

Dear People Whom God Loves,

LOVE THE BIG PICTURE

What I write is the big picture as I see it. It is not provable by science. Reason is wonderful but reason isn't the only kind of knowing. There is another way of knowing that is not based on reason but is reasonable.

Reason can tell us many wonderful things about reality. To say that there is no reality that reason cannot reach is a belief. It is a reasonable belief but it is still a belief.

To say that there is reality that can be known by another kind of knowing is a belief. It is a reasonable belief but it is still a belief. That is why we call it faith.

I cling to this belief for several reasons. First, because it gives ultimate meaning to reality, because it tells me that reality is ultimately good, because it confirms my conviction that love is what is ultimate and finally because it helps me become a more compassionate and merciful person.

Second, because people blessed with mysticism see that depth of reality.

Third, history shows that people of all times and situations have always searched for something more than meets the eye.

Fourth, the doctrines of the church-Creation, Incarnation, Indwelling of the Holy Spirit and Heaven (this one is easily poorly understood) point to the goodness of reality.

Finally, the first letter of John gives scriptural meaning by saying "God is love".

We start with what exists when there is no universe, no time, and no space. A total emptiness of beings. There is nothing that can be pictured.

We might say that there was no-thing but that doesn't mean nothing. The Easterns call this a pregnant void. I understand this to mean that there is a fullness but no-thing.

This fullness is love (LOVE). Love is not a thing but it is real, the realest and deepest of everything. I will use the word LOVE to refer to Ultimate Reality, which refers to what we usually call God.

This brings us to **Creation**. LOVE gives birth to the universe. With the Big Bang, time and space begin. We now have creatures. We now have created beings who are not the source of their own existence. Their existence depends on LOVE. If LOVE were withdrawn creatures would instantly not exist. Creation doesn't mean that creatures just owe this beginning existence to LOVE but that that their existence is eternally dependent on LOVE.

This says to me that LOVE is continually present to creatures. I would even say that LOVE is in creatures in some mysterious way. This shows the value of creation that calls for our respect.

This can be hard to accept when we see the destructive power, the tragedy, the unfairness of the universe and when we come to sentient creatures, the pain and suffering that is so widespread.

When I think of this I realize that to be a creature necessarily means to be imperfect. I also realize that because LOVE is in and through all of this that we are being drawn painfully and seemingly haphazardly with successes and reverses, tragedies and unfairness toward perfection.

For me life only has meaning when I look at the big picture. Perhaps this was the best and maybe the only way for LOVE to do it.

LOVE (working through evolution) continues working after the Big Bang through the formation and explosion of stars, the formation of planets including our earth.

Our earth gradually forms primitive life and continues until the appearance of human beings.

With human beings comes a radical difference. We remain connected with the rest of creation and are a part of it. The difference is that we have the ability to love.

We now have not only uncreated love (LOVE), we also have created love. We have Big Love and little loves. Now LOVE is working in and through the rest of creation but also through us little created loves.

This means that we can be conscious co-workers with LOVE when we choose to act with love. This also says to me that we have a special connection and relationship with LOVE. There is a relationship between Big Love and us little loves.

Meister Eckhart (the medieval mystic) said that it is hard to tell where we (I think he uses the word soul) end and God begins.

Our words are not able to express this mystery very well. The Easterns point to this by saying that God and we are not one and at the same time we are not two. If we say we are one - we are wrong. If we say that we are two - we are wrong.

In English we call this non-dual. Not one but not two. Not two but not one. I think that it is good for us to live in mystery and allow the mystery to transform us.

Some insight into this mystery of non-duality is available to us when we have experienced deep love for someone. When we experience this love with someone we are not one but we are not two. We are not two but we are not one. We are not separate but we are not one.

We are not the other - but we are the other. What affects the other affects us, but at the same time we are not affected in exactly the same way as the other.

The other is not an object but someone. Someone like me - but not me. I am in them and they are in me but we are not the same. We are incredibly close but we are not merged.

This is the kind of knowing that can only come from experiencing love. It cannot be attained by reason or scientific exploration. It is a reality that is beyond the grasp of reason and science.

I think that this is why the mystics tell us that we can only know God through love.

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love." I Jn.ch. 4 v. 7 & 8.

My understanding is that God is drawing us through all of our imperfections, tragedies, losses and sins to the state where love is what is. It is my belief that this Infinite Love is, in the long run (not necessarily in the short run) more powerful than anything else. This is why to name God (LOVE) is the most helpful to me.

This brings us to the **Incarnation.** Our belief that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. While we Christians believe that something essentially different happened in the Incarnation, we must not draw that conclusion that LOVE was not active in a powerful way before Jesus walked the earth.

I will not use words beyond "*Jesus is fully human and fully divine*". I see that as sufficient for us to be drawn into the mystery of Incarnation and to be transformed by the mystery.

The mystery tells me of the incredible closeness that LOVE desires to have with us little loves. Not distant closeness but closeness of profound intimacy. I don't think that we can exaggerate the love that LOVE is.

Perhaps we could say that LOVE wanted to walk the human journey with us and share our pain, suffering and tragedies. And in sharing this journey, this LOVE came to heal our many wounds, especially our wounds of the spirit. These are the wounds of our unloving choices that we call sins. This tells me that LOVE is a saving love and Jesus is Savior.

Isn't it true that when we love someone deeply and they are on the wrong track - that we are not interested in condemning them or getting mad at them, but only healing them and helping them find a better and happier path.

When we little loves are at our best and respond in this healing and loving way, it calls us to believe that Big Love will infinitely more be the same with all of us. I sometimes wonder if our human understanding of "justice" distorts our vision of LOVE.

I understand that our life as creatures will often bring recompense for our bad deeds. That is the way it is. I also see it as valuable. We need to learn accountability.

My experience is that LOVE often works through reversals - not to punish us - but to wake us up so that we begin the difficult and usually painful path of healing. LOVE doesn't cause pain but works in pain to bring healing.

I see LOVE as working though good stuff and bad stuff to heal and save us.

How does LOVE want us to live? I believe that the life of Jesus tells us better than anything else. I see Jesus reaching out to anyone who was suffering.

He reached out to the sick in need of healing. He was always concerned with making people whole no matter who they were or how they were broken.

He reached out to the lepers who were pushed out of the community. He reached out to Mary of Magdala - out of whom he cast seven devils. He reached out to the woman caught in the act of adultery. He reached out to the woman who was known in the town as a sinner (prostitute). He reached out to the man born blind. He reached out to the despised tax collectors even though they were defrauding people. His reaching out brought about transformation in some of them... He reached out to the sinners (those deficient in following the religious laws). He reached out to the poor. The Roman tax and the Temple tax were making people destitute. He reached out to the religiously righteous-those who looked down on those who didn't follow the religious law as well as they did. However, he did this in a different way by strong and harsh words. He called them whited sepulchers - white and shiny on the outside but inside full of dead peoples bones.

Why did he use a different tactic with those who were religiously righteous? I suspect that it was a form of tough love. Religious righteousness is an insidious form of badness. When we are religiously righteous and look down on others we have in some way convinced ourselves that we are really very good. We are trapped. We don't see how we are distorted inside. We are blind to who we are. That is why conversion is so difficult.

My guess is that while Jesus felt anger at them because they were hurting people, he also loved them. He needed to use strong and harsh language to crack through the hard shell of religious righteousness that was spiritually destroying them. He wanted their conversion and transformation.

In a way spiritual sins are more dangerous than fleshly sins. They are more dangerous because they are more hidden from us and allow us to hurt people and be confused by the thought that we are doing good.

LOVE walked in our world while Jesus walked our earth. But Jesus died and walks our earth no more. Does this mean that LOVE is no longer with us? No. LOVE is still with us. Christ is still with us.

This brings us to our third doctrine. **The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit.** Jesus tells his disciples that it is better that he go, "for otherwise the Advocate (Spirit) will not come to you". The message was that he would ask the Father to send Spirit to us. Perhaps Jesus is saying that we are better off with the Spirit than those who walked with him in the flesh. Confer Jn. 16, 26; Mt. 10, 19-20; Jn. 16, 7; Jn. 14, 26.

The doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit points to our belief that LOVE actually lives in us. Big Love lives in us little loves. Or we might say, Uncreated Love lives in us created loves.

Again, we are not one - but we are not two. We are not one but we are not separate. LOVE is the power that can transform us ever more deeply into loving mercy. Our role is small but essential. Our role is to be willing (at least a little willing) to allow LOVE to transform us. This transformation is a gift. Our role is to be willing to accept the gift. Remember LOVE loves but does not force. The push often comes from the ups and downs, through our virtues and sins, through our loving and unloving. I think that LOVE even helps us do our little part. St. Thomas Aquinas said "God moves us freely".

LOVE invites us and helps us let go of our deflated ego (where we believe that we are worthless, no good and hopeless cases) and to let go of our inflated ego (where we believe that we are supposed to control everything and are more important and valuable to LOVE than others.

We are all good and valuable. That is because LOVE lives in us. As our spiritual journey deepens our appreciation of that truth draws us to be more humble and more grateful. To realize that we are ordinary like everyone else: that we are the beloved of LOVE.

This brings us to the last of our four doctrines - **Heaven.** When I was younger I thought that that Heaven was a place – a place where God would reward us for being good. Being good meant being obedient to the Ten Commandments and to the teachings of the church.

Counterbalancing this I thought that Hell was another place -a place of eternal suffering and horrible punishment for committing mortal sin. Again, the emphasis was on disobedience.

The kernel of value in my early belief was that we must learn to be accountable for our decisions and actions. This is a very important lesson. We must learn that there are consequences to our choices and actions. If we don't learn this we severely harm others and ourselves.

It is understood now in our church - this was made clear by Pope John Paul II - that Heaven and Hell are not places that we go to after death. They are states of being. Heaven is the state of total love and peace. Hell is the state of total hate and torment. Love and hate both bring consequences. Love brings a deepening of who we ourselves are as humans and also helps that deepening in other humans. Hate diminishes who we are as humans and can have the same effect on other humans.

I further suggest that rewards and punishments have a place in the earlier stages of our spiritual journey but we are called to grow more deeply than that. As we mature we are able to move beyond rewards and punishments and our motivations become important.

- If I am good to you so that I will be rewarded with Heaven, am I caring about you or do I just want to get my reward?
- If I am good to you so that I don't get punished with Hell, am I caring about you - or do I just want to escape the punishment?

There is a difference between motivation coming from desire to receive a reward or escape punishment and motivation coming from a desire to do what is loving and good for people.

I am not here to judge where people are on their spiritual journeys. It is my intention to encourage spiritual growth. There are behaviors that one could believe indicate that someone would deserve Hell, yet I am reluctant to judge anyone in this regard. There are many factors – some inflicted by others, some self-inflicted – that can be variables underlying that behavior. Only God (LOVE) can truly know the person and their intentions. I believe that judgment from LOVE comes with the goal to facilitate the ultimate healing.

It is also true that as a society, there are times when people must "judge" another so that they can be restrained from hurting themselves or others. We might call this judging the action and not the person. Those who are restrained

on earth may still not be considered evil in the eyes of God because of the unseen factors that drive the *intention* of their misguided behaviors.

As an aside: There is a tendency for groups to draw others to their level but are afraid to let them go beyond that level. A level that is different - even if it is a deeper level - seems wrong and is disturbing to those who are not at that place. This kind of fear is also true for some individuals and can be a crucial factor when someone is in a leadership position.

What is the doctrine of Heaven telling us about LOVE? God (LOVE) is the uncreated LOVE that is perfect. We are the created loves that are imperfect. Creatures are by definition limited and imperfect. We have to grow toward perfection.

Heaven tells us that God (LOVE) is drawing us through all of our trials, sins, suffering, unlovableness and injustices to the deepest state of love and peace that is possible for us.

We will not *be* uncreated LOVE (God) but we will be *created love* that resembles uncreated LOVE (God) as much as possible. We and God (LOVE) will not be one but we will not be two. We will not be merged but we will not be separate.

We call this state the **reign of God**. The reign of God, which is all love and peace, will never be complete on our earth as we know it. But Jesus calls all of us who follow him to bring as much of this reign of God into our world as is possible. The reign of God is among us and at the same time is not yet.

We are reminded of this whenever we pray Jesus' prayer. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done". How many times have I said the words and paid no attention?

Just a word about purgatory: Purgatory tells me how committed LOVE is to us. It tells me that LOVE does not abandon us. While there may be some exceptions, when I (I would say most of us) die, we are a long way from total love and peace.

I think that when I die LOVE will say to me, "John, I love you. I always have and I always will. I am going to help you see parts of yourself that you do not see. It will be painful but the pain is the process of healing".

Then God says to me, I will help you see how you are selfish, full of ego, cowardly, dishonest, hurtful to people and driven in unhealthy ways. These revelations will force you to be humble and grateful. These revelations will help you realize that I don't love you for the good things you have done or hate you for the bad things that you have done. You will realize that I love you because you are you. And that is the way that I love everyone. I will never abandon you or anyone else".

Ultimate uncreated LOVE is beyond anything that we can imagine. Is it not possible that LOVE can heal those – who for hidden reasons – are driven by a terrible distorted hatred?

Smile, God Loves You,
Father Clay

P.S. Here are four suggestions about how we can do our part in cooperating with LOVE to bring about ours and others transformation into people of deeper compassion, mercy and humility that is called the reign of God.

1. Prayer. By this I mean our willingness to allow LOVE that surrounds us and lives in us to bring about the transformation. My personal experience is that this willingness starts very small as we resist. We resist because this will mean letting go of cherished ideas, beliefs and actions to which we cling. The letting go means letting LOVE do it. LOVE'S way and not our way. So hard.
2. Acts of kindness. This can be something small or something big. What is essential is that we do it –as much as we can –out of concern for others rather than for any fame or praise that we may receive. This is especially true when we are relieving suffering of any kind.
3. Sacraments. This means participating in the sacraments with our hearts open to allow LOVE to work in us.
4. Awareness. This is the kind of meditation when we –without any kind of judgment-allow ourselves just to be aware of any thoughts, emotions, feelings or sensations within ourselves and also what is outside of us.