



“Mysticism Revisited” “Sacred Stories in Glass and Stone” A Pilgrimage in the Washington National Cathedral

Led by Kathleen Henderson Staudt using the words of Evelyn Underhill

Pilgrim Gallery: Invitation to Pilgrimage

Underhill on the spiritual journey as pilgrimage: “ Thus by a path which never departs from the human landscape we are led out and up beyond the human landscape, to a Divine revelation that yet is deeply human, and a human revelation that is completely Divine. -- Evelyn Underhill, *The School of Charity* (1937))

The special atmosphere, the hoarded beauty, the evocative yet often archaic symbolism of a Gothic Cathedral, with the constant reminiscences of past civilizations and old levels of culture, its broken fragments and abandoned altars, its conservation of eternal truths—the intimate union in it of the sublime and homely, the successive and abiding aspects of reality —make it the most fitting of all images of the Church, regarded as the spiritual institution of humanity.” — Underhill, *The Life of the Spirit and the Life of Today* (1921)

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Creation Portal

To stand alongside the generous Creative Love, maker of all things visible and invisible (including those we do not like) and see them with the eyes of the Artist-Lover is the secret of sanctity. (*The School of Charity* (1937))

Bishop’s Garden

All gardeners know the importance of good root development before we force the leaves and flowers. So our life in God should be deeply rooted and grounded before we presume to expect to produce flowers and fruits; otherwise we risk shooting up into one of those lanky plants which can never do without a stick. We are constantly beset by the notion that we ought to perceive ourselves springing up quickly, like the seed on stony ground; show striking signs of spiritual growth. But perhaps we are only required to go on quietly, making root, growing nice and bushy; docile to the great slow rhythm of life. (*The School of Charity* (1937))

Walk to the Rose Garden

Like the story of the Cross, so too the story of man’s spirit ends in a garden: in a place of birth and fruitfulness, of beautiful and natural things. Divine Fecundity is its secret: existence, not for its own sake, but for the sake of a more abundant life. It ends with the coming forth of divine humanity, never again to leave us, living in us, and with us, a pilgrim, a worker, a guest at our table, a sharer at all hazards in life. The mystics witness to this story: waking very early they have run on before us, urged by the greatness of their love. We, incapable as yet of this sublime

encounter, looking in their magic mirror, listening to their stammered tidings, may see far off the consummation of the race. (*Mysticism* (1911))

Prodigal Son Sculpture:

I invite you to look closely at this sculpture of "The Prodigal Son" that it stands at the head of the rose garden. There is a "union" portrayed here. When you see it at first, it seems as if the two bodies, the father's and the son's, are all one -- the sculptor leaves it obvious that they are hewn out of one piece of stone. Only as you look longer can you see the separate bodies emerging out of the unity between them -- their leaning on one another-- the father delighted to welcome the son, the son casting himself on his father's love, and lost in this embrace. Even the form of the repentant son's body, except for its outline on the sculpture, is lost in the arms of his loving father. If you look long enough at this sculpture, you may learn something about the depth of God's desire to welcome us into prayer, no matter what spiritual shape we are in, and the fact that we are welcome, whatever our sins or deficiencies, into that prayer.

Evelyn Underhill knew this in her own experience-- we know from some of her private papers that when she looked into herself, she struggled viciously with her own sense of sinfulness, and was agonizingly, perhaps unfairly, hard on herself in her own self-examinations. Yet if we look at the unfolding of her life, we see her moving out of self-occupation, and bringing others with her, into greater and deeper and somehow easier, more natural adoration of the Holiness of God. With this comes her movement toward deeper, fuller, and public intercession, so that in the last years of her life, suffering from ill health yet persistent in her teaching and writing, she was wholly committed to pacifism as a response to the radical love of God for all creation. She joined a fellowship of others who were praying that the world would be saved by the peace that passes all understanding -- and her public writing exhorted Christians to follow in the way of peace, whatever the cost, exposing herself to ridicule and to the pain of having her work dismissed and ignored. All of this seems to reflect her increased willingness to enter the embrace of God, entrusting everything to the divine love, and accepting the unlikely but important work that she knew that that love was yearning to do through her teaching and her writing.

Underhill writes in *Mysticism* The mystic knows [his] task to be the attainment of Being, Eternal Life, union with the One, the "return to the Father's heart"; for the parable of the Prodigal Son is to [him] the history of the universe. (*Mysticism* (1911))

Stained glass of Bethlehem Chapel

It sometimes happens that one goes to see a cathedral which is famous for the splendour of its glass; only to discover that, seen from outside, the windows give us no hint whatever of that which awaits us within. They all look alike; dull, thick and grubby. From this point of view we already realize that they are ancient, important, the proper objects of reverence and study. But we cannot conceive that solemn coloured mystery, that richness of beauty and meaning which is poured through them upon those who are inside the shrine. (*The School of Charity*)

The Way of Peace

Peace is a word which echoes through the New Testament. It was one of the gifts offered by Christ to those who followed Him; a peace which came from the Transcendent, which was based

on a deep confidence in God and a complete acceptance of the action or non-action of God. "My peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth. . . let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid, . . . He stood among them, and said Peace . . . The true pacifist is a redeemer, and must accept with joy the redeemer's lot. . . self-offered, without conditions, for the peace of the world. (*A Meditation on Peace*)

Bethlehem Chapel

STONE: Kathy Spaar point out foundation stone under the altar, on which is inscribed "And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us" .

Evelyn Underhill writes:

The Word, the Thought of God, made flesh and dwelling among us, accepted our conditions, did not impose His. He took the journey we have to take, with the burden we have to carry. We cannot then take refuge in our unfortunate heredity, temperament or health when faced by the demands of the spiritual life. It is as complete human beings, taught and led by a complete Humanity, that we respond to the pressure of God. . . Grace does not work *in vacuo*: it works on the whole man, that many-levelled creature; and shows its perfect work in One who is described as Very Man, and of whom we cannot think without the conflict of Gethsemane and the surrender of the Cross. (*The School of Charity*)

Looking "from the inside" at the stained glass, especially window depicting the magi:
Underhill Writes:

The story of the Magi shows the new life which has appeared within the rich texture of our normal experience, casting its purifying radiance upon the whole existence of man: the Light of the world, not the sanctuary lamp of a well-appointed church. Cozy religious exclusivism is condemned in this mystery. It is easy for the pious to join the shepherds and say, "Look at those extraordinary intellectuals wandering about after a star; they seem to have no religious sense. Look what curious gifts and odd types of self-consecration they are bringing; not at all the sorts of people one sees in church. Yet the child who began by receiving those unexpected pilgrims had a woman of the street for His most faithful friend, and two thieves for His comrades at the last. Looking at these extremes, so deeply significant of the Christian spirit, we can learn something, perhaps, of the height and depth and breadth of that divine generosity into which our narrow and fragmentary loves must be absorbed. (*The School of Charity*)

Resurrection chapel

Underhill writes:

The ancient Easter sequence sums it up:

Death and Life strove together in awful combat;
The Lord of Life, who died, living reigns

And yet this reign, with its strange triumphant beauty, is not manifested in any of the sensational incidents of which Apocalyptic writers had dreamed; by a sudden coming in the Clouds of Heaven, or by the shattering of our ordinary human world. Still true to the Divine method of hiddenness and humility, it comes back into that world very quietly; brought by love, and only recognized by love. . . . Personal needs, friendly affections, become the consecrated

channels of the immortal Love, which declares its victories by a quiet and tender benediction poured out on ordinary life. The glory of the Divine Humanity is not shown in the Temple and the Synagogue. He seeks out His nervous followers within the arena of ordinary life; meets them behind the locked doors of the Upper Room, waits for them in early morning by the lake side, walks with them on the country road, and suddenly discloses Himself in the breaking of bread. The characters of the old life which are carried through into this new and glorified life are just those which express a homely and cherishing love. It is the One who has fed the multitude, pacified the distracted, washed the dusty feet of His followers and given Himself to be their food, who now re-enters their troubled lives; for their sake, not for His own. (*The School of Charity*)

Center for Prayer and Pilgrimage

“Thou when thou prayest, enter into thy closet --and *shut the door*.” I think we can almost see the smile with which Christ said those three words: and those three words can define what we have to try to do. Anyone can retire to a quiet place and have a thoroughly unquiet time In it -- but that is not making a Retreat! It is the shutting of the door which makes the whole difference between a true Retreat and a worried religious weekend.

Christ said Shut, and He meant Shut. A complete barrier deliberately set up, with you on one side along with God and everything else without exception on the other side. The voice of God is very gentle; we cannot hear it if we let other voices compete. (*The Fruits of the Spirit*)

Chapel of Joseph of Arimathea. Taize worship

Scripture appointed for the Feast of Evelyn Underhill is *Wisdom* 7:24-8:1

“Every person, then, who awakens to consciousness of a Reality which transcends the normal world of sense -- however small, weak, imperfect that consciousness may be-- is put upon a road which follows at low levels the path which the mystic treads at high levels.” (*Mysticism* (1911))
“To be a mystic is simply to participate here and now in that real and eternal life; in the fullest, deepest sense which is possible to [humanity]. It is to share, as a free and conscious agent -- not a servant, but a [child]-- in the joyous travail of the Universe: its mighty onward sweep through pain and glory towards its home in God.” (*Mysticism* (1911))