to fully appreciate the truth of these ecstatic moments. Therefore one needs to remember these moments in humble times of solitude and quiet to fully value them. Wordsworth emphasizes this point in *The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, when he speaks of poetry thus:

I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of re-action, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind (Perkins 432).

Although he is talking specifically about poetry, the same idea can be applied to spiritual experiences. Contemplating about spiritual experiences can allow one to more fully realize the true value of these experiences.

In order to utilize this power of memory, one must have a healthy imagination.

Imagination in this sense does not merely refer to the power of a child to dream of fantastical images. Rather, it is the creative faculty of the mind that works with images and objects not to create fantasies, but reality. Samuel Taylor Coleridge describes imagination in this way: “The imagination, then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (Perkins 567). It is this creative faculty

that allows fleeting moments to live longer than the brief time they exist. Wordsworth recognizes this creative faculty of the mind when he says,

Therefore am I still  
A lover of the meadows and the woods,  
And mountains; and of all that we behold  
From this green earth; of all the mighty world  
Of eye, and ear,-both what they half create,  
And what perceive (Tintern Abbey 102-107).

People participate in creation every day when they use their imaginations to help produce reality.

It is this imagination that allows Wordsworth to recreate a past that is no more. Without a healthy imagination, one would not be able to call to mind these moments, and so they would die.

A healthy imagination is not only useful for remembering the past. As already discussed, transcendent experiences and transcendent truth do not merely exist outside the realm of humanity, but are dependent on the individual person. Spirituality at its core requires people to admit the presence of some type of mystery. Whether it is a belief in a Christian God, inner truth, love, in mystery as Mystery, to be spiritual means to have an awareness of something beyond reason. For this matter, it is necessary to have the creative faculty of the imagination to believe in something one cannot physically see or fully understand.

Imagination is necessary to be aware of spiritual moments when they happen. Life without imagination would be a boring representation of life in its simplest terms. To walk through life without the creative power of imagination can mean to live a life of despair. When Wordsworth says “To me the meanest flower that blows can give/Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears,” he is able to do this because he creates a reality that transcends the mere physiology of the plant, but which is not separate. He imagines the presence of a transcendent truth located in an object normally taken for granted.

Imagination is a crucial aspect to many religious traditions. Christianity stresses the need to believe without seeing. At the end of John's Gospel, Jesus tells Thomas, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:29). It is impossible to believe what one cannot see without actively creating images of truth through the imagination. A large part of St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises is the ability to imagine oneself present at the time of the Gospel one is reading. The Jewish faith depends on history, and again it is necessary to have imagination to keep alive a history one did not live through. Wordsworth's imagination is not a fanciful tactic of a poet, but the creative aspect of a spiritual man searching for truth.

One must have a healthy imagination to have a life of prayer. One can define prayer as a strict reading of memorized poems or psalms recited in a ritualistic pattern. While there is nothing wrong with this type of prayer, it can be seen as too rigid for certain people. Prayer can be a direct conversation with God or Mystery, or it can simply be a loving knowledge of a transcendent being. This type of prayer can be very thoughtful, where one attempts to associate his emotions with reason, often thanking God for his love, or petitioning for His help. Prayer can also be a quiet acceptance of the presence; or in other words to simply be with God. However one defines prayer, imagination is necessary.

William Wordsworth does not write about times when he sits on the edge of his bed and prays the *Our Father*. This does not mean he does not pray, however. In *The Excursion*, he describes his spiritual experience:

Sound needed none,  
Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank  
The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,  
All melted into him; they swallowed up  
His animal being; in them did he live,  
And by them did he live; they were his life.  
In such access of mind, in such high hour  
Of visitation from the living God,

Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.  
No thanks he breathed, he professed no request;  
Rapt into still communion that transcends  
The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,  
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power  
That made him; it was blessedness and love! (Excursion 205-218)

This passage represents the authenticity of Wordsworth's prayer life. It is not merely a thoughtless recital of prayers, or meaningless words of thanksgiving, but prayer that reaches the depths of who he is. There is no need for thought, or any words of thanksgiving, for his entire being, his soul, mind, and heart, are all united into a still communion in the presence of the living God. He mentions the "imperfect offices of prayer and praise" as an inefficient way for him to express his thanksgiving and to return the love of which he is so poignantly aware.

It is this type of prayer that is not as traditional as saying the *Our Father*, but is a more efficient way for Wordsworth to be aware of and give thanks for moments of love and ecstasy. In this way his entire life, including his poetry, is a way of giving thanks to the mysterious being who created and sustains life with love and beauty. Imagination is vital for both the creation and reading of poetry.

### CHAPTER 3 – Poetry

A Poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth. – Percy Bysshe Shelley

In book two of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth again describes the creative faculty of the imagination to create truth. This time, he relates this faculty to poetry:

Emphatically such a Being lives,  
Frail creature as he is, helpless as frail,  
An inmate of this active universe:  
For, feeling has to him imparted power  
That through the growing faculties of sense  
Create, creator and receiver both,  
Working but in alliance with the works  
Which it beholds. – Such, verily, is the first  
Poetic spirit of our human life,  
By uniform control of after years,  
In most, abated or suppressed; in some,  
Through every change of growth and of decay,  
Pre-eminent till death (Prelude 2: 252-265).

All people are “inmates” of this “active universe.” We inevitably participate in the act of creation every second of our lives. We work in “alliance” with the works our senses behold to both create images of truth and see truth as it is. The imagination is a faculty of the mind that works with the Creator in the constant act of creation. It is this creative faculty of our own minds, our imaginations, that inevitably makes poets of us all. The first “Poetic spirit of our human life” occurs when we are “Infant babes,” barely capable of reasoning, yet having the potential to create with our imaginations. The poetic spirit lives in every new-born infant, and remains in every person, even as they grow in uncreative, mind-inhibiting societies. People may not always be aware of their poetic spirits, as they are frequently “abated or suppressed.” Only some people are called to put the fruits of the spirit on paper as “poets.” However, all people are born and always will be poets in the sense that they inevitably use the imagination to create and reveal truth in all aspects of their lives. Through “every change of growth and of decay,” the creative poetic spirit will always be there. Unfortunately, only for some people will it be “Pre-

Eminent till death.” The presence of this creative poetic spirit in all people is similar to the way the gracious spirit resides in all things.

Just because “words can only point to the Holy in a symbolic way,” as Theodore Ludwig states, does not mean that words should not be used to help reach the Holy. Rather the opposite. Wordsworth does not choose to use religious language in his poetry but he understands the importance of poetry to open one’s soul to spiritual moments. Poetry has two main functions in enhancing one’s spirituality. It opens readers’ eyes and hearts to beauty and love in the world, and it helps a person look beyond reason to find transcendental truth. Both these elements are essential for one’s spirituality, and both are improved by poetry and art.

To understand how poetry is an enhancer of spirituality, one must understand what Wordsworth means by poetry. He says one of the tasks of a poet is to create an awareness of beauty and truth in the world:

It is an acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe, an acknowledgement the more sincere, because not formal, but indirect; it is a task light and easy to him who looks at the world in the spirit of love: further, it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves (Perkins 429).

All people must do is look at the world in a “spirit of love,” and they will see the beauty in all things. Poetry allows people to see beauty in elements of life they would never have otherwise thought about. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth says:

He, who in his youth  
A daily wanderer among woods and fields  
With living Nature hath been intimate,  
Not only in that raw unpractised time  
Is stirred to ecstasy, as others are,  
By glittering verse; but further, doth receive,  
In measure only dealt to himself,  
Knowledge and increase of enduring joy  
From the great Nature that exists in works  
Of mighty Poets (Prelude 5: 586-595).

People can see beauty in the world without reading or writing poetry. But one can be “stirred to ecstasy” by “glittering verse” and receive “enduring joy.” Spirituality insists on seeing the beauty of the world. St. Ignatius recognized it by imploring his followers to “see God in all things.” The central core of Jewish faith is to find meaning in everything: in God, in human existence, in suffering, and in history. No matter what one’s religious beliefs are, poetry helps people find beauty and love in the smallest aspect of everyday life.

Religious language can often blur one’s understanding of art, and can deter a reader from enjoying the poetry. However, the truths that religion attempts to teach cannot be obtained by reason alone, and so poetry is critical in allowing one to look beyond reason. Dennis Taylor, in his essay, *The Need for a Religious Literary Criticism*, says, “We seem in a terrible dilemma: we cannot talk about it, but if we don’t, we ignore something fundamental at the heart of the work” (Mahoney 24). This captures the paradox that there is a need for poetry to enhance spirituality, but yet there is the risk of using religious language. Wordsworth agrees and says:

The commerce between Man and his Maker cannot be carried on but by a process where much is represented in little, and the Infinite Being accommodates himself to a finite capacity. In all this may be perceived the affinity between religion and poetry; between religion – making up for the deficiencies of reason by faith; and poetry – passionate for the instruction of reason” (Perkins 440).

If poetry is an expanding of the mind to see beyond the appearances of senses and the limitlessness of reason, then it truly is necessary for appreciating spiritual truths. The mystery of God will always remain Mystery, but to attempt to appreciate a part of the worth and beauty of this Mystery, one needs poetry. It is needed to see how sensuous experiences correspond with ultimate truth, and one needs poetry to share their own spiritual experiences and learn from others. All people have moments when they experience this ultimate mystery, such as the one Wordsworth describes in *Tintern Abbey*:

That serene and blessed mood,  
In which the affections gently lead us on,-  
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame  
And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul:  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things (Tintern Abbey 41-48).

One does not need to write of experiences like these to feel them. Whenever people enter moments of contemplation and spiritual joy like this, any attempt to put meaning in it is poetry, whether or not it is written. Although these experiences cannot be fully described in words, the use of poetry is an attempt to allow readers to see that they are experiencing something special where they can “see into the life of things.” Writing these experiences can help the author remember the feelings he was experiencing and to share them with others.

J.A. Appleyard, S.J., in his essay, *Imagination's Arc: The Spiritual Development of Readers*, says:

Faith-whether religious or the primal force of belief, promise and fidelity that shapes all existence and is not specifically religious-is a life of the imagination, William Lynch argues. It is not the case that faith comes after and adds something to human knowledge (the great modern separation). Rather, faith is a form of imagining and experiencing the world. Its images change the way we see the world” (Mahoney 51).

He also says, “Sharon Parks, a developmental psychologist, uses the terminology of imagination and images, more typically associated with literature and other forms of artistic creativity, to explain growth in religious faith” (Mahoney 50). There is a direct correlation between spirituality and literature, and imagination plays a vital role in this relationship. Poetry is a way of expressing the truth experienced through spiritual moments, and imagination is necessary to both read and write poetry.

Wordsworth's poetry is more than flowery language used to touch one's senses and make one feel good. It is a concrete representation of prayer that is beyond words and beyond feelings.

It is a tool to help him remember those “spots of time” that shape who he is and his relationship to God. It is the way he uses the creative faculty that is his imagination to share his spirituality with others, and allow readers to become more aware of the moments of love, truth, and God in their lives. It is a means of seeing a flower and realizing it is not just a beautiful image of vivid colors, but a concrete representation of a truth that transcends human reason.

People can say Wordsworth, like all poets, is not a help to society and so is ineffective at enhancing one’s spirituality. They can claim that a man who spends his life surrounded by beauty and love is not as spiritual as someone who devotes his life to those surrounded by sorrow and misery. Wordsworth’s value to the world, however, is immensely important. His gifts lie in writing, and he uses these gifts the best way he can to allow others to obtain the same understanding of truth that he has experienced. He does not hide from the misery of the world in his life of love. He presents an opportunity for people to see the beauty and love that always surround them, even in the midst of the most intense human misery. Some people devote their lives to help sustain other lives. Wordsworth devotes his life to showing people why they should sustain their lives. A balance between sustaining life and making life worth living is necessary for a healthy spiritual life. The poet’s role is to show others what makes life worth living, and this can in turn give people reasons for such living. This is not merely an emotional retreat into the sensational aspects of pretty flowers, but a way to explore the truth that encompasses all things. This truth may not always “feel” good, but it is real, which is much more fulfilling than sustaining momentary feel-good emotions. A balance between sustaining life and making life worth living is necessary for a healthy spiritual life. The poet’s role is to show others what makes life worth living, and this can in turn give people reason to sustain their lives.

## CHAPTER 4 – Why Spirituality?

“In a word, spirituality is at once God-awareness, self-awareness, and other-awareness. It is the level of consciousness and of choosing that makes us different from the pelican that dies on the beach and simply is no more.” - Thea Bowman

I could write at greater length about the spiritual innuendos in Wordsworth’s poetry, his many experiences, and his quest for truth. This entire thesis would be fruitless, however, if one did not understand why it is important to be spiritual. How can the experiences and writings of one man have any value for other people? If a transcendent presence, or eternal Mystery, inevitably exists and cannot be fully grasped, why even attempt to discern the meaning of it in our lives?

The search for truth is one with no possibility of ultimate fulfillment, and it can often leave one bitter, frustrated, and full of doubt. A life in search of pleasure is in many ways more desirable than a life in search for truth, for happiness is often thought to be the greatest thing to strive for on this earth. It is almost irrational to think a person would devote his life to a search whose destination is unknowable and whose path may not be pleasurable. It is easy to wish to always remain in the ignorance of childhood and seek the pleasures of life without knowledge of the very thing one is seeking. The answer to the question, “Why be spiritual?”, however, is that it produces change. Recognizing spirituality changes the way one views the world, oneself, and one’s relation to the world, and, ultimately changes the way one acts.

It should be noted from the beginning that spirituality at its core is an awareness of and relationship with a presence or a mystery that is greater than the self. However, this presence is not an external being that simply watches over earth, but is a transcendent being, as much a part of this world as it is outside it. Therefore, improving one’s relationship with or increasing one’s awareness of this Being means changing the way one views and acts in the world. In *What Are We: An Introduction to Boston College and its Jesuit and Catholic Tradition* the author says:

“To see, to pay attention to, the presence of God’s love and care and self in nature and in other people, gently invites us to look at creation differently” (87). Wordsworth’s awareness of the mysterious presence impels him to change the way he sees all creation.

Wordsworth’s spirituality is not static. His progress from the innocence of childhood is one that is filled with change. His visit to the Banks of the Wye five years after his initial trip, as described in *Tintern Abbey*, is much more fulfilling than the first visit. In his youth, he approaches the beauty of the Wye at Tintern as a child approaches a Christmas tree on Christmas morning: full of a yearning for what he sees in front of him, but without an understanding of what it really is he is racing towards. Five years later, when he visits the same spot again, he is more aware of his growing spirituality. He recognizes the truth that is present in Nature and understands that its beauty is more than a fantastical delight. Looking at the world with a spiritual vision allows one to see normal, mundane aspects of life in a new way, seeing that “The world is charged with the grandeur of God,” as Gerard Manley Hopkins put it. In *The Prelude*, Wordsworth says:

An auxiliar light  
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun  
Bestowed new splendour; the melodious birds,  
The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on  
Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed  
A like dominion, and the midnight storm  
Grew darker in the presence of my eye:  
Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,  
And hence my transport (Prelude 2: 368-376).

Wordsworth always knew there is splendor in the setting sun. However, after his spirituality has matured, he is able to see a new magnificence in everything in nature: the sunset, the wind, birds, and fountains. Recognizing that in the world there is more than just beauty but a presence that is truth allows one to see the beauty of Nature in more fulfilling ways. One can see the beauty of Nature for what it actually is, without the projection of personal ideas.

Recognizing the truth in the world is not always pleasurable. Seeing things as they really are means seeing the bad as it really is, as well as the good. Wordsworth's spirituality does not only allow him to have a better recognition of the beauty of the world, but he recognizes that the dark aspects of Nature need to be looked upon in the same way. The storm grows darker when he begins to see Nature for what it actually is. This may not be as pleasurable as the innocent way he viewed the beauty of Nature the first time he visited the River Wye, but it is more fulfilling. In *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth says:

For I have learned  
To look on nature, not as in the hour  
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes  
The still, sad music of humanity,  
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
To chasten and subdue (*Tintern Abbey* 88-93).

His new way of viewing the world means he no longer has "aching joys," or "dizzy raptures," but hears the "sad music of humanity." This spiritual way of seeing the world allows him to see it for what it actually is, a world that is often filled with sadness and despair. Again, this may not be as pleasurable as seeing things the way he would like them to be, but it is seeing truth, and that creates a more fulfilling joy, or "abundant recompense," as Wordsworth says.

Being spiritual does not only mean one changes the way he views the world, but it also means he changes the way he views himself. Thomas Merton says:

At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will (Merton 146).

To find this "point of nothingness," or God, or truth within ourselves is to be authentically human. In an attempt to discover the core of who we are, in an attempt to be real, we are knowingly or unknowingly searching the depths of our spirituality. Again, people do not need to place any title on what it is in themselves they are searching for. Whether it is God, love, the

inner Buddha, they are all searchers for the true self, and the search for true selfhood is inevitably a spiritual one. This search, with no possibility of ultimate fulfillment, can seem vain and impractical to many people. Wordsworth himself states:

But who shall parcel out  
His intellect by geometric rules,  
Split like a province into round and square? (Prelude 2: 203-205)

It is impossible to come to a full understanding of who one is, but the search is worth everything. Wordsworth would not have written *The Prelude* if he believed it was fruitless to attempt to discern oneself, despite the impossibility of completely succeeding. The spiritual quest for true self-identity is a quest for the true meaning of creation, and for why there is something instead of nothing at all.

Wordsworth's understanding of who he is changes as he grows older, as it probably does with most people. He sees changes in himself from the innocent boy of childhood who would run to Nature for the pleasure of its beauty, to someone who would turn to Nature as a nurturer and protector of what he believes. This change does not only happen in people who are spiritual, but his recognition of the existence of a mysterious presence outside himself changes the way he sees himself. His change over the five years between his two visits to the River Wye in *Tintern Abbey* represent two changes that are concordant with each other: a change in himself and a change in his spiritual beliefs. He has a greater appreciation in his second trip of the presence that "disturbs" him, and he also has a different view of who he is. He recognizes both of these differences, and realizes that throughout his life as his spirituality is strengthened, his self identity will change.

A spiritual view of the world changes the way one sees himself in relation to the world. Again, Wordsworth's spirituality lies not merely in the way he appreciates the beauty of the world, but in the way this beauty changes him. He is aware of the connection he has to all living

beings, and to all of Nature. There is an awareness of the spiritual oneness that exists among all things of this earth. This idea is presented often in Wordsworth's poetry. In *The Prelude*, he says:

I have felt the sentiment of Being spread  
O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still;  
O'er all that, lost beyond the reach of thought  
And human knowledge, to the human eye  
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart;  
O'er all that leaps and runs, and shouts and sings,  
Or beats the gladsome air; o'er all that glides  
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself,  
And mighty depth of waters (Prelude 2: 401-409).

Everything seen and unseen, everything rational and irrational, everything loving and unloving, share this sense of Being. Everything that lives and everything that is are related because they exist. Even aspects of life normally considered bad - vices, doubts, sufferings - all exist together to form the unity that exists in all things. Wordsworth says:

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows  
Like harmony in music; there is a dark  
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, makes them cling together  
In one society. How strange, that all  
The terrors, pains, and early miseries,  
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes interfused  
Within my mind, should e'er have borne a part,  
And that a needful part, in making up  
The calm existence that is mine when I  
Am worthy of myself! (Prelude 1: 340-350).

Somehow, even these "discordant elements" of life are harmoniously united with the beautiful. Recognizing this spiritual connection among all things allows Wordsworth to remember that even the darkest aspects of life play a part in the harmony of the world. Again, this is more than a fictional way of allowing him to see suffering as something positive. There is much more truth at the core of this spiritual unity. There is truth in recognizing that "terrors, pains, and early miseries" of life play a "needful part" in determining who a person really is. It is an indisputable fact that everything that is shares Being. Because everything shares Being, there is a necessary

connection between everything that exists. Recognizing this unity is recognizing truth; and realizing the importance of suffering and trials means realizing the truth that they are as much connected with the Creator as is the innocent infant babe. This allows Wordsworth to have a better way of dealing with trials and suffering, but it is not an escape from or a falsified romanticizing of these sufferings.

The connection of Being that exists in all things is more than a similarity all things share. Atheists and pantheists can recognize the connection that exists between all living things. This interconnectedness of existence can simply be an affirmation that all people share in a Godless, meaningless life. But to return again to the passage from *Tintern Abbey*:

I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused,  
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things (Tintern Abbey 93-102).

There is something more than mere existence that connects all things. There is “this presence,” that not only unites all things in its existence, but impels the minds of all thinking things. Just as the Poetic spirit is inevitably present in all people, whether they know it or not, so too is this mysterious presence that will always remain mystery.

Spiritual oneness is not inconsistent with traditional religious beliefs. Catholics believe that through Baptism all people enter the Mystical Body of Christ. Through the sacrament of Holy Eucharist, all participants share in the feast and become one with each other and one with Jesus Christ. St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians says, “For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread” (1 Corinthians 10:17). This union is

not a loss of individual identity, nor is it an atheistic way of saying people do not need God. It is a representation of the way all people are united under the love of God that encompasses all people, animals, and things. It is this connection that Wordsworth recognizes and so often writes about in his poetry.

This appreciation of the spiritual oneness of all Beings does more than allow Wordsworth to feel connected to the sunset. It is immensely important in the way he lives his life as a brother of all that exists. It is vital in determining the way he chooses to love everything else in the world. The presence of a gracious spirit unites everybody and everything in brotherhood. Wordsworth says:

Along his infant veins are interfused  
The gravitation and the filial bond  
Of nature that connect him with the world (Prelude 2:242-244).

If people truly recognized the connection all people have with one another and with the world, there would not be any hatred, wars, or social injustice. Part of the reason there is so much poverty and so much fighting is because people assume they only need worry about themselves. The words of John Donne do not echo in people's ears every time a war is fought, a crime committed, or social policy made:

Any man's death diminishes me,  
because I am involved in mankind.  
And therefore never send to know for whom  
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee (Meditation XVII).

If people realized that every death toll in a way signified the death of a part of themselves, they would be able to live more harmoniously in the world. The brotherhood of man Donne talks about is the dream of every person working for social justice, and for every Christian who truly wants to follow the ideals of Jesus. For those people standing up for the marginalized people of the world and giving a voice to the voiceless, the spiritual oneness that Wordsworth often recognizes is of vital importance to their work.

This brotherhood of man is essential for all religious traditions, and any spiritual person recognizes that the mystery of the world is not constrained to any individual, but is shared by everything that exists. Wordsworth recognizes this harmony, and becomes more aware of the world at large. This spiritual awareness does more than change the way Wordsworth views himself and the world, for it also changes the way he acts. To say that Nature plays an important role in Wordsworth's life, his poetry, and his spirituality would be an understatement. As already discussed, Nature plays a prominent part in everything that is important in Wordsworth's life. This is why it is extremely significant when he says:

Glad sight wherever new with old  
Is joined through some dear homeborn tie;  
The life of all that we behold  
Depends upon that mystery.  
Vain is the glory of the sky,  
The beauty vain of field and grove,  
Unless, while with admiring eye  
We gaze, we also learn to love (Glad sight whenever new with old).

Wordsworth understands that the most important part of his fascination with Nature, his spirituality, and his poetry, is the way he loves. For a man who so revered the beauty of Nature, to say that this beauty is vain if one does not love is an immense claim to the power and necessity of love.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, by Fyodor Dostoevsky, Father Zossima says:

Love all God's creation, the whole and every grain of sand of it. Love every leaf, every ray of God's light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love (Dostoevsky 175).

Wordsworth loves Nature so much that he is able to feel the love of the immanent Being, and so love the rest of the world. Loving God, or the presence, and loving other people and things of the world are not discordant as long as that love is ordered. Loving others and loving God and

recognizing the unity that exists in all things occur in a cycle. If one begins to love the world, as Wordsworth says is most important, he will be able to perceive that all things are connected in the mystery, as Dostoyevsky says. Once this is perceived, one will want to love the world even more, which will in turn lead to an even greater awareness of the eternal mystery, which will then lead to more love. It is a cycle which should be repeated over again, and the first step is recognizing that all things and people are united under the same Presence, and so all things should be loved.

Wordsworth, when describing the importance of those transitory moments of spiritual awareness, says:

Thence did I drink the visionary power;  
And deem not profitless those fleeting moods  
Of shadowy exultation: not for this,  
That they are kindred to our purer mind  
And intellectual life; but that the soul,  
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt  
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense  
Of possible sublimity, whereto  
With growing faculties she doth aspire,  
With faculties still growing, feeling still  
That whatsoever point they gain, they yet  
Have something to pursue (Prelude 2: 310-321).

The value of these moments is vague. One can argue that being attentive for moments that may not last more than a few seconds is vain and unnecessary for they have no practical value.

Wordsworth does not give specific examples as to why these moments are so important, but only says there is an “obscure” idea of “possible sublimity.” People do not know what they remember about those moments, just simply how they have felt. This defense of spirituality can be seen as humorous, since there is no definite gain. However, obscure ideas of possibilities are extremely important for the spiritual person. Spirituality depends upon uncertain ideas since the very thing people are attempting to discover is unknowable truth. These obscure senses do not create passivity in Wordsworth, but encourage him to change the way he acts. He has had a moment

where he recognizes some type of spiritual presence, which changes the way he views the world, himself, and his relation to the world, and from there knows that his soul always has something more to which it can aspire.

The Mystical Body of Christ today is not an elitist group of “believers,” but a true society of all people of the world who are willing to love. It could be argued that Wordsworth does not do anything practical to help others he is connected to through this spiritual oneness. However, the power of his poetry should not be underestimated. In the Jewish tradition, there is a term, *tikkun olam*, which means: “Repair of the world, whether manifested in the social realms as concrete acts of goodness or as a mystical process of restoring the sparks to their proper place” (Kamenetz 302). This mystical process is extremely important when repairing the world.

Although the practical problems of injustice in the world need to be repaired, people everywhere need their sparks to be restored. Spiritual moments, or “sparks,” are important for people of all parts of society, both the rich and the poor. If those people in power recognized the sparks of God or Mystery in their lives, they would possibly gain a greater appreciation of the spiritual connection among all people, and would be able to make the necessary changes to create justice for all. Selfless people need to recognize the sparks in their lives to provide the motivation to continue giving. The marginalized in the world need to restore their sparks to give them the courage to continue living and continue loving. All people need to restore their sparks to remind them there are forces in this world more powerful than the material world people have created for themselves, and there are parts of life more important than what society says is important.

This mystical process of restoring sparks is one in which Wordsworth plays an extremely important role. His poetry, besides possibly inspiring people to change their lives, can restore spiritual sparks to all readers. Moments of awareness can come while reading his poetry. His

poetry can help people remember previous spiritual moments, or it can simply be an affirmation that what one believes or feels about spiritual moments is not vain.

J.A. Appleyard, S.J., when discussing the relationship between spirituality and literature says:

The premise underlying this thesis is that reading deals with the same issues that are the terrain of spiritual growth: identity, relationships with others, what it means to love, the nature and limits of truth and knowing, manners and morals, mortality, evil, death, what we hope for beyond our lives (Mahoney 31).

Art in general has the power of touching the spiritual core of millions of people. It does not matter when something is created or when it is read or viewed, the subjects of love, spirituality, and ultimate meaning are motifs that have inhabited literature for thousands of years. Even though the need for a spiritual life may not be discussed in mainstream culture today, there is still this desire within all people to search for ultimate truth, or to grasp the Mystery that encompasses life. Poetry is read not because of its flowery language and feel-good sentiment, but because it is the genuine approach of a certain individual to seek this unobtainable truth. Because of this, a poet's quest is inevitably linked to our own, since we are all searching for this same truth.

When reading Wordsworth's poetry, readers may feel a certain sense of awe overcome them when they encounter certain passages. There can be "aha" moments where the reader's eyes and hearts are open to the truth that is presented to them in the poem. These times are moments of awareness of the same presence that Wordsworth felt while on the banks of the River Wye. One does not need to leave the comforts of his own home to experience these moments. They can be found in any aspect of life, including poetry. Reading Wordsworth's poetry can also help readers remember certain moments of their lives. While experiencing a

spiritual moment, one may call to mind a certain poem he or she loves. That poem can always serve as a reminder of that one fleeting moment when one was able to see into the life of things, and therefore to make the moment eternal.

Reading the poems of a spiritual writer like Wordsworth can remind one that he is not alone in his search for truth, and the strides one makes in one's spirituality are not in vain. In *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth says,

These beauteous forms,  
Through a long absence, have not been to me  
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:  
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din  
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them  
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;  
And passing even into my purer mind,  
With tranquil restoration: - feelings too  
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,  
As have no slight or trivial influence  
On that best portion of a good man's life,  
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts  
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,  
To them I may have owed another gift,  
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,  
In which the burthen of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened (*Tintern Abbey* 23-40).

In the midst of the “din of town and cities,” and while in “lonely rooms,” readers may be strengthened by a man who has endured similar trials and tribulations and has been supported by his love for Nature. They can be inspired by the way he keeps alive transitory moments to encourage him to live a life where he is real to himself and to the world around him.

Thomas Merton says, “All that we can do with any spiritual discipline is produce within ourselves something of the silence, the humility, the detachment, the purity of heart and the indifference which are required if the inner self is to make some shy, unpredictable manifestation of his Presence” (Merton 298). Awareness of “his Presence” creates in people the necessary humility needed to recognize the dependence of their lives on some other being. People cannot

force this awareness to occur. Reading Wordsworth's poetry can help create the silence of heart necessary to allow spiritual moments to transpire.

Feelings of calm and relaxation are not the desired goal of spirituality, which strives for truth, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant. However, in order to appreciate or recognize this truth, it is necessary to have inner calm and a quiet heart. Once the heart is silenced, one can become aware of the mysterious truth pervading all things and existing outside all things. Then true love of this mystery can happen, which leads to inner transformation, which in turn changes the way people act. This change should happen constantly, for nobody ever completely actualizes all the potential they were born with, and so the spiritual quest never ends. Wordsworth's poetry not only reinforces this idea, but provides the motivation and inspiration to make this inner transformation possible.

## CONCLUSION

Albert Einstein said, “The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed.” William Wordsworth, like most of the writers of the Romantic Era, focused on beauty as a source of truth. The unknown mystery that pervades this world is not only beautiful, but it is truth itself. To close one’s heart to this mystery means missing out on many feelings of pleasure and awe, but, more important, it means closing one’s eyes to truth, and so closing one’s eyes to life. It is paradoxically simple: all one needs to do is keep his or her eyes and heart open to mystery, truth, beauty, and love, and he or she will be led to the unobtainable truth in the world. To not pay attention to the world as it really is means not really living.

William Wordsworth kept his eyes open. He was able to see a field of daffodils in a way that not only enhanced his own spirituality, but allowed him to create a poem that could help many readers on their own spiritual quests. Although spiritual moments may not have come often, he actively kept alive the few that did happen in the spiritually stagnant periods of his life. Through doubts, trials, and sufferings, he always sought to discern who he was, what the world meant to him, and what that mysterious presence really is.

This quest is no different than the ones undertaken by so many people today. We are all searching for truth in some form. It is easy to be led to misrepresentations of truth, but art like that produced by Wordsworth can provide the motivation and inspiration to seek truth as it really is. It is important for people to hold on to the spiritual sparks as they ignite in their lives and use them as strength and inspiration to continue their journeys and remind them that the spiritual quest is not a vain one. To conclude this thesis, I will cite a poem that I believe captures

Wordsworth's search for spirituality throughout his life: a desire to grow in maturity, but retain a child's sense of awe:

My heart leaps up when I behold  
A rainbow in the sky:  
So was it when my life began,  
So is it now I am a man,  
So be it when I shall grow old  
Or let me die!  
The Child is father of the Man:  
And I could wish my days to be  
Bound each to each by natural piety (My Heart Leaps up when I Behold).

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