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Through a Glass Darkly (1 Corinthians 13)

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I chose this passage from Paul's letter to the Corinthians as the phrase 'looking through a glass darkly' or here 'for now we see in a mirror, dimly' has hung around in my mind for some time.

I am a visual person so I need to show images. I always have them running through my head and when I look back at my life they are there.

Δ Bea Maddock Passing the glass darkly

Part of my recollection of this phrase includes Bea Maddock's graphic image *Passing the glass darkly*

I always saw this image as providing a message that over a passage of time there was clarity, that is when read from right to left

It can also be read left to right – where the closer we look at ourselves, the more what we thought we were, disintegrates

I grew up in Sydney

My ancestors were Irish/English

There were also some Huguenots who had fled from religious persecution from France to England.

After my Australian grandmother died my father and I confirmed that we had convict heritage – a fact that she would have liked to have left undiscovered.

In her time, convict ancestry was something you did not speak about.

It was Winston Churchill who stated that Australians were of "poor stock". Presumably he was referring to the so-called convict "stain."

Δ Stamp

My mother was an immigrant from London – a boat person – arriving in the 1950s on P & O's Moolten.

As a child, I assumed that it was her picture on the stamps that arrived in our post box.

She had short wavy hair, she was from England and to cap it all off she too had a sister.

She was the centre of my world and it made sense that her image appeared on the letters that were delivered to our post box.

Δ Dee Why beach

For the first 10 years of my life I lived in Dee Why

Dee Why is a northern beach suburb

Dee Why was then a multi-cultural area, full of boat people.

There were us Anglos, Greeks, Italians and Dutch

I still to this day feel safe and at home surrounded by multiple cultures.

Δ Max Dupain's image

I recall my early experiences as being dominated by the senses

We spent many hours at the beach. Swimming in the surf or lazing on the sand.

I remember the feeling of my body leaving its impression in the sand.

The wind or sun playing on the surface of my skin.

Max Dupain's image takes me back to this experience

I remember after long periods of being in the sea, lying in bed with the feeling that I was still being thrown about in the waves.

Our idea of heaven, on a cold day, was being allowed to buy a potato scallop, after we had been swimming. Sitting on our wet towels we would grasp our treats in greasy and salty pieces of newspaper.

At times we went on fishing trips and enjoyed the natural environment that Sydney and the south coast had to offer.

On weekends and holidays, we were taken on bush walks and at times explored the rock carvings left behind by the Aboriginal people of yesteryear. The images had a magical quality to them and a sense of reverence for the natural world.

POINT TO BOOKS

Thank God for my mother's paternal grandmother, Emily.

Emily had produced a series of Sunday school books about the virtues of living a clean and a wholesome life.

In her books a badly-behaved boy or an alcoholic could repent and live a good clean life with their soul intact. You could be in the gutter one moment then teacher Sunday school the next.

As a result of inflicting her sobriety and religious fervour upon my grandfather, he allowed his two daughters to choose their own level of religious commitment.

I inherited this choice with my mother allowing me to decide when I went to church.

Δ Biblical stamps

On occasions, I visited the wooden progress hall, at the end of our road, which doubled as a Church and attended the Sunday school.

I recall receiving coloured stamps with the scenes from the Bible as rewards. I also remember making a diorama of an Old Testament scene with paper cut-outs and an empty fruit tin.

Δ Fruit tins

The character, whoever he was, descended into this well or some type of subterranean cavern on a piece of string.

I don't remember any sense of spirituality beyond a series of stories about a different time and place.

Δ Catholic images

I knew that I was part of the Anglican brand. My neighbours who I played with were those other types, Catholics.

When I visited their house, they had strange religious decorations on their walls with images of men and women from another place and time.

They were involved in rituals that were alien to my experience.

They attended the 'other school' that was next to mine.

I liked my friends, but in my mind their practices were 'the other'.

Eventually we moved away from the beach. I attended a Presbyterian school with blackwatch tartan and Moderator Generals. We sang in a chapel, when we were well behaved. When we misbehaved we were decamped to an auditorium. We sang songs about cherubims and seraphims and ancient feet walking on green lands. Every now and again Cat Stevens' song/hymn, *Morning has broken*, was included, which we thought was pretty cool. The words spoke about a love for life and the natural world. However, it was not proper religion as it was too passionate. It was about something else. You could reach out and step into the imagery. It was real. Beyond this, I was not part of the religion we were taught. It was severe and about fear. It was just part of the backdrop of my school life.

Eventually I attended the local church in order to be 'confirmed'. I recall these meetings as again instilling in me as sense of fear. It was imperative that I do as

instructed or my soul would be lost. This was about a god of fear, and fear is a dark and static place where nothing grows and prospers.

Δ Derrain's Henri Matisse

I went to art school and immersed myself in a world of expression and an appreciation for colour and form. I felt inspired by the avenues and eddies where art could go. It was powerful and life affirming. It had meaning and passion for life in all its forms. I was absorbed by the vibrancy of colour.

Δ Oxford the Isis

I have had a love of landscapes.

I became interested in the 'New Age'. Buddhist ideas made sense and had a truth that I could use to guide me. Buddhist philosophies provided ideas of accepting what is. Everything is in a state of flux and the need to accept what is. Buddhism is about self-acceptance.

Δ Bea Maddock Passing the glass darkly

Today I am situated in what Richard Rohr labels, the second stage of my life. This second stage of my life is where in some ways I begin again. After experiencing the bits and pieces of life I have the opportunity to focus on what is truly important. There is more of a form of clarity to my life. I can step aside from the trappings of the physical world as what is essential is drawn to the fore.

Today I look back and see that everything I truly valued was, in reality, part of religion. My love of the physical world of the senses confirms the ideas of Eckhart Tolle and the need to move beyond the ego of the mind and be properly in the world. Tolle tells us to seek out the natural, the landscapes in order to free ourselves and fully live. He says that all forms in the world have a vibrancy. We have a vibrancy

and are part of the whole. Buddhist philosophies and Aboriginal culture say the same, that we are part of an inter-dependent universe. Respect for all forms brings respect for one's self. The messages are ecumenical. They are for all. There is a truth that weaves its way throughout religions and cultures.

In Ted Egan's words

Once when I'm young boy

Old man tell me

'Always look after

This you country.

You are river

You are the sea

You are the rocks, boy,

This is your country.'

(Ted Egan – *Poor feller my country*)

Everything is connected. I am part of the whole. I hear these messages again and again when at Benedictus. This underlying truth.

I have always had a sense that I am lucky. Something is there supporting me and bringing to me what is needed. In dark times of adversity something arrived that was needed.

'The light leaks in through the cracks'.

Out of the blue comes important messages. It may take the form of unexpected contact with another. A person shows a kindness that touches me deeply and pulls me back out of isolation from estrangement from love.

At a dark time in my life I was given the role of looking after indigenous students.

This brought me to a people and culture that was life affirming and inclusive.

Benedictus turned up at a moment in our lives when it could not have been more needed.

Out of suffering and surrender I have been given new understandings about myself and others.

I have had the good luck to be presented with a sense of what I can only describe as God. God is about what is real. What is essential to us.

It is all united by love.

As Richard Rohr says 'love dissolves the illusions and fears born of our estrangement from the infinite love that is our very life.'

God is love.

I am a work in progress. All my life I have had glimpses of what is essential. I did not necessarily realise it at the time as it did not look like it fitted the look, but it felt right.

Glimpses of something magnificence, the sacred. I now see that the glimpses were the most important things.

God is love.