



# A PRIORI

Speculation on the  
Idea of Prior Knowledge

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**a priori** | , ā prī' ôrī |

adjective

relating to or denoting reasoning or knowledge which proceeds from theoretical deduction rather than from observation or experience.

adverb

in a way based on theoretical deduction rather than empirical observation

## Introduction

The terms “a priori” and “a posteriori” are philosophical terms generally used as adjectives to modify the noun knowledge. A priori knowledge is that which is known independent of experience. A posteriori refers to knowledge known by experience; arrived at afterward. We will primarily be speculating on an *a priori* state of knowing previous to all perception, cognizance or understanding, referring to belief or faith in the unseen God. The Creator “of all that is seen and unseen” in the history of mankind, has been and is being revealed in his creations as the inevitable force of a priori *good*. We will follow science and religion as belief systems of similar modality arriving at different conclusions but primarily on a priori knowledge. Finally, Jesus in the fourth chapter of the gospel of John, correlates Spirit, Life and Truth, worshipping the unseen God, confirming, as it were, a new human paradigm in which he himself perfects revelation by his life, death and resurrection. The Father reconciles us; forgives mankind through Christ, ultimately saving us from the negative aspects of ignoring the Spirit of God among us, and in us. Our very nature reflects the image of the Creator. With the coming of the Messiah, God enters humanity securing for us union with divinity.

# A P R I O R I

## Speculation on the Idea of Prior Knowledge

Having informed a friend of mine that I was embarking on speculation with regard to the idea of “a priori,” an electronic retort came whipping back to me saying: “*You may find that the problem with a priori is that it is a priori. Or, that from nothing comes nothing.*”

Since we live in a grand world of things, I cannot possibly imagine *nothing* at a beginning that produced all that is. Maybe I’m a determinist after all. Following my friend’s line of thought, something had to *have been* for us and for all things to be. This means, of course, that what ever that something was (or is) had to have been a priori, since no one had or has knowledge of it nor can justify it because it is independent of anyone’s experience. This at least legitimizes the use of the idea of a priori. We *know* there was something rather than nothing even if we may not be able to determine what that something was.

Let us assume, as many do, that there was no beginning, and everything that we know, have known or will know, in some form or another happens *infinitely* by repetition. Things causing things causing things ad infinitum. We must rationally infer from such sequencing that there was a beginning of things, because we know that all finite things cannot be infinite by the law of non-contradiction. We could try to prove our point by mathematical formulas and abstractions which could only be justified a priori. Infinity, as far as we understand it has no beginning and no end, it is unboundedness, so we cannot know the extent of the infinite because there is no extent. It is simply forever, past and future. In cosmology, if the things that exist exist physically in the infinite so to speak, *those things* have to have had a cause, since “nothing

comes from nothing,” as has been said. There must, out of necessity, be a cause; and we say we *know* that a priori. The experience of belief in an unknown *truth*. Emmanuel Kant thought that a priori concepts are possible only as necessary conditions of experience. A priori concepts do not give knowledge without application to experience; and understanding and sensibility are not opposed to each other but cooperate to provide the conditions of knowledge.(1)

Epistemology is the term given to the study of knowledge. What knowledge is, how it is acquired and how it relates to the notions of truth, belief and understanding. Experience tells us that we can have knowledge *of* something without fully understanding it. Knowing that something formally exists by recognition does not automatically give us an understanding of the thing. To “really” know something, that is to justify our knowledge as fault free, we must acquire maximum information about the object and how it relates to the world and to us. I think we would all agree that knowledge is limited. We can neither know all there is to know, nor can we know things perfectly. Knowledge of a thing is limited by the extent of a thing’s complexity and by the limitation of human mental capacity.

“You’ve undoubtedly heard over and over again about what an absurdly complex entity the human brain is. But a new breakthrough by Japanese and German scientists might finally drive the point home. Taking advantage of the almost 83,000 processors of one of the world’s most powerful supercomputers, the team was able to mimic just one percent of one second’s worth of human brain activity, and even that took 40 minutes.”(2) That doesn’t mean that a computer-brain interface is impossible, what it does show is that we are working to have the computer think like the brain, rather than have the brain “think” like a computer. That’s good news! I trust that humanity will always

remain one step ahead of “Hal.” Research is presently showing some success with electronic-prostheses in many of our major medical schools, particularly in the field of ophthalmology. Generally the scientific community surely displays a certain amount of hauteur in expecting a “theory of everything.” According to Hawking, when that time arrives, we will have become omniscient! Will it make us happy?

Since belief or conviction is the result of certain knowledge, it is an area where epistemology overlaps with an understanding of religious *faith*. Can faith in the Deity be truly called knowledge? Thomas Nagle, in his book *Mind and Cosmos* has written:

“With the appearance of life even in its earliest forms, there come into existence entities that *have a good*, and for which things can go well or badly. Even a bacterium *has a good* in this sense, in virtue of its proper functioning, whereas a rock does not. (I presume here he means clinging to survival, obviously a good considering the alternative.) Eventually in the course of evolutionary history there appear conscious beings, whose experiential lives can go well or badly in ways that are familiar to us. Later some descendants of those beings, capable of reflection and self-consciousness, come to recognize what happens to them as good or bad, and to recognize reasons for pursuing or avoiding those things. They learn to think about how these reasons combine to determine what they should do. And finally they develop the collective capacity to think about reasons they may have that do not depend only on what is good or bad for themselves.”<sup>(3)</sup> It seems obvious to me that what Nagle is touching on here is the human capability of innately *knowing* the difference between good and bad, and rightly choosing to follow the former rather than the latter as the most productive path to success rather than failure. The writer of Genesis put it a bit more poetically. Knowing the difference came with the “package,” and

in time we became more proficient at offering reasons to follow a negative course rather than a positive one— accompanied by the pangs of a primal “conscience.” Webster says that: *To believe is to have confidence in something as true.* If one concludes that good and bad is innate, and Nagle is correct, it could be construed as prior knowledge or experienced a priori. Faith in the *known* power of the intrinsic *good* rather than it’s opposite. Upon reflection, it became recognized as the spiritually-oriented understanding of the Deity considered as the Ultimate Good, or God freely accepted or rejected. It took Augustine of Hippo a long time to figure that out: “*We could never judge that one thing is better than another, if a basic understanding of the good had not already been installed in us.*”<sup>(4)</sup> I have a feeling that Jesus would say to Nagle today, “You are not far from the Kingdom of God.”

A pure definition of *truth* is not easily had. Truth as a noun pertains to the “real facts” about something. A state of being the case, genuine: FACT: the body of real things, events or facts: ACTUALITY: a transcendent fundamental or spiritual reality. Something “*in truth*” is understood to be in accordance with fact, reality. A person who *is true*, is characterized as one who is faithful to an original or a standard. “In philosophy, the property of statements, thoughts, or propositions that are said, in ordinary discourse, to agree with the facts or to state what is the case. At least four major types of truth theory have been proposed: correspondence theories ( realism), coherence theories ( coherentism, idealism), pragmatic theories ( pragmatism), and deflationary theories. The latter group encompasses a wide variety of views, including the redundancy theory, the disquotational theory, and the prosentential theory.”<sup>(5)</sup> Facts have been so badly distorted throughout history, particularly in this “information age” that most of us have become somewhat skeptical of what is a *true fact* and what is not. I believe it’s safe



to say that culturally, we are seeing an enormous surge in incoherence or the “unreal,” especially in the entertainment industry. That is not to say we should put a cap on the wonder of human imagination, it never occurred to me that Flash Gordon would not some day travel into space.

We are continuously being confused by a reversal of definitive values. What we *know* of the good can be peddled as bad, and the bad peddled as good. This is destructive of truth, that is, only if truth is a value to be treasured. Benedict XVI said: “We are building a dictatorship of relativism that does not recognize anything as definitive and whose ultimate goal consists solely of one’s own ego and desires.”<sup>(6)</sup> Primarily this is “beauty is in the eyes of the beholder” crowd, using the term beauty loosely; we make our own truth. Doing what is only best for oneself surely shows, to a degree, indifference toward the other. Dealing with the truth in all circumstances requires knowledge of the facts, and facts need to be validated as every historian, journalist, jurist and scientist knows, or ought to know. Facts cannot be subject simply to personal or public opinion. One’s belief does not necessarily make that person’s belief true. When the facts are known and coherent they speak for themselves, as they say; and are added to individual or common knowledge. In certain cases facts are vague and may not be considered true, only circumstantial. “There are cases, in which evidence, not sufficient for scientific (or experiential) proof, is nevertheless sufficient for assent and certitude. This is the doctrine of Locke, as of most men. He tells us that belief, grounded in sufficient probabilities, ‘rises to assurance;’ and as to the question of sufficiency, that where propositions ‘border near on certainty,’ we may assent to them as firmly as if they were infallibly demonstrated.”<sup>(7)</sup> For those of us who will not accept anything other than empiricism for validation of the truth, i.e. that knowledge comes only from sensory experience, we are always

reminded of what Max Planck, the father of Quantum Theory said: “The pioneer scientist must have a vivid *intuitive* imagination for new ideas *not* generated by deduction, but by an artistically creative imagination.”<sup>(8)</sup> When his a priori (non experienced) thoughts were put to the test, they turned out to be consistently true. What Planck posited a priori, after experimentation, existed in objective reality. For the most part this is how real science advances. Had Albert Einstein, for instance, not imagined a ride on a beam of light, we might not have had his theory of relativity. It was a dip in the bathtub that had Archimedes cry “Eureka!” Knowledge had arrived. The capability of knowing how much gold was in the king’s crown just needed a nudge. For me, these experiences show that we truly are the inspired, playful children of Providence. Life never seems to struggle against the “good” within it. It wants to keep it and pay it a dividend, although I must admit, there are those who, for some reason need to resist the good with which they have been graced. Sadly, circumstances may have taught them otherwise. “Nisi efficiamini sicut parvuli.” As Pascal said: Wisdom sends us to childhood.<sup>(9)</sup> We will enquire as to the criteria of the truth as it relates to a priori a little later in this essay.

There is no reason at this point to go into an extended treatment of the “value” of knowledge per se either, since our subject is speculating on the idea of a priori as one way of knowing—leading to a comprehension and understanding of things by the use of reason. Epistemologists, like other scientists, need to publish their views with regard to expertise in their chosen discipline, or should I say to the extent of their advanced knowledge. I think we could agree that knowledge, in a pragmatic sense, has value. So much so that the lack of it may be rightly called ignorance. That said, it doesn’t mean that the kid in school who is daydreaming is not gaining knowledge, but it

would be of a different kind than the rudimentary lessons being taught by the teacher. In many ways daydreaming is the forerunner of contemplation. The process of rational judgement is moved forward by intelligence and intelligence feeds on knowledge; both practical and theoretical. “Ideas” and concepts are not automatic. What is automatic in the “human animal” is instinct.

There are many natural instincts. They exist as a permanent, inseparable condition in every organism. The human psyche has the capability of overriding many of them since it has progressed by the use of reason over time. We can control our instinctual inclinations with a willingness to do so, especially having a good *reason* to do so. Of all the human instincts, the one that is most evident to us is the survival instinct, commonly understood as “flight or fight” when the organism is mortally threatened. A lot could be said about the military establishment training men and women to overlook that instinct for a higher cause; or for a martyr, secure in the belief of a loving God and the promise of a post life paradise. Instinct may be said to be a priori as a condition; again, it comes with the package. It becomes knowledge when we experience it and choose to disregard or override it. The body is a neurological, psychological, physiological-glandular universe that immediately responds to instinctual stimuli without knowledge, but it has learned in the course of human evolution to recognize many of the external conditions that produce a reaction as unnecessary in the modern world. Still, every once in a while our hair stands on end when we see a large black branch in the grass believing it to be a snake, using Prof. LeDoux’s example.

On the subject of the acquisition of knowledge, I have long been fascinated by the distinction between “sensing” and “feeling.” We do get to know things both ways. There are five known

senses, they are: seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. These senses are connected by neural networks to the brain where they are processed, evaluated and distributed and affect the whole organism in ways that are conditioned by the individual psyche. In other words the senses supply physical input to the brain in which the “mind” is said to hold forth. It coordinates with all the other physical components of the body supplying feedback. I think this spontaneous, almost instantaneous process is a plasma like simulacrum. The whole organism working in a hopefully, healthy, natural concert, much like a symphony orchestra works.

Feelings are a product of the Limbic System within the brain itself. Playing in the same orchestra and at the same concert, the limbic system, for me, just uses different instruments, sort of like the woodwinds in harmony with the brass section—sometimes in improvisational ways. A complete psychophysical ensemble. Sensing seems to involve exterior to interior input, while Feelings appear more of an interior exterior modality. Still, all working as a whole entity with “spirit” or life as it’s generating power. Of course this is strictly amateur speculation. I did spend about a year studying the workings of the human brain but that was quite a while ago. I will catalogue my readings in the notes.<sup>(10)</sup> I picked up a snip from a professional blog to help confirm my previous understandings regarding the limbic system.

“The limbic system is a complex set of structures found just beneath the cerebrum on both sides of the thalamus. It combines higher mental functions and primitive emotion into a single system, often referred to as *the emotional nervous system*. *It is not only responsible for our emotional lives but also our higher mental functions, such as learning and formation of memories.* The limbic system is the reason that some things seem so

pleasurable to us, such as eating, and why some medical conditions are caused by mental stress, like high blood pressure, etc. There are several significant structures within the limbic system: the amygdala, hippocampus, thalamus, hypothalamus, basal ganglia, and cingulate gyrus.”(11)

If you are prepared to look into this in detail, I must tell you not even the most advanced psychophysicologists have it entirely wiggled out. But every now and then there are significant breakthroughs as we touched on above involving high speed computation, brain scanning and psychopharmacology etc., so they’re getting closer all the time knowing how the brain works but they have a very long way to go.

Why would we include this scenario in an essay on “a priori,” which is a philosophical concept? I’m inclined to believe that a priori knowledge is centered in one or another or all of the substructures of the limbic system of the brain where there is a communicable reference to an understanding of the “good,” and not entirely in an abstract way. I believe it is related to both a sense of feeling good followed with the feeling of order, or *being* good. Obviously sensing and feeling are coordinated in the whole organism. The question is, does sense experience produce a feeling, or does it “arouse” in the *mind* a preexistent (a priori) knowledge of what is stored in the “unconscious” entirely as a result of previous experience? Freudian psychology points to the latter. All of our negative and positive lifetime experiences are put into a “memory-bank,” some of which can be accessed readily, some totally forgotten, others are awakened by a particular sense-trigger, without which they would remain in the sub-conscious. They come “up” into consciousness and either scare the hell out of us or leave us with a feeling of joy, comfort, agitation, satisfaction, anxiety and so on. If certain memories are repressed, Freud’s “talk-therapy” was supposed to unlock them

thereby relieving, over time, the unexplained mental problems they may have caused.

But, is there something beyond that: an a priori knowledge of the “good” as a center, a ground. The Spirit of the good, or God imbedded in human *life itself* engaging the whole being, regulated by conscience. A Holy Spirit, God with us? The answer to that transcendent question must remain open ended or inspired by “grace” understood by faith.

What else could be in the system? Well, we know certain inherited traits are genetically there as well as our instincts. The older we get the more we know how much our parents are in us—both mentally and physically. Once we are conscious of them it is possible that unwanted inherited as well as personal, self acquired traits (habits) can be over-ridden like our primal instincts can, We can do this by changing our lifestyle for the purpose of preventing certain conditions or diseases to which we may be prone. Unfortunately, we have not gotten far enough in manipulating human genes to prevent chronic cases. By the way, this scientific goal opens up a huge moral dilemma for the future: The Frankenstein option.

Abiogenesis, or life produced by dead matter, has long been debunked. “It is clear that spirit (life) is not a random product of material developments but, rather, that matter signifies a moment in the history of spirit. This, however, is just another way of saying that spirit is created and not the mere product of development, even though it comes to light by way of development.”<sup>(12)</sup> In the war between matter and anti-matter in the first milliseconds of creation known as the Big Bang, matter won. That’s why we have something rather than nothing. To overlook a pre-existent intelligence and producer of this super show makes no sense. The order and beauty of it all speaks to us clearly leaving little doubt. Still, there must always be doubt,

without that possibility there is no freedom. We are all skeptics to a degree since absolute certainty remains the ultimate goal; a complete and all knowing eventuality.

How the universe managed to survive, and evolve, may soon be answered by science, but *why* the big bang came about will probably always remain in the hands of the philosophers and theologians mining and screening the “proofs” of *revealed* truths with an a priori sense of belief; at least for those theologians who, following Anselm, said “I believe in order to understand.”<sup>(13)</sup> Without belief, theology must simply be called religious studies. “Many of us believe that the plan for man was already present in the explosion and expansion of dense matter that according to current cosmological theories, marked the origin of the universe, and that the uncreated “ground” from whence that event came is the Godhead. No one has yet been able to give us a better idea using scientific, empirical evidence,”<sup>(14)</sup> Here to fore it has all been theory. Based on the existence of reason itself, as well as the use of it in terms of probability by observation, it’s not too difficult to assent to the understanding of a higher power called God as the source and ground of all that is. This the ancients, and even the primitives knew a priori (without experience) long before Jesus of Nazareth confirmed it by his life, death and resurrection. To accept the Word of God is as certain as it gets in this life by a sincere act of faith influenced and inspired by grace.

“There are three sources of belief: reason, custom, inspiration. The Christian religion, with reason, does not acknowledge as her true children those who believe without inspiration. It is not that she excludes reason and custom. On the contrary, the mind must be opened to proofs, must be confirmed by custom, (*in our day that’s justification*) and offer itself in humbleness to inspiration, which alone can produce a true and saving effect.”<sup>(15)</sup> In Pascal’s

quote above, I believe that he means by offering the mind, “in humbleness, to inspiration” he’s talking faith. According to Webster, *inspiration*, from a theological standpoint is: *A divine influence directly and immediately exerted on the mind or soul.* Faith, then, for Webster: *a direct, immediate divine influence on the mind*, sounds like an external act by God. If that were the case faith would be imposed; Would God influence us to have faith by giving it to us? Webster’s definition sounds a bit like the Calvinist point of view of an “elect.” God chooses to give faith to some and not to others. For me, there is a much different meaning in Pascal’s statement– that is, the mind offers itself, in humility *to* inspiration. A soul, offers belief of necessity, having been inspired by grace and divine revelation, this is a personal act of faith; and depending on the individual, a degree of certainty is made available and freedom is preserved. Grace is simply the a priori knowledge of the “good” *installed*, to use Augustine’s term, in us. It is also *sensed* in the works of creation itself arrived at with reason. I think Schleiermacher put it quite well and I’ve quoted him often: “To think God is not religion, but Philosophy or Theology. Likewise, to strive for moral perfection, even if this includes a certain relation to God and a religious sanction, it is only indirectly related to the unique apprehension of the transcendent which we call the religious experience. *In the religious act we find the same equilibrium of the objective and the subjective which characterizes the aesthetic feeling.* The religious consciousness transcends every specific theoretical and practical orientation: It unites the knowledge and love of God in one act of cognitive surrender.”(17)

“The desire for God is written on the human heart”(18) is the way the Catholic Catechism graciously put it. Pascal offered a little different explanation: “The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. We feel it in a thousand things. I say that the heart naturally loves the Universal Being, and also itself naturally, according as it gives itself to them; and it hardens itself against



one or the other at its will. You have rejected the one, and kept the other. Is it by reason that you love yourself?(19)

Faith stands above reason because it includes an act of the will, a decision; reason and will inspired by grace— aesthetically and intellectually understood. Henry Dumery (1920-2012) expressed his sentiments on this issue: “The Religious soul comes to God through faith, hardly at all through dialectic. This is not to say that the man of faith does not have recourse to numerous and subtle reasonings if ever he attempts to think his faith. But faith itself lies none the less on a plane more profound than any reflection.”

Here is how the catechism formally states it: 154 “Believing is possible only by grace and the interior helps of the Holy Spirit. But it is no less true that believing is an authentically human act. Trusting in God and cleaving to the truths he has revealed are contrary neither to human freedom nor to human reason. Even in human relations it is not contrary to our dignity to believe what other persons tell us about themselves and their intentions or to trust their promises (for example, when a man and a woman marry) to share a communion of life with one another. If this is so, it is still less contrary to our dignity to ‘yield by faith the full submission of... intellect and will to *God who reveals*,’ and to share in an *interior communion* with him.”(20)

Faith in God gives human beings a definitive answer to humanity’s “eternal” question, confirmed by the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth called the Christ. “Why is there something rather than nothing?”

The antithesis to this religious belief system is another system of belief in which many put their faith, albeit of a different sort. It has been called “scientific materialism.” John Haught in his book *Science & Religion, From Conflict to Conversation*, explains it very well:

“Scientific materialism resembles religion, and can be called a belief system, because it systematically answers many of the same ultimate questions that religion responds to: Where do we come from? Where are we going? What is the deepest nature of reality? What is our true identity? Is there anything permanent and imperishable?, etc. The answer to all of these questions, according to scientific materialism, centers around the concept of “matter” and has enormous appeal to many scientists and philosophers. It satisfies a deeply religious longing for a solid and comprehensible ground upon which to base their knowing and being.”

However, we have to be consistent. Our contrast approach emphasizes that we must sharply distinguish science or scientific method for all belief systems, not just from theistic religion. And scientific materialism is not less distinguishable from science than is religion. Yet, making this distinction clear today is often quite difficult. In fact, in the enteric materialism is so intimately folded into their “scientific” presentations that it is only with great difficulty that they can be persuaded to distinguish between them. Often it is impossible.”

“Nonetheless, we are convinced that it is the naive merging of science with a materialist or naturalist belief system that misleads many modern intellectuals into thinking of science as irreconcilable with religion. For it has yet to be shown that any purely scientific discovery contradicts the idea of a personal God, though it is not hard to show that scientism and scientific materialism do so. What we have here, then, is not a conflict between science and belief in a personal God, but a conflict between two irreconcilable belief systems.”(21)

Sure enough, as Dr. Haught eloquently stated, these are two “belief” systems rather than a belief system and a non-belief system. One is based on religious faith the other on a secular faith. They arrive at totally different conclusions but get there in pretty much the same way. The secular system or Scientific Materialism is inspired by the beauty and mysterious attributes of matter, as Planck and Einstein saw it, and investigated by using determinate reasoning which satisfies an agent with the “fact” that one day science will answer all the questions concerning “why there is something rather than nothing.” Similar to the religious system there is absolutely no empirical evidence to unequivocally prove the conclusion. Like so many *religious* beliefs it’s generally left with faith and hope. The stated conviction then becomes a priori knowledge due to the lack of experience or a material object.

The most often quoted definition of theology is the one given us by St. Anselm: “faith seeking understanding.” Theology probes the mysteries concerning the existence of God presented in two parts, the First and Second Testaments. A branch of theology known as Christology links them by primarily relating to Jesus himself, the Messiah; his actual life, death and resurrection attested to by The People of God (Israel) with the inclusion of the Gentiles, and with the Apostles in the stories detailed in the gospels. The believers in the religious system get much of their inspiration from Jesus, “Truth as a Person,” as Benedict XVI called him. Christian faith is seen as belief in the promises of Christ, but certainly not excluding the trans-scriptural connection of Christ with the Jewish People and the Torah. The believers in the secular system, the Materialists, place their faith in the theoretical promises held out by many well known men of science, particularly since the so called Age of Enlightenment. These various concepts in physics, biology, cosmology etc., have been and are being added to a great corpus of wonderful

scientific works even today. A distinction is made between the two systems but the methodology has many similarities.

Another of Blaise Pascal's (1623-1662) quotes seems appropriate here: "It is the *heart* which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason."<sup>(22)</sup> I will say in this regard, that grace, i.e., "participation in the life of God,"<sup>(23)</sup> however it may be experienced in one's own life, can become a powerful enough reason to solicit an act of faith. I believe Aquinas might have made this point. One thing that must be said is that the secular believers tend to be anti religion especially anti Christian, and particularly anti Catholic. Whereas the religionists are hardly ever anti science. In fact: "...what we mean today by science—it's methods, it's controls, it's guiding principles, it's desire to unite theory to empirical discovery, it's trust in a unified set of physical laws, and so on—came into existence, for whatever reasons, and for better or worse, only within Christendom, and under the hands of believing Christians."<sup>(24)</sup> One need only mention a few: Newton, Galileo, Kepler, Mendel, Eddington, Faraday, Priestley, Lemaître, Planck.

Is there a priori truth? Is there ultimate truth beyond our experience? Do right answers exist in mathematics and geometry that lie outside our grasp? Is this the ultimate boundary question? Erwin Schrödinger, (Nobel prize in Physics, 1933) said: "A mathematical truth is timeless, it does not come into being when we discover it. Yet its discovery is a very real event, it may be an emotion like a great gift from a fairy."<sup>(25)</sup> That sounds to me like a priori knowledge. Something that is "true" prior to our perception that cannot be verified until it arrives as knowledge; as a true fact of the matter. In his marvelous book, *Living Forms of the Imagination*, Douglas Hedley wrote: "Truth, beauty and goodness are facts, yet they elude description in objective terms and seem to vanish upon analysis. Goodness and evil are not

locatable in space and time, but are as palpable to the reflective mind as mathematical objects or conscious thoughts...The mind quite properly experiences truth, goodness and beauty to command assent as a reality of experience, without which science, society and creativity would collapse.”(26) Erwin Schrödinger appears to support these thoughts from a religious standpoint. “We *know* when God is experienced, this is an event as real as an immediate sense perception or as one’s own personality. Like them he must be missing in the space time picture. I do not find God anywhere in space and time – that is what the honest naturalist tells you. For this he incurs blame from him in whose catechism it is written: God is Spirit.”(27)

It was actually Jesus who said: “God is Spirit” and then he added: “so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.”(28) Chapter four in John’s gospel tells the story of Jesus’ confrontation with an intrepid Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well where these words were spoken. It is a beautiful story with marvelous symbolism having to do with his messianic mission but it would take us off point to elaborate on it here. Though it is unusual to isolate one sentence from the whole story, it does help us broaden our understanding of Jesus’ remark to the Samaritan woman regarding God, since their conversation involved the different places where Jews and Samaritans worshiped him.

Once again we must rely on Webster to help us understand the commonly accepted definition of a word. In this case the word is “spirit.”

1 spir·it noun \ 'spir-ət\

: the force within a person that is believed to give the body life, energy, and power.

: the inner quality or nature of a person

: a person (29)

There are several questions we need to ask ourselves. Can Webster's primary definition of "spirit" be interchanged with the word "life," that is, if spirit is the force that gives life, it must somehow have "life" to give life? Secondly, how is spirit and or life related to "truth" regarding worship?

If we call spirit life in terms of God being "Spirit," then God must be a "Living God" who is simply unseen. To worship him "in spirit" is to worship him with a living devotion, with our lives, so to speak; and not necessarily in only one sanctuary or on one mountain. Moreover, to answer the second question: living worship must not be cursory, or casual; it must be true, heartfelt, sincere. This is the whole message of the "Kingdom of God" with "The People of God," (Israel), and now through the Samaritan woman, to everybody else. John Paul II gave us a wonderful comment on this very point: "This is an event without precedent: that a woman, and what is more a "sinful woman," becomes a "disciple" of Christ. Indeed, once taught, she proclaims Christ to the inhabitants of Samaria so that they too receive him with faith."

All through the history of time, man has known a priori of the "living God." The inspiration of the Spirit of God joined with his spirit, his life, was what engendered the faith which he proclaimed— albeit in many strange ways before Abraham and the "good news" of the arrival of Jesus Christ.

John 4, NRSV

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, 'Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John'— although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized— he left Judea and started back to Galilee. But he had to go through Samaria. So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water.'

Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come back.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband"; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. **God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.**' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming' (who is called Christ). 'When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.' Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who is speaking to you.'

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, 'What do you want?' or, 'Why are you speaking with her?' Then the woman left her water-jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 'Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?' They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, 'Rabbi, eat something.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat that you do not know about.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Surely no one has brought him something to eat?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, "Four months more, then comes the harvest"? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labour. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labour.'

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I have ever done.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there for two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.'"

The woman, known as St. Photina in the Orthodox Church, is also accepted as a saint in the Roman rite on traditional grounds. There is no mention of her name in the gospel.

## Feast of The Chair of Peter, 2014

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- 12 Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, interview
- 13 St. Anselm. Proslogium, Ch. I
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- 25 Erwin Schrodinger, What is Life, p 142
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- 29 Webster Online

