

**CG Theme Guide, Mystery**  
**December 2015**

*Being is a mystery, being is concealment, but there is meaning beyond the mystery. The meaning beyond the mystery seeks to come to expression. The destiny of human beings is to articulate what is concealed. The divine seeks to be disclosed in the human. — Abraham Joshua Heschel, Who Is Man, 1965.*

I would rather live in a world where my life is surrounded by mystery than live in a world so small that my mind could comprehend it. -- **Harry Emerson Fosdick**

All is mystery; but he is a slave who will not struggle to penetrate the dark veil.

-- **Benjamin Disraeli**

No; we have been as usual asking the wrong question. It does not matter a hoot what the mockingbird on the chimney is singing. The real and proper question is: Why is it beautiful?

--**Annie Dillard**

**“God is free to be God”.**

"Mystery means that, in spite of all our efforts, all our insights, discoveries, and experiences, we will never do much more than touch the hem of God's robe. It is enough that such touching brings healing. It is too much, idolatrously too much, to claim more than very little information about the wearer of the robe. And even that little information, we can claim only with enormous humility. However, humility is the twin of trust.

"It has been said, referring to the temptation to which biblical literalists often succumb, that we should never confuse the love letter with the lover. We all have our version of such literalism, our dogmaticisms, our exaggerated (if unadmitted) claims of knowledge. Humble acknowledgement of mystery delivers us from the imprisonment of such certainties into the awesome dimension of possibilities. Trust begins there. So, in some primitive way, does prayer

. . . .The point is, mystery simply reminds us that God is free to be God in ways that we have no knowledge of at all."

**--Ted Loder, *Guerillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle***

When we understand the outside of things, we think we have them. Yet the Lord puts his things in subdefined, suggestive shapes, yielding no satisfactory meaning to the mere intellect, but unfolding themselves to the conscience and heart. -- **George MacDonald**

We are so impressed by scientific clank that we feel we ought not to say that the sunflower turns because it knows where the sun is. It is almost second nature to us to prefer explanations . . . with a large vocabulary. We are much more comfortable when we are assured that the sunflower turns because it is heliotropic. The trouble with that kind of talk is that it tempts us to think that we know what the sunflower is up to. But we don't. The sunflower is a mystery, just as every single thing in the universe is. --**Robert Farrer Capon**

The real mystery of life is not a problem to be solved, it is a reality to be experienced.--**J.J. Van der Leeuw**

Paradox is in fact a hallmark of western spirituality, an ongoing reminder that mystery is the heart, the atmosphere and completion of our spiritual quest, that the ultimately untouchable is forever at our fingertips. **John Kirvan in *God Hunger***

"I think it's much more interesting to live not knowing than to have answers which might be wrong. I have approximate answers and possible beliefs and different degrees of uncertainty about different things, but I am not absolutely sure of anything and there are many things I don't know anything about, such as whether it means anything to ask why we're here. I don't have to know an answer. I don't feel frightened not knowing things, by being lost in a mysterious universe without any purpose, which is the way it really is as far as I can tell."

— **Richard Feynman**

It is only through mystery and madness that the soul is revealed. **Thomas Moore**

The problem of evil has baffled humankind since Eden; perhaps because it can only be approached through facing the mystery of good, and we do not like to acknowledge that good is a mystery. **D. M. Dooling** quoted in *The Spirituality of Imperfection* by Ernest Kurtz

### **Mystery in Catholic Scripture and Theology**

(Greek *mysterion*, from *myein*, "to shut", "to close".)

This term signifies in general that which is unknowable, or valuable [knowledge](#) that is kept secret.

The [Old-Testament](#) versions use the word *mysterion* as an equivalent for the [Hebrew](#) *sôd*, "secret" ([Proverbs 20:19](#); [Judith 2:2](#); [Sirach 22:27](#); [2 Maccabees 13:21](#)). In the [New Testament](#) the word mystery is applied ordinarily to the sublime revelation of the Gospel ([Matthew 13:11](#); [Colossians 2:2](#); [1 Timothy 3:9](#); [1 Corinthians 15:51](#)), and to the Incarnation and life of the [Saviour](#) and His manifestation by the preaching of the Apostles([Romans 16:25](#); [Ephesians 3:4](#); [6:19](#); [Colossians 1:26](#); [4:3](#)).

In conformity with the usage of the inspired writers of the [New Testament](#), [theologians](#) give the name *mystery* to [revealed truths](#) that surpass the powers of natural reason. Mystery, therefore, in its strict [theological](#) sense is not synonymous with the incomprehensible, since all that we [know](#) is incomprehensible, i.e., not adequately comprehensible as to its inner being; nor with the unknowable, since many things merely natural are accidentally unknowable, on account of their inaccessibility, e.g., things that are future, remote, or hidden. In its strict sense a mystery is a [supernatural truth](#), one that of its very nature lies above the finite intelligence.

[Theologians](#) distinguish two classes of [supernatural](#) mysteries: the *absolute* (or *theological*) and the *relative*. An *absolute* mystery is a [truth](#) whose existence or possibility could not be discovered by a creature, and whose essence (inner substantial being) can be expressed by the finite mind only in terms of analogy, e.g., the Trinity. A *relative* mystery is a [truth](#) whose innermost nature alone (e.g., many of the [Divine attributes](#)), or whose existence alone (e.g., the positive ceremonial [precepts](#) of the [Old Law](#)), exceeds the natural knowing power of the creature.

**Excerpted from Catholic Encyclopedia on the website, New Advent**

***For Reflection, Discussion***

*1. Is mystery an important aspect of your spiritual life? How so? What mysteries are important to you?*

*2. How is that you have come to respect mystery, respect for not knowing? Have you learned from other people or is this learning more about your own felt experience? Is it your experience that you respect mystery more and more over time? Why do you think that this is? Is it that you have greater respect for mystery or less respect for knowing?*

*3. Are you more typically calling attention to mystery, or is it more the case that others call your attention to mystery? In what contexts?*

*4. Does your awareness of mystery relate to your love of life? your peace of mind? the way you show up in the world?*

*5. Does your experience at All Souls relate to your understanding of mystery?*

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