

We may think we are seeking God but it is really God who is seeking us. We are the ones in hiding and God who asks 'Where are you?' but no one, of course, can hide from God. It's like the child with hands over eyes saying, 'You can't see me.' And God smiles and says, 'Oh yes I can! Only you don't know it!' This comes across strongly in Gerry Hughes' autobiographical musings entitled 'Oh God, where are you?' where he goes off in search of God but keeps on discovering that he has, in a sense, already been found. Time and again we hear such sentences as

It was years later that I learned . . . I did not recognise the connection at the time . . . I did not then realise I had no awareness that I was the real cause of my own annoyance . . . and so on.

When we construct such stories as those of Genesis or the Annunciation or the Immaculate Conception of Mary, we are constructing aetiologies to explain experiences which would otherwise remain mysterious to us, or better, would remain even more mysterious than they already are. In writing his own story, Gerry Hughes is searching for the meaning of his life; trying to discern the connections between all the various events and people who have made him who he is – and it's, of course, an unfinished business and he's happy to remain an agnostic about much of what has happened. He's learnt a lot but there's a lot more still to learn. There is a pattern but its full realisation remains unknown. This is theology at work, as we see in the beautiful hymn at the beginning of Ephesians: a litany of the blessings, Paul, or whoever constructed it, discerns in the pattern of our Christian history, of our Christian coming-to-be and, as so often, it's the missing bits that are telling:

He (God) has let us know the mystery of his purpose
according to his good pleasure which he determined beforehand in Christ. (Eph. 1:9)

As we live, so we begin to understand that obedience to God, to Christ, is a way of hearing, of learning wisdom, also. Mary doesn't really understand what the angel is asking of her but she makes an act of faith: 'Let it be done to me according to your word' and, gradually, as with Gerry Hughes, wisdom comes. It's sin that obscures this and purity of heart which makes it possible. The heart of a virgin is empty of self, of a personal agenda, and willing to let go, willing to receive, to trust.

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