

The Divine Dynamic

*Exploring the Relationships between Humans,
Earth, and the Creative Power of the Universe*



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Dedication

*To Thomas Berry
Mentor Inspiration Friend*



PROLOGUE



During my early adolescent years I was gifted with some powerful religious experiences in the context of the natural world. While sitting around campfires and staring into that part of the flame that has no boundaries and while looking up at the stars at night and expecting them to speak to me out of their silence, I felt a oneness with the cosmos. I felt part of a much larger reality and at home within that immensity. I experienced wonder, amazement, and even felt loved. Looking back I now know that the whole arrow of my life was being revealed to me in those experiences.

Then I went to the university and majored in chemistry. I absorbed much of what mechanistic science had to teach me. I learned that matter is just stuff and that it has no spiritual dimension, no voice, no within, and carries no mystery. I also studied biology and learned about evolution, dabbled in geology, and became aware of the fantastic ages of the rocks. However, I didn't make any connections between these scientific facts and the meaning of my life. How far I had drifted from my early adolescent experiences.

After several years studying philosophy and theology I found myself working in the Caribbean islands and territories. There I was caught up in the pathos of the human situation. Although surrounded by so much natural beauty, I couldn't see much beyond human pain and suffering and the unjust structures that kept the people oppressed.

I was well into my fifties when my worldview began to change. Like the biblical Noah, I found myself deposited on a new shore. At

times I was scared and confused, and at other times excited and energized. I was undergoing what is popularly known as a paradigm shift. I was living within a new world view and therefore within a new understanding and experience of myself.

Cultural historian Thomas Berry (1914-2009) became my mentor at that time. I attended a lecture that he gave in 1989. I had always been fascinated with the relationship of the Divine and the human, so when Thomas started to speak about the Divine-human relationship my antennae extended to their maximum. For most of my years as a priest, I had been involved in human problems and the challenges of social justice, so when Thomas spoke about the human-human relationship I felt comfortable and much at home. Then he began to speak about the Earth-human relationship. Memories of my early adolescent experiences stirred in my soul. I was eager to learn more.

That *more* came when he wove the three relationships together. I forget his exact words but they went somewhat like this: Continued progress in the Divine-human relationship and continued progress in the human-human relationship, now for the first time ever, depends upon progress in the Earth-human relationship. Upon hearing these words, from deep inside of me, emerged this response: Yes! This is true! At that very moment I knew that for the rest of my life I would focus on the Earth-human relationship, knowing that in doing so I would continue to be working on the human-human and the Divine-human.

This was my primary motivation as I wrote this book. It is my hope that as you read these pages you will begin to understand and experience the Divine-human relationship, the human-human relationship, and the Earth-human relationship that together form one sacred relationship in your one sacred life.

John Surette, SJ
Planet Earth
The Universe
Year 13,700,000,000

I

THE PROMISE OF MORE

*Billions of years before our own appearance in evolution
it was already seeded with promise.*

John Haught



No matter where we focus our attention in the 13.7 billion year unfolding of the Universe, we find the promise of *more*. We find it at the beginning, throughout history, and also in our present moment.

In its original flaring forth the Universe expressed itself as a plasma of charged particles and energy. The temperature of the plasma was in the order of a thousand million degrees centigrade. That primordial furnace contained the promise of atoms. And so it happened, after less than a million years, the plasma cooled and the particles were able to come together and form atoms of hydrogen and helium. Very quickly the Universe took the form of galactic clouds of these gases. These galaxies, billions of them, foamed into existence.

The galaxies held the promise of stars. And so it happened, that due to the attracting force of gravity, the molecules of hydrogen and helium were drawn together where they ignited and the primal stars burst into being. These stars, millions of them in each galaxy, lit up the Universe like a cosmic Christmas tree.

One of the stars contained the promise of our solar system. And so it happened, several billion years ago, that a star (recently named "Tiamat") grew old, swelled, and exploded with the brilliance of a

billion stars, scattering its dust into space. It was a supernova! Again the uniting force of gravity was at work. Over time the dust from that star was drawn together, where it ignited and gave birth to many stars, including the one we call the Sun. It was from the scraps of that birth that our beautiful planet Earth was born.

The early Earth contained the promise of life. And so it happened, some four billion years ago, that conditions were such that life was able to emerge within Earth's ocean in the form of tiny one-celled creatures. For millions of years they cleaned the waters, added

**The *more*
that the Universe
promises points
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adventure.**

oxygen to the atmosphere, and prepared the way for every different and complex form of life that was to follow. Among those who followed were we humans, that most creative and unpredictable of creatures.

The promise of *more* was embedded in humankind. And so it happened over the past 200,000 years that we humans moved from being hunter-gatherers to becoming village and then city dwellers. We dared to dream dreams and see visions. We created language and art, literature and poetry, philosophy and theology, science and technology, and in modern times through our science we have taken into ourselves the very powers of the Universe itself.

The evolving Universe is essentially promise. Its creative energy carries this great promise of abundance, of fulfillment, of *more*. The *more* turns out to be galaxies, stars, planets, Earth, life—including all of us reading these words at this very moment, with all that moves deeply within us.

The *more* of the Universe is often not predictable or even imaginable. A charged particle in the primordial plasma could not have foretold atoms of hydrogen and helium. Those atoms could not have imagined stars and galaxies. Tiamat could not have predicted our beautiful planet Earth, and Earth's early life forms could not have forecast the human adventure. In recent times, for example, who among us could have predicted the disintegration of the Soviet Union or the collapse of Apartheid in South Africa or the emergence within Maoist China of a capitalist economy?

The *more* that the Universe promises often turns out to be a total surprise and as such points to Ultimate Mystery that is *more* than we can ever imagine. It points to a Mystery that is full of surprises and delights in change and adventure. Such a Universe provides the cosmic basis for the hope of fulfillment that resides at the core of the great religions and in the hearts of all peoples. This hope invites us into our future and moves us into action in the present moment.

The promise of *more* also provides us with the basis for an ecological ethic. It nurtures within us humans an intensified sense of responsibility for Earth, within which such promise is embedded. It fosters an ecological justice, a justice that is sensitive to all creatures that carry within themselves the evolutionary Divine Dynamic. It makes evident to us that to contribute to the diminishment of Earth and its human community is to despair of the promise and of the Maker of the promise.

Many look at our twenty-first century world, with its ever-growing problems and perceive an historical process leading to chaos. Experiencing a lessening of their optimism for the future, such people yearn for the "good old days." Others look at the same radical changes that are taking place in our world and perceive the resulting chaos as a necessary condition for the emergence of the something *more* that has been promised from the beginning. These are the people who

will lead us into our future as a human community. They are the ones who experience the Divine Dynamic as a source of potential energy, an energy for moving forward and dealing creatively with the challenges and invitations of our time, an energy for the enhancement of our human adventure.

As citizens of the Universe we know that this Dynamic plays out in our individual human lives. If the promise of *more* is carried by the whole cosmos, we know that the promise is available to us in our present moment. And so it does not surprise us that we are never satisfied and carry deep within ourselves an endless aching need.

Our hearts are restless, and when we experience this restlessness we are participating in the promise of *more* that pulsates throughout the Universe. The universal is present in the particular and the particular participates in the universal. The cosmic yearning for more and our individual yearning for more are one yearning. An evolving Universe encourages us to believe and to trust that there is always...*more*.

Reflection *Taking promises seriously*

They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.
(John 14:21)

Pay attention to these words from the Gospel of John. They contain a promise.

Our hopes are often based on a promise that has been made. What is distinctive of us Christians is our hope in the promise of Easter, of resurrection, of transformation—not just at the end of time but throughout all of time including our present time.

Consider the age of the Universe, an almost unimaginable length of time, and that those of us living in this twenty-first century are members of that Universe. Such a long period of time carries the promise of the Divine commitment to and investment in the Universe. It carries the promise of God being profoundly faithful over deep time and therefore faithful in our present time. Because of this faithfulness we can have hope in the future.

Consider the promise made to Abraham and Sarah that they would have descendents as numerous as the grains of sand of the seashore. Because of that promise, in their old age the couple left behind all that was familiar and set out with hope into a new and unfamiliar land.

Consider the promise made to the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey. Because of that promise, with a hope to offset their anxieties and fears, they set out on some forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

Consider each moment of dawn, as Earth turns toward its Sun. That turning carries the promise of the continuation and the newness of life. With such a promise we are able to enter into each new day with hope in its giftedness. Consider each moment of dusk, as Earth turns away from its Sun. The turning carries the promise that the darkness of night is not the final word. Because of that promise we can close our eyes in sleep, expecting to awake to the gift of a new day in the morning.

Consider each time a seed is planted. The very act of planting carries the promise that as a result of going down into the soil the seed will grow into the total surprise that is a new plant. So the seed is placed into the ground with the hope that it will yield plenty. Consider also the times when we have taken the risk of reaching out in love to another. This risk contains the promise of communion, of relatedness, and of intimacy.

Consider each time we pray for peace or work for justice in our

world. The very act of praying or working carries the promise that the overwhelming brutality of what is happening within our human community need not be the final state of affairs. And so with hope we can continue with our praying and our working.

Consider all the ways in which we humans are diminishing and destroying planet Earth. We are tempted to despair over this pathological situation and wonder if anything can be done to reverse what is happening. Instead, we find the courage to hope for and imagine a better relationship between Earth and its human community. Our hoping for and imagining of this better relationship carries the promise of a new way forward.

All these experiences carry the hope of a more fully human life for all of us. Our hopes carry the promises of a better future, a future that is making its presence felt in our present moment.

Reflection *The Promise Maker*

Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt, but believe." (John 20:27)

It seems that believing came more easily in earlier times than it does now. It seems that it was easier for our parents and grandparents to believe than it is for us, and for us to believe than it is for our children. I am not certain of this, but generally speaking I suspect that it is true.

Why is it true? One answer is to be found in the degree of affluence that many of us in the developed world have achieved. Somehow all of our possessions prevent us from seeing with the eyes of faith. Somehow having so much stuff makes it more difficult to experience our dependence upon the Divine. Somehow having so many material things keeps us from experiencing the social and spiritual

things. We are reminded of the Gospel teaching that it is more difficult for the rich person than it is for the poor person to enter the Kingdom of God. We are reminded of the often-repeated invitation of Jesus to those of us who have much that we should share what we have with others.

A second reason it is more difficult to believe in modern times has to do with the ever-increasing pace of change in all aspects of our lives. For example, prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) there was little change in our Church, and so the answers to the big and important questions we received when we were younger were to a large extent the same answers that were given when we were older. But now, many of the answers given when we were younger today sound quaint, somewhat out-of-date, inadequate, and not helpful in the light of our modern problems and challenges. In earlier times, when life was more static and involved less change, believing was easier. In our twenty-first century, when life is anything but static and unchanging, being persons of faith is something to which we need to give more attention, time, and energy.

A third reason that believing is more difficult today has to do with our diminished awareness of the Divine promises to us. The faith of Abraham and Sarah was founded on God's promise. The faith of the Israelites during their forty years of wandering in the desert was sustained by God's promise. The faith of Jesus and his disciples was steeped in the promise of the Reign of God, a world of justice, peace, and love. We Christians are part of that long line coming down from Abraham and Sarah through Jesus and his disciples. Accordingly, each of these promises is also made to us.

We once thought that the Universe was unchanging. Now we know that it has been unfolding for billions of years and that it carries the promise of change for billions of years to come. As citizens of that Universe and its Earth our lives also carry this same promise

of change. And so we know that our lives and therefore our faith will continue to unfold and that new truths will be revealed to us as the years unfold.

The life of each of us, no matter what stage we are in, carries God's promise of something more. For Catholics, our Church, despite its slowness to be concerned about the fate of Earth and its clerical abuse scandal, carries God's promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against her. Our world, despite all of the violence and war, carries God's promise of becoming a city shining on the mountaintop. Our Earth, despite all its ecological diminishment and destruction, carries the Divine promise of greater abundance.

Reflection *Dancing on the cutting edges*

*Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.
(Luke 5:10)*

In this story from the Gospel of Luke, the apostle Peter is standing on the shore of Lake Gennesarth with his sandals off and his knees shaking out of fear as Jesus calls him to the cutting edge of his life, as Jesus calls him to discipleship. Do you remember a similar story about Moses before the burning bush? In that story Moses stands there with his sandals off and his knees shaking out of fear as he is being invited into the cutting edge of his life by the Holy One whose name he does not know. He is being called to be the leader of his people.

Where do we find the cutting edges of our lives? Certainly not sitting in front of the television, stretched out for hours, numbed and drugged by the onslaught of images. Certainly not at the mall, buying stuff and more stuff, perhaps to numb the diminishment of meaning in our lives.

So, where does each of us find our cutting edge? I want to an-

swer this question by asking another. What is the Divine will for us? Centuries of sermons have been preached to shed light on this question. Books up to the ceiling and beyond have been written in attempts to answer it. The answer I offer to you today is my personal one: God's will is that we deal creatively and not destructively with our life's menu. The cutting edges of our lives are revealed to us in the items printed on our menus. We need not look elsewhere. Those menus, of course, are always changing. They are different today than they were five, ten, or more years ago, and will be different the same number of years from now.

Sometimes we deal destructively with our menus. For example, we deny what is printed there, or we run away from what is printed there, or we try to change the menu—change that in many cases is not possible. God's Universe and its Earth also have a menu, and it is characterized by change and creativity. The Creative Spirit is present and acting throughout the cosmos and therefore within our lives. It is a Spirit that invites us to participate as co-creators in the cosmic creativity and embrace the Divine promise that our efforts will bear fruit.

Does your life's menu invite you to deal creatively with a challenge within a relationship? Does it invite you to deal creatively with a medical diagnosis that has recently presented itself? Does it invite you to deal creatively with the fact that you are growing older? Does it invite you to deal creatively with our present day catastrophic climate disruption and the diminishment and destruction of Earth's life-systems?

All of these invitations point us to the cutting edges of our lives. These cutting edges are the places where our creativity is called forth, where our faith, hope, and love are required, and where our doubts, anxieties, and fears are to be kept under control. If we listen deeply within while standing on our cutting edges, we can hear the words: Do not be afraid for you have all the gifts you need to deal creatively with your own menu.

Reflection *Something new*

Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43:18-19)

This message from Isaiah was somewhat strange to the Israelites, as they were a people of memory. It was the memory of Yahweh's mighty past deeds on their behalf, especially leading them out of slavery in Egypt through the desert into a new life in the Promised Land. Isaiah did not throw out the past, but he did call upon the people to look beyond it. They were too dependent on their past, on their tradition, and so they were blind to perceiving the newness that their God was promising and bringing about.

If we look at the story of the Universe we will see that it too is a history defined by change and by newness. 13.7 billion years ago the Universe flared into existence. It was total surprise. It was a newness. 4.5 billion years ago, out of the cosmic dust resulting from the explosion of a star, our planet Earth formed. It was total surprise. It was a newness.

Five hundred and twenty million years ago, responding to evolutionary dynamics, fish emerged within Earth's ocean. It was total surprise. It was a newness. One hundred and thirty million years ago, flowers, in all their colors and fragrances, began to spread across the land. It was total surprise. It was a newness.

Some 200,000 years ago, the first humans, in all their beauty and unpredictability, appeared in East Africa. They were total surprise. They were a newness.

Some 2000 years ago, in Bethlehem of Judea, Jesus of Nazareth was born and later proclaimed God's Reign of justice, peace, and love throughout all of Galilee. He was total surprise. He was a newness.

Whatever your age is today, it was that number of years ago that you floated in the waters of your mother's womb. You were total surprise. You were a newness. There never has been and there never will be another you.

God's Universe values surprise, values newness. What each one of us will create within our lives will be a newness. What our Church will create in this time of its testing will be a newness. What all peoples will do to reverse the withering of Earth's life-systems will be a newness.

We cannot go into the future without our past and our traditions but these cannot lead us there. We need to look beyond the past and not hold on too tightly to it. What leads us into the future are our imaginations, our creativities, our dreams, and our allurements. We are people of the newness that the Divine has promised and the newness that the Divine is bringing about within us: "See, I am doing something new! Do you not perceive it?"

Reflection *Our deepest desires*

*O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen...
Destruction and violence are before me;
strife and contention arise. (Habakkuk 1:2-3)*

Habakkuk is one of the twelve minor prophets of Israel. The dialog between Habakkuk and God follows a pattern that is common to all of the prophets. The first thing that happens is that Habakkuk complains to God, saying that he prays a lot but receives no answers.

One of the duties of a prophet is to be a watchperson. Habakkuk is carrying out this duty. He is watching what is going on in his society. He is reading the signs of the times. As a result he finds himself in circumstances that he experiences to be overwhelming. He

cries out to God that there is so much evil and suffering in the land.

Does all this sound familiar? It should! We twenty-first century people also find ourselves in circumstances that are overwhelming. There is economic insecurity, new cancers and diseases, growth in conflicts, and a decrease in the zest for life among many people. We are also beginning to realize that planet Earth itself is suffering much pathology. Like Habakkuk, we too cry out, saying that destruction and violence are everywhere.

After Habakkuk complains God responds to the complaint. God's response takes the form of a vision that is given to the prophet, but we are not told what the vision is. So, the question for us moderns is the following: After all our prayers of petition and all our complaints to God, what is the vision that is given to us? Regardless of our age, each of us has received a vision. For some of us the vision is clear, and for others it is somewhat vague, but the vision is there somewhere deep within. Some questions that can help us to identify our vision are these: For what do we dream? What are our deepest desires? What is alluring us? What is the *more* for which we yearn? For what are we even willing to give our lives?

Is it a fuller life for the children and grandchildren? Better relationships within families? More love and less strife among peoples and nations? A less destructive and a more mutually enhancing relationship between Earth and its human community? Whatever our vision is we need to cherish it. It is a gift that we have received. Whatever our vision is we need to embrace it.

Our vision will lead us into what has been promised. No one wants to drift into the future. We all want to go into it with some sense of direction and purpose. So how do we stir into a flame the vision with which we have been gifted? I offer one simple suggestion. We need to desire deeply that our vision become a reality. We need to begin and end each day of our lives by making that desire our morning

and evening prayer. As we pray that our vision be actualized, so shall we act with passion and zest. And slowly but surely, certainly in small ways and perhaps even in some big ways, our vision will become incarnated within our lives and within our Earth.

Reflection *Cry out in the deserts*

In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (Isaiah 40:3)

The dictionary defines a desert as a wilderness, a dry, barren region and as a parched land without water where there is danger, hardship, and even death for those who lose their way. The desert is where Isaiah says we should prepare.

As we move into this first century of the third millennium we modern people find ourselves living in many wastelands or deserts where daily we experience dangers, hardships, and even deaths.

There are the deserts deep within our own souls such as the desert of hopelessness, the desert of despair, the desert of fear, the desert of discouragement, and the desert of doubt. These deserts are not life-nurturing places. In fact, they can be death places, and to the extent that we live our lives in such wastelands we are indeed more dead than alive.

There are deserts within our Church where sexual abuse of children by priests occurs, where women are denied their proper roles, and where the voices of lay people go unheard. These deserts are not life-nurturing places. In fact, they can be death places, and to the extent that our Church lives in such places it too is indeed more dead than alive.

There are deserts deep within our country, and within other countries as well, where the gap between the rich and the poor grows

ever wider, where militarism rules the day and where the legitimate social needs of people are increasingly ignored. These deserts are not life-nurturing places. They can be death places, and to the extent that countries live in such wastelands they are indeed more dead than alive.

There are deserts within Earth. I am not speaking of the geographical deserts of the African Sahara or of the American Southwest. I am speaking of the desert of catastrophic climate disruption, the desert of nuclear wastes, and the desert of ever increasing pollution of air, water, and soil. These deserts are not life-nurturing places. They can be death places, and to the extent that Earth experiences these pathologies Earth is more dead than alive.

A quite different view of deserts is to be found in Scripture. It was in the desert that Israel met Yahweh and that promises were made. That meeting was experienced as shalom or peace. It was also in the desert that Yahweh embraced Israel, made promises, and recovered her love. That recovery was experienced as shalom or peace. The Scripture portrays this loving embrace as causing the desert to blossom.

Each of us, according to our individual talents and strengths, is called to venture into some of the deserts that I have mentioned to prepare the way and bring peace there.

For example, that desert deep within you where you experience only anxiety and fear. Go there and cry out that you are unconditionally loved by God...and experience peace there.

Another example is that desert in our country where the drums of war seem to be always beating and where the Industrial-Military establishment gets money overflowing while the poor and the homeless, the jobless and the uneducated, and the other oppressed of society have their needs increasingly ignored. Go into that desert and make straight a highway for our God by crying out that we are a nation under God and our God is not a God of war but a God of peace

and justice...and bring peace and justice into those deserts.

A final example is the desert that is the ever-diminishing vitality of Earth's life-systems. Go into that desert proclaiming that we humans are Earthlings and what we do to Earth we do to ourselves... and bring a blossoming into that desert.

Reflection *Singing songs of freedom*

All the leading priests and the people also were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the Lord.... (2 Chronicles 36:14-23)

As a result of the sinful behavior described in this passage, God's chosen people, who had been led out of slavery in Egypt, found themselves once again taken into slavery. Their enemies had set fire to their Temple and torn down the walls of Jerusalem. The people were now captives in Babylon.

Exile in Babylon meant that the voices they heard, the customs they were forced to obey, the laws they were compelled to observe, were all cruel reminders that their freedom had been forfeited and that they were no longer at home. This experience of captivity was bitter and robbed them of their dignity and joy. By the rivers of Babylon they sat and wept as they remembered their homeland and grieved that they were unable to sing their sacred songs. How they asked, can we sing about what moves most deeply within our souls in this foreign place?

However, after some seventy years in exile, Cyrus, the king of Persia set the people free and rebuilt their Temple in Jerusalem. Once again the people were liberated from slavery and were able to sing their songs. They were born again as a people. Sing a song of freedom sisters! Sing a song of freedom brothers!

Without much effort we can compose a twenty-first century version of this story. In our own time we are adding war upon war, violence upon violence, injustice upon injustice. We are making people of other nations, cultures, and religions our enemies and they are making us their enemies. We are polluting Earth and in the process we are making ourselves toxic. We are worshipping at the altars of the gods of nationalism, individualism, sexism, militarism, consumerism, and a few other gods as well.

The result is that we find ourselves in a twenty-first century Babylon. We have misused our freedom and have chosen death rather than life. Many aspects of our existence have become bitter aspects that rob us of our dignity and our joy. We have spent billions of dollars on the military and yet feel less secure. We have spent millions in our shopping malls and yet find that our lives continue to feel empty. So now we sit by the rivers of our modern Babylon and shed our tears and wonder if it is possible to sing about what moves deeply within our souls.

The answer, of course, is that it is possible. God desires life for us and not death, freedom and not bondage. God is rich in love for us. This love is always being offered, and it carries a justice for Earth and its humans, a promise of greater abundance. All we need do is embrace it.

In this embrace our cries of lamentation will be replaced with songs of joy. We will become sources of love and justice. We will become a blessing for others and for Earth. The promise of more will be realized within us and through us. As a result of this blessing things will never be the same again for Earth and for its humans.

Sing a song of freedom sisters! Sing a song of freedom brothers!

Reflection *↻* Giving increase

*They went to Capernaum; and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority.
(Mark 1:21-22)*

There is nothing unusual in this story from Mark. Following the custom of his time, Jesus, as an adult male member of the community, took his turn at teaching those gathered in the synagogue. What is unusual is the quality of his teaching. It was so different from that of the scribes who were the official teachers and interpreters of the law. Those gathered in the synagogue recognized this unusual quality. Some marveled at it and perhaps some were disturbed by it.

I want to submit three words for your reflection. They are: author, augment, and authority. Notice that they all begin with the letters “au.” This “au” derives from ancient languages and it means “to give increase.”

Author...the person who authors a new cookbook makes some new recipes available and thus gives increase to the number of menu possibilities for the home and for the restaurant. Augment...the person who joins a group working to help the homeless augments that group of workers, thus giving increase to its size and effectiveness. Authority...the teacher who teaches in a way that influences, excites, and activates the imaginations of the students is a teacher who gives increase to them.

Many who listened to the teachings of the rabbi Jesus noticed that their lives were enhanced. They were changed by what they heard. They experienced an increase within themselves. True authority is authority that gives an increase, while false authority is authority that gives a decrease.

Parents have authority over their children. They can spoil their children and prevent them from growing into the unique persons they might become, thus giving them a decrease. Or they can encourage the children and give them the space they need to learn, grow, make mistakes, and develop their talents, thus giving them an increase.

Friends and spouses have authority over each other. They can neglect to grow their relationship, thus giving each other a decrease. Or they can strive to nurture and deepen their relationship thus gifting each other with an increase.

The clergy have authority over the laity in the Church. The clergy can put down the laity, treat them as children, and not listen to their advice, thus giving them a decrease. Or the clergy can encourage the laity to take their rightful responsibility and affirm in them the power they have to carry out these responsibilities, thus giving them an increase.

How desperately we modern people need to receive increase in our lives. Some of us are so busy attending to the demands of daily life that we yearn for some small increase as we seek some quiet or meditation time. Many of us are so caught up in our materialistic and consumerist culture that our souls cry out for some increase in meaning and significance.

May we be people of the “au.” May we desire each day to be recipients of and givers of increase. May it be a receiving and a giving that will lead us into more abundant life. May it be a receiving and giving that will lead our families, our communities, all of humanity, and Earth itself into the greater abundance that is promised.